ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

THREADING THE LABYRINTH: A NOVEL
&
GARDENS AND THE FANTASTIC: SPACE AND TIME IN THREADING THE LABYRINTH

TIFFANI KAY ANGUS

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ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY
ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF ARTS, LAW & SOCIAL SCIENCES

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THREADING THE LABYRINTH: A NOVEL
&
GARDENS AND THE FANTASTIC:
SPACE AND TIME IN *THREADING THE LABYRINTH*

TIFFANI KAY ANGUS

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This thesis comprises a novel and a critical commentary. The novel, *Threading the Labyrinth,* is a historical-fantasy novel set in an English manor-house garden over four centuries. The commentary explores the intersection of time and space in gardens, both fictional and real, and how this has influenced my creative process. The commentary begins with an investigation of borders between genre designations and my argument for the term "temporal instability" to describe the variation of timeslip I employ, which differs from that found in other fantasy novels with garden settings. Real and fictional gardens are chronotopes, or "time-spaces," based on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory; this intersection of space and time influences the verisimilitude and characterisation used to encourage the suspension of disbelief necessary for historical and fantasy fiction. A narrative of separate but interconnected stories of other times within the same space designate my novel as a composite novel. I also argue for the fictional garden as a heterotopia, and each novel section as a heterochrony, based on Michel Foucault's theories. Gardens are cultural creations, and the influence of the *hortus conclusus,* or walled garden, makes it nearly impossible to write a fictional garden without inadvertently creating a metaphor for the Garden of Eden or Paradise. Further, planting a garden is a pursuit of perfection; writing is much the same, with studies of creative writing processes illustrating how writers follow various steps in their pursuit of narrative "perfection." Finally, Susan Stanford Friedman's theory of spatialization assists in placing the author in relation to reader, the creative product, the historical context of its creation, and the nearly uncountable outside texts that influenced it.

Key words: garden, historical, fantasy, border, timeslip, chronotope, verisimilitude, characterisation, composite novel, heterotopia, heterochrony, *hortus conclusus*, metaphor, spatialization

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THREADING THE LABYRINTH

A Novel

by

TIFFANI KAY ANGUS

Early Seventeenth Century

"Her Ladyship complains that her garden is choked with weeds." The voice spoke down to her from above, and when Joan Cookstole looked up the sun shone around the edges of his head and hat, sending his face in shadow. She tipped her head to shade her eyes with her own hat brim and the halo disappeared. Edmund Vale's face came into focus.

The King might rule the kingdom, and His Lordship's domain was his house and lands, but the running of the gardens was Vale's concern.

Joan stood and wiped her hands on her apron. Having worked by her husband's side these many years, she had her own opinion of the master gardener. "Sir, you know we tended My Lady's particular garden within this week."

"Joan." He ignored Gwen, the other weeding woman who was pulling the sheepbine that had tangled itself in the gooseberry bushes. "My Lady requests it. She has a dislike of plants which spoil the lawn's continuity, and she desires a smooth surface upon which to walk when in contemplation."

Vale held himself with his shoulders pulled back and his head cocked at such an angle that he peered down at Joan from beneath heavy lids. Gardens are not rooms inside houses, though. You cannot fill a garden, even a small one, with your presence. It is always bigger. And Vale's attempt fell short.

"We weeded her garden just last Thursday, today being only Tuesday."

He swept one arm wide. "You are welcome to go to the Hall and send that message to My Lady."

Her Ladyship would be back in her garden just after dawn. Joan was going to have to either tend it now then go home to a late supper, or weed it early the next morning in the dark.

The gate stood taller than the master gardener, its wood painted a dark green that almost hid it among the vines growing up the wall. Inside the stone walls there was barely an inch of space between the dirt paths of the labyrinth that did not hold a dandelion or charlock or groundsel. Instead of a calm stretch of green, the space was dotted with yellow, yellow, yellow. She was glad of her gloves when she saw that the paths along the edges of the garden were thick with nettles and docks.

She began at the far corner, and Vale left her to her work.

Every gardener knows that gardens are borders between worlds, built to keep order in chaos, to keep beauty from decay, to keep what is inside safe from the threat of what is outside. But Joan didn't have time to ponder the philosophy of fences and borders and wilderness and gardens. She was too busy pulling weeds, or tending children, milking cows, making cheese and butter, baking bread, spinning and weaving, soaking peas, washing and wringing, making malt, and pulling rushes to make what little light she could against the darkness to see the greater design.

As she finished, pulling the last of the nettles and setting them aside for pottage, she heard a baby's weak cry. It sounded like Ned, crying from his cradle in the night, and Joan started. Beth knew to bring him to the garden if she couldn't get him to suck from a milk-wetted cloth, but his colic made him vexatious. Joan waited, expecting her daughter to round the corner. Then the crying died away, and she told herself it was a rabbit most likely, being taken down in a field.

#

That night Joan dreamed she'd lost a babe. His cries sent her running along paths between hedges twice her height, skirting the fish pond, and around the dovecote before reaching the garden. At every turn, she was sure he'd be there, on the ground along with the cabbages and radishes and leeks, but each turn brought her back against a wall and down another alley. She struggled through vines that pulled at her hands and feet before she reached the walled garden's door. And then a man stopped her. He both was and wasn't Vale, with the gardener's dark hair and stature and green coat, but a face she could not see. She woke as tired as if she'd not slept at all.

Joan returned to the garden several days later with some trepidation but relaxed when she and Gwen were tasked with weeding the strawberries planted beneath the roses and raspberries before raking the coloured paths in the knot garden. Joan felt at ease outside the shadow of the enclosed garden's walls and enjoyed an easy morning with everyone busy at work around her. She looked forward to a change in task, such as harvesting the hops, but that was some months off.

Later, as she weeded the knot, she nicked her thumb with her small curved knife and scolded herself for not paying attention. When she stuck her thumb in her mouth and sucked it free of blood, the bitter taste brought to mind a memory that she could not firmly grab a hold of. A flash of light, as bright as the sun reflecting off the edge of a

newly sharpened spade, only much, much larger. And then it was gone and she was back on her knees, the smell of dirt and crushed leaves high in her nose.

Joan waited for her hands to stop shaking before picking the knife up, wiping it on her apron, and bending back to the ground, concentrating on the here and now, making sure that she put any sallet herbs in one pile, those for Her Ladyship's stillroom in another, and those no good to man nor beast into a third.

Nearby, the walled garden's gate opened and Her Ladyship locked it behind her. Rather than hurry away to her own work, she studied the women.

It was bad enough Joan was on her knees all day, digging deeply to be sure to kill the weed. Like the Good Book said, evil must be taken out at the root. Same went for bittercress and thistle and sundry other unwanted plants or they would flower anew. Joan appreciated the salves Her Ladyship made with the plants, and for three pence a day she did as she was told, knowing that plenty of others would take her place.

Joan worked carefully. There was something too intent in Her Ladyship's gaze, like a cat watching the hay for a mouse. It had been so ever since the death of two of the Lady's children—the younger girl and the only son—that winter just before the death of the King. Her Ladyship's disposition had been like the weather, inconstant. Her humours were out of balance, and she moved from melancholic to sanguine and back, her temperament like the sun's on a windy, cloudy day.

"Look, Joan, look, Gwen, upon God's wonders," Her Ladyship said. "The trees and clouds, the birds and beasts, even the smallest insects which swarm in the air. They are all here for our use and our education. Nature is but one of His ways of speaking here on earth."

Joan did not dare say that she spent more daytime hours up close with nature than Her Ladyship ever had, on her knees, fingernails caked with dirt, skin and lips chapped and dry, her skirt stained. She dare not say anything.

The Lady looked particularly sharp this morning, her hair pulled back so severely that her nose and chin pointed forward. She paced between the women faster than usual, her skirts snapping with each turn. Her voice rose higher and louder as she admonished the women to join with God. Her hands and arms danced in the sky around her head as if she were a puppet at the fair.

"I would wish to state that this garden is truly a paradise," Her Ladyship continued. "But nay, I cannot. There can be no paradise where there is rot and decay. Where flowers fade and turn to slime in the morning frost. Where weeds choke the paths which have been carefully laid. Where water lies stagnant and no fish ripple its

surface. Death will not be avoided, so there is no paradise. Our work is to toil in faith, to create order from chaos on the land which He has given to us and to keep it, as His stewards."

Joan's skin grew hot at Her Ladyship's speech, but Gwen caught Joan's eye and shook her head. A shrewd woman, the Lady was never unkind and she tended to her people. The loss of a child, Joan knew, was difficult to reconcile, and she felt a stab of distress for her son. Recalling Beth's patience with him, she let her shoulders drop and turned her concern to the Lady's welfare.

"It holds the secrets which test our faith." The Lady paced back and forth along the enclosed garden's outer wall, one pale hand pressed against the swell behind her stomacher. Her eyes darted from Joan to the wall and back to Joan. "It cries out to us, calls us to it, and then pushes us away, our arms cold and empty."

"M'Lady," Joan said, beginning to unfold herself and stand. "Please rest a while." She held out her hand, pressing the Lady to be calm.

"No, Joan." She held out her palm. "I shan't rest—not while…. The garden does not rest."

And almost before Joan realised the speech had ended, the Lady strode away, her shoes scuffing the gravel path.

Joan fell back to her knees. The soft thump of it cut through her numbness. She looked to Gwen then. They had shared news with each other, kept confidences and vigils. Gwen's lips parted as if to speak, but she bent her head, dug up groundsel that had gone to seed, and threw its carcass in the pile with the others.

Before dinner a carriage and a cart rumbled up the approach to the house. Joan was familiar with His Lordship's family crest, painted on the carriage's door and even carved in stone over the front door: a mouse facing a lion. But this carriage's crest was more intricate. Making it out was like following the curves and loops of the garden's knots. Gwen was too far away to see it, and for this Joan was glad. She didn't like being asked to puzzle out letters. Having a friend to confide in was a blessing, but some secrets once shared became burdens.

Gossip trickled out from the house to the garden, and Joan learned that Her Ladyship's family—her mother and father, her brother and his wife and child—had travelled with a gift. The visit meant more work for everyone. The kitchen ordered more of everything: fruits and vegetables and flowers for meals. Joan and Gwen pulled skerrits, carrots and radishes, harvested calendula, and cut purslane and spinach. Her

Ladyship was especially fond of lavender, and Joan took armloads in for the bedding and linens, almost stripping all the lavender bushes of new blooms. Kneeling among the green-grey bushes and breathing in the clouds of scent as bees flew heavily from flower to flower made the lavender harvest one of Joan's favourite tasks. She silently asked for the bees' pardon for taking their flowers and paused when one lit on her hand as if in recognition of her work.

#

It wasn't long before Edmund Vale came to Joan again. And again the meditative space inside the stone walls was clogged with weeds. And in the centre of it all stood the new sundial, a gift from Her Ladyship's family.

"Her Ladyship prayed in here just this morning," Joan insisted.

Vale sighed.

"Sir, I am not so old that I have lost half my wits."

"You speak beyond your place, Joan. Tend the garden as directed or I will easily find another woman who would welcome the income from stoop work." Joan held her tongue.

"M'Lady also asks one other thing," Vale said before he left. "Her nephew is ill, and she requires as many herbs as you can gather for her stillroom."

Her heart, like any mother's, tightened at his words. "What ails the boy?"

Vale stopped, one foot still inside the garden. "It does not matter what it is. M'Lady has great need to restock her stores and cannot leave the Hall herself. She trusts you to know what to bring. Deliver the herbs to the Hall before weeding." He handed her the key to the walled garden and then was gone.

Joan retrieved a basket and asked at the kitchen door about the nephew, a small boy of around four. So close to Her Ladyship's lost son's age.

"He cries his ears are sore though there's no growth or pus anyone can see," a cook told her.

Joan collected what she could in the walled garden and then the kitchen garden, where she pulled some garlic and savory. Knowing that God had provided what was needed, she left the gardens to find the more powerful plants. Near the approach, beneath the hedgerow, she found henbane but left it as it wasn't yet in seed, oil from the seeds being effective for worms in the ears. She noted its location for later because its leaves, shaped like a jaw, indicated its use for toothache. One of the best plants for ear

worms, calamint, grew along the edge of a crop field, its flowers so like lavender in colour, its scent strong enough to make Joan's eyes sting a bit. Not far from the mint grew marjoram. At the far end of one field, along the banks of the creek where cattle gathered, she spied the soft white pad-like flowers of cat's-foot. Before returning to the garden, Joan looked for a plant she had first seen in her mother's stores: sicklewort. It grew in the damp and shade, so she headed for the edge of the deer park. Her mother had made it into a syrup for her father, who had visions and heard voices when too drunk. Joan wasn't far into the woods when she spied the tall plant's blue flowers. She yanked up several handfuls before heading to inspect the oaks for mistletoe that grew low to the ground. Though the plant also grew on apple trees, she was reluctant to meet her husband while finishing this task for Her Ladyship. The mistletoe came away from the trunk easily, but Joan made sure not to handle it much, too fretful about Ned to chance another child so soon.

Joan spent the better part of the afternoon weeding, being particularly careful with the few dandelions that had gone to seed, their soft white heads threatening to reseed the whole of the estate's hundreds of acres. She spied new berries beneath the roses against one wall, round and red as drops of blood. Though tiny they tasted sweet on her tongue and she sent up a small prayer of thanks for the delight of such pleasure. She tucked a few into a pocket for Beth and Ned and bent back to work.

Nothing moved in the enclosed garden. The tree limbs that hung over the top of the wall were empty of birds, and the air above Joan's head was, for a moment, free of insects. No sounds from the rest of the garden—of horses pulling carts or men digging or moving tools here and there—could be heard. Joan was alone, but she felt watched nonetheless.

She bent to her work, soon lost in her thoughts, chief among them the throaty cough that came to her the night before from her son's cradle.

Every time Ned coughed or cried, Joan could feel a cold emptiness engulf her, the same as when she lost her other babes. Her Ladyship had lost three. Gwen, widowed twice, had lost two girls. Joan had lost three by their first birthday before Beth arrived, round and pink from the very first, and then another two before Ned. Babies died. But try telling that to William Cookstole, who had hounded after Joan for a son from the first night of marriage. Not that that was their first time abed. Gardens and villages and all green spaces hide shadowy bowers. Joan smiled to think of those early days in the woods and how hot she and Will were for each other. Let Father Sloane preach on that one, she thought to herself. But since Ned's hard and bloody birth not a year before,

they passed through each other's lives, did their duty. He still turned to her in the night sometimes, but she could have been anyone, not his *Joanie love*. Since Ned's arrival, which should have filled him with joy but instead had turned him into a guard dog, always watchful, he hadn't called her much except *wife*.

Joan shook herself and returned to the garden, to the here and now, and Will's anger was lost. But sending away the image of little Ned's feverish head lolling on his neck wasn't easy. Joan felt she must be going mad, to be unable to keep a pleasant thought in her head for longer than a breath before one memory flowed into the next and a third after that. Being bent over the dirt in His Lordship's garden, or her own at home, gave her plenty of time to ponder.

She kept up a rhythm while digging, imagining each addition to the pile of weeds was another trouble from her life outside of the garden. Beth's torn shift. The goat's reddened teat. The leaky roof. Will's dark mood. Ned's cough. Her Ladyship's words.

A small sound came to her, and she waited for Vale to appear from behind the gate, impatient for her to be finished. She'd never rested here, never seen it as a calming place. For her it was work, a place to be kept perfect, unlike her own small dooryard and their few acres where the chickens scratched at the dirt and wrens had built nests beneath the thatch and she lay clothes over the shrubs to dry in the sun.

After a few more minutes of mindlessly pulling weeds and throwing them on the growing piles, she realised she still heard the noise but that the man hadn't appeared. Still the birds didn't sing. All was silent except for a scrabbling noise, similar to the sound of a trowel scooping stones.

Across the garden, behind a row of potted trees, a man kneeled on the grass, his shoe tops scraping on the gravel path. His face turned away, he had one hand on the edge of a pot, fingers digging into the soil around a small apricot tree within. He held up a woman's skirt and petticoats with his other hand. Above her impossibly white hose, which ended at the tops of her thighs, her rump was exposed, her soft, pale skin showing ruddy handprints where he'd grabbed her.

The violence of their actions—rutting Joan thought of it—should have resulted in more noise. Grunts, moans, sighs, the slapping of flesh on flesh. But except for the gravel being disturbed they were silent.

Joan watched, her apron twisted in her hands. To move would be to alert them to her presence. But she'd been in plain sight the whole time. For them to overlook her when they slipped in was unthinkable.

She had no idea who they were.

They weren't servants. Their clothes were too fine, and too strange, even to be Her Ladyship's family's servants. Perhaps they were house guests, from somewhere far away.

With one final thrust the man sagged against the woman. She peeked back at him and smiled. And with a tenderness at complete odds to the scene, he smoothed her skirts back down over her legs, touched her face, and landed a chaste kiss on her cheek. Joan's face burned, not with discomfort at having witnessed them but with unease at the jealousy she felt.

When they both stood, Joan bent her head, not seeing them, and in turn not being seen. She didn't hear them walk away, didn't hear the gate open and close, but when she looked up they were gone. The image of them, so odd in dress, still floated in Joan's mind, crowding out all of the other affairs of the day.

The man's dark hair had been pulled back, not flowing over his shoulders, beneath a hat with a wide brim, like her own but of a dark material rather than straw and pinned up on two sides. Though she had not seen his face, he seemed familiar. His coat was such a dark green and so covered with vines and flowers that he all but blended with the shrubs and trees. His breeches, however, clung to his legs rather than ballooning around his hips. But it was the whiteness of the woman that Joan recalled most clearly. White like the centre of a sweetbriar rose or sheepbine open in the sun, the woman's gown was covered in embroidery, a decoration far beyond Joan's grandmother's simple blackwork or even the designs that edged Her Ladyship's gowns. It was on a much larger scale and so fine that the effect was one of the woman growing out of the ground, the vines and flowers on her dress not covering her but part of her. Adding to the strangeness of the design was the shape of her gown, her hips too wide to walk through an open door. They were like nothing Joan had ever seen. The woman's skin and hair were white, too, and flowers grew from the curls piled high on her head.

Joan struggled to her feet, one hand on the new sundial, its surface warm in the sun. She stared at the spot where the people had been and waited. Something else was coming. The garden around her was still and silent as if holding its breath. She watched the gate, expecting Vale or Her Ladyship to walk in and scold her for laziness. Behind her came a cry.

She turned, and atop the pulled dandelions piled close to the centre of the labyrinth cut into the grass, their flowers gold in the light, lay a child. A newborn, tiny but with a head of dark hair, sleek like a pony just brushed.

Joan blinked and he disappeared.

She ran out of the walled garden faster than she could think. Other workers called after her, but she dared not speak. Her madness would be obvious, and they would take Beth and Ned away from her, as Joan had been taken from her own mother.

The next thing Joan knew she was in the orchard, helping with the June drop as Will inspected the trees. She stood up in shock and reached out to lean against the closest tree, dropping the apples she couldn't remember gathering into her apron. She watched them, soft green with blush spots like bruises, roll around her feet and wondered how she'd ever pick them all up again.

Late that night in their dark bed, Joan turned to Will for the first time since Ned's birth. She imagined the white lady and the dark-haired man, the red handprint on the lady's flesh and the way she smiled back at him. She tried not to think of the child's dark hair. At the end, the single image that burned in Joan's mind was the first apple she picked up from the pile around her feet, its weight, round and solid in her hand, full of life and death at the same time.

#

Ver non semper viret. Springtime does not last.

Her Ladyship, inspired by the sundial's motto, had asked for the old labyrinth to be removed—pulled out or covered over, it mattered not, just as long as the Popish thing was gone, and the old story of a changeling child with it—and new flowers planted to inspire thoughts on the impermanence of life. To add to the growing list of tasks, among them digging a new well to replace the crumbling old one, repairing a hedge that a tree had damaged when it fell in a storm, and sprinkling the garden with a mixture of baybery and nees-wort to drive away flies, Vale and his men filled in the labyrinth and he drew up a list of the earliest spring blooms. From London he requested information on one tulip bulb, knowing their great worth. He also ordered checquered daffodils, with the instruction that he be sent only the kind with sweet scent. Lily-of-the-valley, blew English hare-bells, daffodils, white bellflowers, green hellebore, primerose, cowslips, and sweet violets could all be gathered in field and woods the following spring to be brought to the garden.

But before he could plant the new garden he disappeared.

It took people asking after Vale, and of the house sending down orders that went unfilled, or filled late and with little care, before anyone realised that the master gardener hadn't been seen by any one person in several days.

“Perhaps he’s gone to see his family. I seem to recall him saying they live a day’s journey away,” one gardener said when asked.

“His sweetheart is a maid at the next estate over,” claimed another.

When Vale didn’t reappear a week later, men searched the neighbouring fields and woods to see if he’d come to a bad end, fallen in a ditch or caught in a poacher’s cross-fire. But nothing was found. His rooms were clean but not empty, his hat on a chair and his shoes beneath. His satchel was gone, as was his coat, apparently on his back wherever he may be. Edmund Vale had, indeed, disappeared.

Only Joan ever saw him again.

#

Over their small supper of pottage, Will told Joan his plan. “I am going to see M’Lord tomorrow to ask for Vale’s position.”

Joan lowered her spoon. “You think it wise?”

“I think it the wisest course of action, to take advantage of Vale’s running off. His Lordship is at a loss, and I know this garden. Been working it since I were an apprentice.”

“Been working the orchard and fruit trees,” Joan corrected.

Will leaned across the table on his elbows, causing the trestle to rock on an uneven spot in the dirt floor. “The orchard His Lordship watches over closer than Adam himself. He is a rare one for apples. So why not let me have the position, and Vale’s house which goes with it?” Will had never loved their small cottage and had always begrudged those who were permitted to live on the estate. The master gardener occupied a small brick house built into the kitchen garden’s wall, giving it a vantage point over both sides. The apprentices and a few journeymen lived in the bothy near the main barn, but labourers hired in from the village had no rights to housing.

“Because he has you to watch the orchard,” Joan said. “Why would he split you between his apples and the rest of his gardens only to end up with two halves rather than a whole?”

“Who is he going to find now, with harvest coming soon? I believe he will hear me out.”

Joan couldn’t explain why she doubted Will. Even Vale had deferred to Will’s advice when it came to plums and pears, cherries and quince. She had known Will for most of her life. He was a simple man, a good man. But single-minded. They

both had high aspirations, but Vale knew the knack of talking to his betters, of gaining their trust. Will only knew how to barge in and through, believing a straight line was better than a circular one.

"Perhaps wait a while. I haven't heard word yet of a new gardener coming. Perhaps M'Lord is waiting for something. Perhaps you should be careful."

Will gave his wife a cold stare. "And perhaps you should keep out of men's business. Perhaps you've been working too close to Her Ladyship. I've heard things about her, about her odd ways. And you know I'll have none of it in my house."

Ned, bundled up in his cradle, coughed and fussed. Beth moved to pick him up but Joan held up a hand to stop her daughter as she pushed the cradle's rockers with a foot. "Do what you will."

Will didn't respond. As the head of the house, he didn't need to.

Will never got his chance to talk to His Lordship before he heard that Vale's replacement was on his way.

#

James Hitchen arrived at the manor before Midsummer as the news of the new King's troubles with parliament were reaching the countryside. The labourers closest to the approach heard the crunch of his wagon's wheels and turned their heads like flowers following the sun.

Hitchen studied the workers. Men bent over long-handled tools, pushed barrows piled high with dirt, tied branches; women kneeled in the dirt with small knives, carried watering jars, collected and piled food into baskets. He had never been given the responsibility of another person in his life, and now he had nearly a dozen to consider. Once off the ship he had not expected to find a place before winter but had wanted away from the docks as hastily as he could, so as he carried a potted lemon down the gangplank and a man from the crowd approached and asked if he were a gardener recently arrived from the continent, he had said yes and followed once the trunks full of cuttings and seeds were unloaded. He had left London immediately upon collecting his pay—and what news he could of his monarch and the court—and promising the captain to make some deliveries, not even staying a night in an inn. And now he was in the country north of London, looking at the people he would master. Yet they seemed to go about their work without anyone standing over them, much like house servants who

knew when to start fires in the morning and bank them at night. If he could ease his way into the order of things, he might have a chance to stay.

The workers studied him in return. Where Edmund Vale had been tall but slender, this new man was taller by a head and broad with sound limbs and large hands. Though still young, his tanned face was lined from weather. Vale had been proud of his clean ways and neat with his clothes, but this man's chin and neck were scruffy with several days' growth, his clothes of little consequence. Most striking were the tattoos across his cheeks. He brought a satchel, two trunks, and a wagon bursting with boxes and parcels. The satchel contained small personal items, some from his travels, and a lock of his mother's hair. One trunk contained his clothes, boots, pistol, books and botanic treatises, maps, and drawings. The other trunk, heavier than expected, contained seeds and cuttings, pressed flowers and leaves. The wagon was his dowry. Instead of fine tableware and embroidered linen he brought cuttings and rootstock from foreign lands guarded by swarms of sea creatures, where men covered in pelts swung from the trees and creatures the size of the wagon itself could impale a human on its teeth.

His Lordship considered Hitchen a bargain, a boon to his household, and a saviour to his garden. Hitchen considered His Lordship, like many wealthy men with a singular affection, easily parted from his purse.

#

With Hitchen's arrival, the weather turned bad. Hot and humid each day, the only relief was in the early morning before the heat sent swarms of insects into the air. Joan tied a cloth over her face to keep the bugs from flying up her nose and into her mouth. The new well still needed to be dug, so boys fetched water back and forth from the stream to keep the vegetables and herbs from withering under the relentless sun. Late each evening, clouds rolled in and storms broke over the land, crushing flowers and drowning vegetables in their beds.

Her Ladyship's nephew died one night, the news adding to the weight of the air on following day. Joan couldn't help but think of her lost children and said an extra prayer for them—for all of them, Her Ladyship's included—that night and the next morning. Hard on the heels of that, Ned's cough worsened, and his parents prepared themselves to lose another child. Joan stayed up several nights in a row, listening to the bark of her small son's cough over the crack of thunder. Will had insisted on feeding the fire until it was so hot Joan was sure she could bake bread from across the room.

After midnight, while Will paced and Beth slept soundly in her little truckle, Joan nodded off in spite of the hoarse coughing. Her head fell to her chest and she felt the room open up, as if the walls had vanished. It was not unlike the feeling of bewitchment she had at times in the walled garden, so she shook herself awake again and again. When she grew too tired to fight it, an idea came to her. She gathered Ned up, stepped past her husband, and threw the door open to the rain. A breeze rolled in across the floor.

"The night air will poison the child." Will reached for the door.

Joan blocked it with her body. "It will be good for him."

"Dark air is good for no one." He moved to push her aside, but she stood her ground. "You want to kill another child?"

Ned coughed again, but this time it ended in a wheeze.

"We have tried everything else," Joan said.

"You cannot fight God's will."

Joan looked at her husband's face, gaunt in the firelight. "God took our other children no matter what I did. If He wants Ned…." She shrugged from sorrow and weariness. "So what is the harm?"

"It's not warm, wife." He turned away. "You'll give him a chill."

Joan wiped the sweat that dripped down her forehead from beneath her coif. She piled rushes against the door jamb to soak up any water and mud, and knelt down to settle with the boy on the floor. Lightning flashed outside, but the rain came straight down, leaving the mother and child safe. "Breathe for me. Please, Ned," Joan said while Will grumbled in the background. She knew she was right. She just didn't know how she knew she was right. The sky lit up, and far down the lane, beyond a line of trees, the Hall stood for a second atop its hill. Joan was sure that in that quick flash she saw the dark bulk of Her Ladyship's walled garden.

#

The next morning Joan returned to the garden to be introduced with all of the other labourers to Hitchen. As she passed the walled garden, Her Ladyship stepped out the garden door.

Joan bobbed her head down. "Good day, M'Lady."

Her Ladyship's mouth moved in response, but Joan heard a voice, one that drowned out all other sounds.

It said her name.

Joan.

The Lady's mouth formed the word, but the voice wasn't hers. It was deep, a man's voice. Gwen's eldest daughter passed by and other workers called to each other across the grounds, but Joan could not look away from the Lady. No one else heard the voice but her.

Joan.

It groaned in her head, but the Lady's mouth moved and she was a puppet at the fair now with the puppet master pulling her strings and giving her voice. And Joan, halfway between home and the Hall, could not move, could not look away from the Lady, a black shadow with the sun rising behind her.

Dead.

#

Hitchen brought a new type of apple with him to the manor house. Wrapped in a dirty bit of damp cloth, inside one of his many wooden crates, were cuttings of an apple variety the estate didn't have.

"It came from the orchard of a French duke, who it is said stole it from a cutting sneaked into France from the Holy Land."

"Stolen?" His Lordship's turned the branches over in his hands.

Hitchen nodded. "It is said whoever grows this apple shall have good fortune. The duke has armed guards around his orchard."

Where other men dreamed of piles of gold coins, His Lordship dreamed of a mountain of rare apples, and now he would have it.

"Give this to Will Cookstole. He is the best orchard man in the countryside."

Hitchen loosened his shoulders, unaware until then how stiffly he had held them in anticipation that he would be the one in charge of bringing forth the new fruits. When the apples grew too plain, he had somewhere to lay the blame.

"His Lordship's new apples for you to plant," Hitchen told Will later that day.

Will took the cutting but didn't look at it, still unable to look away from the man's tattoos.

"You mean graft?"

Hitchen waved a hand at him. "Yes, graft."

"Now?" Will asked. "Summer is not the time. Where did it come from?"

Hitchen leaned in close and told Will the cutting's history as if it were the king's secret.

"How are you sure an apple tree from the Holy Land will grow here?" Will asked. "I'm not a travelling man, to be sure, but I know my Bible, and I know soil. Ours is rich, and the East is dry."

"All manner of fruits grew in the Garden of Eden."

Will nodded. "Yet God willed it that the desert the crusaders found was not that garden. His Lordship had stock brought in from Bavaria that fruited but never flourished. This…." He shrugged in uncertainty.

"The apples will take," Hitchen assured Will. "Apples are apples, aren't they, and doesn't England grow the best apples anywhere?"

Will couldn't argue with that and still claim to have the best orchard in the county.

"Cut down whatever trees you need to in the orchard. M'Lord commands it."

"But sir, you know cutting down an apple tree is bad luck!"

Hitchen blinked. "Of course. I am glad of my man's knowledge. I know I can trust you to grow these for His Lordship's happiness."

"If it takes, how many will His Lordship want?" Will knew he could graft it with no small success, but would it be as simple to undermine His Lordship's innocent trust in his new master gardener?

"As many as you can grow. Start a new orchard." Will

smiled and bowed his head.

#

On a clear morning after another heavy storm, Joan asked at the Hall for medicine for Ned, but the maid told her that Her Ladyship was herself ill, and that it would be several days before she would return to her stillroom.

Joan left the Hall resolved to do what she could to help her son herself, in spite of Will's misgivings. Her own mother had taught her well. It wasn't their fault that the neighbour's cow had fallen ill or that a baby was born with three legs. If the blessings of healthy crops and cattle were God's will, why not the curses? Cows got sick and died all the time. And Joan's mother had worked with that particular woman all

through her labour, giving her an infusion of raspberry leaves to bring on tightening of the womb and feverfew to help to ease the pain. When it looked as if both would die,

Joan's mother had used all of her skill to keep the mother alive. In the end, she had to use a crotchet to remove the pieces of the child from inside the insensible woman. If she had the magic she was accused of having, would she not have used it to save the unfortunate child and, in the end, herself? Will never spoke of his mother-in-law. To do so was to admit he had married a witch's daughter—at least, in the eyes of the countryside. Suspicion lived longer than people, Joan learned. Will kept his own counsel, which was exactly what Joan had to do.

She hurried to the walled garden, aware of work planned for the flowers around the sundial and hoping for it to be unlocked and empty.

The gate stood partially open. Joan stepped in.

Hitchen had his back to the gate, a book in his hands. He muttered to himself as he alternated between turning pages and turning a leaf to and fro in the morning light.

"Ah, *Tanacetum Vulgare,*" he said with a nod. Joan hesitated, not understanding the incantation. But anyone could have told him the plant with the sunburst of tiny yellow flowers was tansy. "To bring forth worms and cure female complaints," he read from the book.

Joan stepped back out of the garden and hid herself behind the wall where she could peek around the corner to watch the man. Hitchen moved along the path and touched another plant.

"Such tiny purple flowers … in a spear-like arrangement…" He turned pages rapidly, looking from the book to the plant over and over again. "*Nepeta Cataria.* Catmint."

"No," Joan said under her breath. Catmint leaves were like those of any other mint. Hyssop's leaves were spear-like, similar to the shape of the flower stalks.

Hitchen continued to handle leaves and murmur over the book. Joan had only once seen a book in the garden when Vale and His Lordship had chosen knot patterns.

"Hitchen! Sir?" The voice carried from deeper in the garden. Hitchen started and then crouched, his head darting back and forth. Finally, he scuttled to the bench near the wall that welcomed with the promise of shade. Joan ducked behind shrubs and vines, her grey bodice and unbleached linen kerchief blending in with the stone wall. When Hitchen ran from the garden, Joan darted in.

To avoid distressing Will she depended on Her Ladyship for physic. But Ned's cough had gone on far too long. She would accept the punishment for lying to her husband if it meant saving her child. To help Ned, though, she needed certain herbs that didn't grow in her own garden.

She gathered the needed leaves and flowers, stepping lightly and moving closer and closer to the bench. Before she knew it, she had the book in her hands. It was full of drawings, and as Joan turned the pages she recognised the plants: meadow grasses, medlars, windflowers, and many more she could likely name if her hands would stop trembling. She returned to the first page. Tiny black marks whirled on its surface, some rounded like soft rose petals, others pointed and sharp like the edges of pinks. She studied the larger letters, forcing herself to go slow.

Joan recalled an *S,* the first letter in her own mother's name, Sarah, who as a young girl had been a maid to a great lady, that lady having once met the Virgin Queen, and as a mother had begun teaching Joan her letters before she died. Following the *S* was an *e* and a *c,* and in a moment, with her finger slowly sliding along the page, she had sounded out the word that cut through her like her little knife cut through the pad of her thumb when she let her thoughts wander. *Secrets.*

No one she knew—except, of course, for Her Ladyship and His Lordship and the chapel—had a book. They all knew how to churn butter, cut wood, weave cloth, gentle horses, bake pies, skin rabbits, make brooms, plait straw, and all other manner of things because they did them, every day, and always would. No one needed a book to tell them how to do these things.

Joan handled the pages with much care, letting her eyes stop here and there but not taking the time to look at the words. The likenesses of the plants caught her eye and she wondered at each having so many words near it. How much could be said about a plant? She knew much; Her Ladyship knew even more. Yet the book was full with so many words they seemed about to fall off the edges of each page. It must hold everything about every plant in this garden and the farm and perhaps even England. It would take her until harvest time to read even one page.

The village and the Hall were her whole life but now, with this book in her hands overflowing with words she could barely read, Joan understood how small she was.

Anne. Thomas. Doris. Mary.

The names were spoken in differing voices, one after the next. Joan shut the book and spun round, sure to see Her Ladyship hosting friends in the walled garden.

But Joan was alone.

Mary.

It came as loud and clear as if she'd said it herself.

Joan pressed the book against her lips, keeping the names inside her mouth, inside her head where they were safe. So many words, in her head and in this book. So many secrets. This book promised to tell secrets.

Could it tell her why voices bloomed inside her mind?

Could it show her the best magic to keep her son from withering and dying?

Could it teach her the secret of how to grow her husband's love?

She stuffed the book beneath the cuttings piled in her apron and hurried out the gate.

#

The book was gone.

He hadn't been able to return to the walled garden until early in the evening, and the gate had been left open all day. In his haste, he'd forgotten to lock it. The shadows stretched across the garden, and Hitchen lay on his belly and ran his hands back and forth beneath the bench. But it wasn't there.

"S'bood!" he cursed and tried to remember what tasks he had set the gardeners that day. He doubted many could read, but that wouldn't stop them from stealing something worth a good portion of their wages. If Her Ladyship had found it, he could dismiss it with ease and thank her for finding a stray lamb from his small library. In spite of knowing it was useless, he sent up a prayer that she could not read.

He sat back on his heels and imagined the front illustration, one he had read almost every day since sliding the real Hitchen overboard. A border, embellished with a creeping vine adorned with tiny flowers, inside of which was limned a fine garden laid out in the best fashion surrounded by various figures—including one Hitchen guessed was the King beneath a pair of cherubs crowning him—crowded along the margins with all manner of vegetables and fruits as well as a likeness of the author, and below that *A compleat collection of plants and trees as described by Wm. Tusser, natural philosopher, including receipts for physic and offering all of the secrets of the garden.* Receipts for physic didn't concern Hitchen; that was Her Ladyship's task. As master gardener, he should be able to recognise every blossom and berry on the land. He had learned many and could feign knowledge when necessary, depending on the undergardeners and weeders to know their own work. Yet it was the final promise— the secrets—that he didn't trust himself with. He was a wolf in sheep's skin, but the flock was canny.

He cursed again and watched the sky above the wall as it changed from blue to light red to a soft purple. Birds flying home to roost were nothing more than sharp black shapes in the dying sun. Hitchen's trunk held two other books: one with designs for knots and fountains, and a herbal in Latin, which he could read much of but which was written with the stillroom in mind. He had to tell His Lordship they had a thief in their midst. As master gardener, he was entitled to his books.

Tired and hungry, Hitchen stood to lock up the walled garden for the night.

A faint clicking sound came from behind him.

"Just going home to my supper—" he began but swallowed the rest.

It had a crooked manner, twisted with cloak-like wings, its front limbs three long, thin sticks like a stork with too many legs, its back end gowned. A hand stuck out from beneath the terrible wings and he imagined it a great bat as large as a horse swallowing a maid. It dropped a pebble.

Hitchen had sailed the world and seen things that, remembered in his sleep, woke him with screams: savage tribes said to eat human flesh, animals shaped like small men but covered in red pelts, a unicorn that swam in the depths, its skin pale as death. The sailors he lived with crossed their fingers against the evil eye when the wind dropped, when clouds shaped like birds or women or bats or the dogs of Hell followed the ship, when a sea bird shat in the wrong spot on deck. In all his years at sea, he had never been close to the other men, never taken into their confidence. Nor had he, a man from the great city of London, accepted their superstitious, backward ways.

Another pebble, glowing white against the dusk, fell to the ground.

Hitchen crossed himself and backed away, his knees hitting the bench and forcing him down onto the seat.

The hand lifted the edge of a wing and he waited for it to take flight. A figure birthed itself out from beneath the wing as Hitchen held his breath, his heart beating high in his throat. He squeezed his eyes shut, believing that if he couldn't see the witch it could not see him.

Twenty-nine. Thirty. The voice was so faint he almost couldn't hear it, as if it came from far away.

He opened one eye and then another. She was slight with dark hair, young and hungry looking. She didn't see him.

And as he watched, unable to move, his hands frozen with fingers splayed against the devil, she vanished.

#

"Beth!" Joan called her daughter outside. "Is your father at home?"

When Beth shook her head, Joan sent her to collect water while she went inside and hid the book in the bottom of the trunk. That done, Joan looked around the room. Flies crawled over a pie crust and an apple core on the table, milk spilled across the bench had been left to dry, and a barn cat slept on the bed. Behind Joan a chicken pecked its way across the threshold. She kicked at it and sent it flapping back out into the yard. The cat woke up, saw Joan, and ran out the door. Joan ignored the resulting squabble in the yard and gathered Ned up from his cradle. He was hot and heavy in her arms, and he barely woke. Unwilling to lay him back down, she balanced him on one arm while she mashed rue with honey. She dipped a finger in the mix and popped it in Ned's mouth, praying he had the strength to suck the mixture down.

A sound in the yard made her jump, sure that Hitchen had followed her home, but it was only Beth with the water.

Ned whimpered but didn't cough, so Joan sat for a moment while Beth set the table for supper. Then she left the door open as she worked over the fire scraping boiled carrots to mash with butter and vinegar, and as twilight came on the sky softened with streaks of soft rose clouds against a deepening blue. Thrushes in the shadowy trees called to one another, their song clear above the chatter of the finches. But her relief was short-lived. She saw Will coming up the path as she crossed the open doorway and turned to welcome him. He glanced at her, walked into the cottage, and swung the door shut behind him. Joan imagined the dark birds swarming together and flying away, against the darkening sky, to a quieter tree.

"That man." Will stopped in the middle of the room and looked around as if waking from a deep sleep. He pulled his hat from his head and ran his hands through his hair, lifting it in whirls and splinters. "That man is a Godless pagan!" he bellowed. "His Lordship said I wasn't fit for the position because I've not travelled, and instead he hires that man, with his tattoos and strange ways? It's not right, and the men agree with me. Mark my words," he said and pointed at Joan as she spooned up supper, "there will be trouble in the garden."

"What sort of trouble?" Had Will seen weeds grow overnight? Had he watched strangers rut in the garden? Had he heard a baby cry only to watch the child vanish? "He is a gardener," Joan continued. "His role is the keeping of the plants and trees, and doing as His Lordship wants. Same as Vale."

Will shook his head. “No. Vale had his own ideas and could be a piss pot—”

“William!”

He tipped his head to Joan in apology. “He’s sailed to the Indies, he says. Lived with the savages. Lived as a savage even! I have worked for His Lordship ever since I was Beth’s age—even younger—and I know this garden and orchard like I know my own hands, and this is how I’m regarded? I’m to take orders from a man who wears bits and bobs sewn into his hair? His Lordship has lost his senses. His head’s been turned by the promise of a new apple. He thinks Hitchen can grow strange fruits and flowers from dark islands across the sea.”

To encourage Will to hate the man would only encourage more discord. The book had to stay hidden. Perhaps the next morning Joan would take it back, place it beneath the bench for someone else to find.

“His Lordship chose him.”

“His Lordship is wrong. That man is dangerous.”

“Is there any master gardener you will follow?”

Will stared hard at Joan, and she changed direction. “What are you going to do?” She gave him room to speak so she would know his mind.

Will crossed the room to where Ned lay. He placed his hand, flat, above the sleeping child as if to shield his son from a falling danger. “Hitchen will make a misstep,” he said quietly. “Already may have. And I’ll find out his secrets.” Secrets.

Joan busied herself to hide her face.

“A man doesn’t appear as if by magic without any. Then M’Lord will have to listen.”

The book, stuffed deep in the trunk, burned with a heat as hot as the hearth, a heat Joan was sure her husband could feel. She tried to put it out of her mind and stirred their supper as darkness settled over the cottage.

#

The weather continued hot and stormy by turns, making the gardeners wish for rain when the sun beat down and wish for sun when the rain hammered the ground. When needed, Joan worked in the kitchen garden harvesting vegetables. What vegetables had bolted in the heat she cut and fed to the animals, but where possible she cut back lettuce and leeks, beets and cabbage, covering the stumps so the plant would grow anew. Birds had to be scared away from the berries, rabbit fences repaired, slugs killed, wasp nests found and pointed out for the wasp man to destroy, and mole holes

located for the same. At this time of year, the garden felt like a battlefield, with the humans the losers in spite of their sharp tools.

She warily approached the walled garden, weeding tools in hand, wondering what would greet her inside its walls this day. Wind blew the shrubs and trees in a frenzy, but the door stood open, inviting her in to work. She glanced around, noting where the others worked and where dark clouds gathered, and then stepped inside the walls.

It was empty. Silent. The treetops whipped in the wind above the walls, but inside the garden all was still. She listened.

Door isss … bay … reese … ey nuff … wyshss … howrss … muthrr.

Joan dropped the knife and stilled her hand. She hoped that the voice had come from beyond the wall, from a passing gardener, but it was a woman's voice. Not her own nor Gwen's nor any woman's that Joan knew. Joan was unsure of so much these days, but that the voice was not hers she would swear to in front of any magistrate. The sounds were so strange but almost familiar, like baby gibberish with words starting to come through. Perhaps a language from another land, Joan wondered. How could it be her own voice when she had never left Hertfordshire?

Yes.

The word was as clear as Mary from the time before.

Anne.

The late queen's name.

Joan knew many Annes, but none worked in the garden now. Her Ladyship's Christian name was Anne, but when would Joan—or anyone on the estate's roll—ever address M'Lady as such?

She cocked her head to one side, listening for the voice, holding herself still against it, fervently praying that listening for it wouldn't encourage it to fill her head with its uncommon sounds. But she heard nothing but the thrashing of the wind in the trees and the squeak of the green gate on its hinges.

Ought she be afraid?

If Her Ladyship walked in and heard what Joan could, she would surely fall down on her knees, hands together, and pray. Joan knew that if she told the Lady what she heard, her life would not be the same from this day to her last. Joan was frightened by the voices, but more frightened by what would happen if she were to tell. Her own mother—dearer to her than any Lady—had seen and heard things and had told Joan not to be afraid. Who was she to question her mother then, who knew more secrets than any

book? Who knew how to bring a breech babe quickly, make cream to set to butter in the heat of summer, light a fire with wet kindling, understand the clouds, find reason in birds' chatter, and read fish scales in the waving brook? And, knowing all of that, knew the hearts of men, when to speak, and when to stay silent?

Joan looked around the garden and put herself in mind of her, taking her mother's thoughts into her own, to know what her mother would advise. That it was a ground of sweet blooms, inside walls that sheltered fruit, and could be read when the sun was fresh. That it was an old place with much to say, and that she should listen.

Joan worked with great haste, never allowing her mind to wander, always on alert. She would not be taken by surprise again. She tore up weeds, gathered what berries the birds had left alone, picked up fallen sticks and twigs, and scraped gravel back to the path where it belonged.

Belongs to you.

Because Her Ladyship wished to make rose water, Joan cut what damask roses had opened and pulled their petals, cutting off the white bits and piling the petals in a small basket. She closed her eyes and smelled the roses on her hands.

Joan waited for more, but no more words bubbled up out of the air, none spoke behind her eyes. She sniffed her hands again, the fair scent faint on her cracked and dirty skin. Regardless of what the voice said, none of this belonged to her.

#

The rain kept Joan home while Will toiled at the Hall, repairing tools and fretting over the harvest.

To weed after a rain was a joy, the roots popping up out of the wet ground with one tug. But this rain was a constant thing, puddling in the paths and over-soaking the earth. To walk on it meant to dent the lawn and to push mud up into the gravel paths, which meant more work when it was dry to pick out the clods and rake the paths smooth again. Joan welcomed the respite, for by this time of year she grew heartily sick of the garden, the heat, and the bugs. Not that she would ever admit it. She should be happy with a fertile field and garden, glad at the promise of plenty. To say otherwise … it would be like saying she didn't love her children and want them to thrive and grow strong. But with any fertility comes hours and weeks and years of repetitive caring. Clouts changed, sick bodies bathed, crying in the night, weeds popping up where one

had just been pulled, vines overtaking and choking the rows, coloured gravel tossed away by shoes and birds and coach wheels.

Though feverish, Ned sat in his cradle and played with an apple, wrinkled and shrunken from last year's harvest. Joan spent the morning airing what could be aired inside on such a damp day, sweeping, gathering the wood ash for soap, picking mouse droppings out of the malt and grinding what she needed, restoring order to the crockery, setting Beth to gather eggs and then peel rushes for wicks, checking the brewing, turning cheeses, and preparing a pie made of fruit from their own small plot in the dooryard, when there was a knock at the door.

"Good day, M'Lady." Joan lowered her head and gave the woman room to enter. Though Her Ladyship had the keeping of the health of her workers and their families, when she arrived in the village word tended to travel from cottage to cottage, but there had been no warning. "I am sorry for the loss of your nephew," Joan said.

The woman slid into the house and looked around at the bedclothes draped across the rough furniture, but Joan noted she didn't sniff or sneer. She seemed softer somehow, quieter, more at peace. She took off her cloak. Beneath she wore a black coif over a green and black gown, with white linen sleeves to the elbow that were the brightest thing in the room's dim light. At her breast winked a jewel the colour of a summer sky. For a second, Joan wished she were a small child again so she could reach out to touch it without reproof.

"Has your son's cough eased?"

Joan shook her head. "Ned coughs in the night but seems better in the day."

Her Ladyship nodded. "Ned," she repeated and lifted the basked she carried. "I've brought a mixture for an infusion. It is important to pick herbs at dawn before the sun can dry them out, but in this weather—" She motioned towards the doorway and the storm outside. "I thought it best to bring what I could before the rain has a chance to settle more in the child's chest."

Holding her tongue, Joan thanked Her Ladyship for the simples and offered the woman a seat. She knew when to pick herbs, having done so for years at the Hall. But Joan didn't want a return of the frenzied manner. When the Lady sat, Joan saw her fine slippers were covered in splashes of mud.

"This incessant rain," Her Ladyship started. "I am afraid it has delayed Mr. Hitchen's plans. The man has new ideas about the order of a garden, about what plants to bring in and how to grow them. He may not seem so, but he is a Godly man, a

learned man, and especially concerned with the keeping of the walled garden. He spends much time there when I am not using it."

Joan had to check herself against asking about the garden. She looked down so as not to see the Lady's mouth move and hear the heavy voice speak to her of death. Avoiding her mouth meant avoiding her face, and soon Joan was staring at the floor and studying the rushes and wondering at the lavender she had gathered for the Hall and the herbs she had found and Her Ladyship's visitors and the dead child and that made Joan wonder at the couple she had watched in the walled garden—watched but not heard—and she wondered why she heard people who weren't there but did not hear people who were, people who then vanished, and then she remembered the book—the book!—that was but a few inches away, deep in the trunk, and then Her Ladyship's petticoat and skirt came into Joan's sight and she started and wondered how long Her Ladyship had waited while Joan had gone wool-gathering.

The Lady handed over the herbs. Joan knelt at the hearth and emptied them into an earthen bowl and then filled the bowl with water from a pot hung over the fire. She wished Her Ladyship would leave. The cottage was too small for secrets.

"My garden—"

Joan stirred, waiting, not daring to look up.

The woman said it again. "My garden—" and waited as if for a response.

The leaves went limp in the warm water, and a sharp green smell rose to Joan's nose. Still the Lady was silent. Joan dropped the spoon, welcoming its clatter on the floor. Any distraction, even Ned's coughing, was welcome. Joan even prayed Will would come home, wet and muddy, and interrupt the Lady's continued presence, which was suffocating.

"Some people make the mistake of thinking the garden a place of delights and pleasures."

Joan stifled a sigh.

"I like to think of it as a place of deep mystery. Some see the flowers and greenery and believe it is simply a garden. Yet—"

Joan stirred and stirred, eyes cast down. She would surely tell—about the voices, about the words, about the couple in the garden, about the book—and then where would she be?

"Those of us who spend our hours there know differently," the Lady said.

Who was *us*? Weeding women knew their place: below the gardeners, who were below the Lords. But she worked in that garden as the sun came up and, sometimes, as it went down. Who else would know the garden as well?

Joan bit her lips shut, her throat so full of words that wanted to spill out, like a wasp nest on a hot day.

Her Ladyship stood and walked to the door then back to the chair. It was only a matter of a few feet, three strides at most. Her layered petticoats took up too much space, and Joan felt crowded in her own house.

"And those of us who know the garden know when it changes."

Joan spoke up, choosing her words and ordering them with thought. "We all note the changes from summer to winter, M'Lady. Each year at harvest, I say to my William how quick time passes."

Her Ladyship paced the room again, and her dark skirt slid along Joan's arm.

"The turning of the seasons, yes. Yet have you noticed other changes, Joan? Changes in my garden?"

"What manner of changes?" Joan asked, not trusting herself to answer directly.

"So you have noticed something amiss?"

"I have only asked what you meant, M'Lady."

"But you did not deny seeing anything."

"How can I deny what I do not know?" Joan's knees hurt. It was her house, her hearth. She stood.

The Lady stopped her pacing. "What are you admitting to?"

"I admit to nothing. M'Lady, a garden changes constantly. It never remains the same, from one day to the next. There are days in summer when you would swear you can see the pea vines grow a foot from breakfast to supper."

"You speak prettily, Joan. You remind me of the romances I have read."

Joan froze at the word, sure Her Ladyship had seen her take the book. Or that the garden had told her.

Her Ladyship picked up a spoon from the table, set it down again, one hand absently lifting to toy with the jewel at her breast.

Joan was reminded of a spooked horse, tetchy and sharp, and how the stableboys would soothe it with kind words and petting. "M'Lady, ma'am, what has you so flustered? What is amiss?" The Lady seemed to sag, her hands dropped to her side, her brows softened.

Joan took the woman's elbow and steered her back to the chair. "How can I assist you? Is it the weeds in the enclosed garden? I told the master gardener they grew at an uncommon speed, but it's a case only of hot weather and cooling rains. Nothing strange there." Joan motioned to Beth to pour a mug of short beer and then handed it to the Lady, who took it with a nod of thanks.

"I try very hard to learn the lessons that He would teach us," she said, one hand resting at her waist.

"Lessons?"

The Lady sipped at the drink. "Our toil is our punishment, yet it is what sets us apart from the animals. We use the land as is our right. We raise our children to follow His rules."

"Yes?"

"Why show me a child only to take it away again?" The Lady's long fingers inched across her stomacher and rested on the swell there. "He takes away my own children to teach me the lesson of His power, to teach me the lesson of pride, but then taunts me with another. Is not losing my own children to Him enough, but he must then show me one which is not mine?"

Ned gnawed on a dried apple within arm's reach, but Joan could only think of the baby with the shiny dark hair.

The Lady shook herself and stood, shaking off Joan's gaze. "You've been a loyal servant." Her tone held a note of finality.

"I am still." Joan feared for herself and Will.

Her Ladyship gathered her basket and cloak. "If the child doesn't get well within the week, please send to me for more simples." Joan didn't trust herself to speak.

"If you were a good servant, Joan, you would tell me what you know."

"I know only that gardens follow their own rules."

The Lady arched an eyebrow. "What rules, Joan? We are all servants to God and follow His rules. Even when we do not understand them."

At that moment, Joan was bone tired of the riddle. Rules, servants, secrets; it was all too much. "Eve broke the rules in the Garden of Eden, and we have her to thank for our plight, M'Lady."

"Well," the Lady sniffed. "You will keep me in mind the next time you have some piece of wisdom to share, won't you, Joan?" And with that, she turned and walked down the path and disappeared into the rain.

#

The new master gardener had a line of blue tattoos across the bridge of his nose, and he wore beads and bits of feather in his hair, and he had lived with the savages. It was all true. But, as with anyone new who arrives to an old place with its own light and paths and traditions, there was more that the gardeners and weeding women—and His Lordship and Her Ladyship and their cook and dairymaids and grooms and all of the other servants—didn't know about the gardener yet. They would ask, in their own roundabout ways if they were sly, or come right out and ask if not; they'd gossip; and one or two would just make things up, not meaning to lie so much as hoping for a bit of diversion. The new gardener, though, was on his guard. He knew a place with secrets of its own when he saw it, and he knew how to keep secrets.

He had been born Matthew Hayes in London, the second son of a cloth merchant, and educated with his older brother to become the same, even though, as the youngest, he didn't have a chance of inheriting the family business unless the plague carried them all away and spared him. Matthew learned early he wasn't that lucky. And Matthew learned early that to be that lucky he had to take advantage of whatever destiny threw his way.

From his first day with the teaching master, he was schooled to be a clerk, to help with the business when his brother Richard took over. How proud their father was as he watched them at their letters and sums, his dynasty secure. And how he scowled when Matthew made suggestions for new business ventures he'd overheard on the quay. "You keep your ears to your tutor and your eyes on your figures, Master Hayes, and leave your ignorant concerns about the business to me. And, after I am gone, leave it to Richard. He knows the natural order of things. What do you know about the world? Nothing!"

That Matthew had never been outside of London chafed. He dreamed of sailing beyond the small square of the Thames hemmed in by the window frame in the warehouse where he sat and added sums.

One deep breath of the salt air on the docks and he was a privateer, a Sea Dog with Sir Walter Raleigh and Francis Drake, bringing the Spanish to heel and plundering them of their gold and jewels. At the very least, he was a merchant in more than name, leaving the counting house behind and travelling to the Americas, Araby, the Orient, and all of the islands in between to find exotic spices, the plumage of fantastical birds, and jewels the colour of the sunset for the King and Queen and their Lords and Ladies.

The crack of his father's stick on the table—and sometimes on his shoulder or neck—woke Matthew from these reveries.

When Matthew was sixteen, their father died and Richard took his place as his heir. Once Richard's control of the business was secure, Matthew asked leave to go to the East, to find a new source of silks, even to try importing porcelain. Richard, who had the look and disposition of their father, refused. Matthew asked again and again until one day Richard said perhaps. That tiny possibility was too much for the younger brother to resist. He spent hours at the docks, talking to the land waiters and coast waiters, asking after a cargo's origin, and watching the weighers unpacking and weighing the cargos.

"*When* may I go?" Matthew did not give his brother the opportunity to say no.

Richard studied Matthew, now eighteen and cramped at his desk, his legs so long that his knees hit the desk's underside if he rested his feet on the chair's bottom rung. Part of him wanted to say yes, go, just to gain a moment's peace from the boy's constant moping. But why should Matthew get to do what he wanted, when Richard, too, had never been asked?

When he could sneak away, Richard crossed the river and went to the playhouses. He stood with the groundlings in the pit when he could not get a seat, not minding being cramped in with the stinking butchers and fishwives, his cape going limp in a soft drizzle, or the bones in his feet grinding together from standing for hours. All he minded was missing a moment of the magic on the stage. Richard itched for days afterward, making him wish to be able to shuck his skin and leave it on the warehouse floor to take on a new skin, a new name, and pay his way into a company and look down on the crowd from the stage as he played the lover, the villain, the hero, anyone but Richard Hayes, cloth merchant.

Richard looked at Matthew and saw hope in the boy's eyes. The top of Richard's left foot throbbed where someone in the crowd had stepped on him the night before at *Tamburlaine the Great,* touted as the only performance of the great play since the death of Good Queen Bess, during the scene when Tamburlaine betrays Cosroe and takes the throne of Persia for himself.

Outside the window, one of the customs men shouted an order as a ship came to dock to unload.

"You may not," Richard said. "It's not the way of things. Your place is here, with me, and the business needs you."

“Any clerk can do what I do. Why not let me go? I can find us more business, make us richer than we can imagine.”

“You?” Richard asked. His brother’s impudence brought to mind the play, when Cosroe betrays his own brother. Matthew, as far as Richard knew, had never even crossed the river to go to the playhouse. His whole world was here in their house, on their street, and on the docks. “Why would I trust you out in the world? You’re still a boy. Your head would be turned by the first shiny bauble or veiled whore who crossed your path, and the business which Father worked so hard to build would be gone. No. Enough. Your place is here.”

He turned then, away from his brother, away from the possibility of a different life. Matthew left that night, taking a few belongings and a little money, and found a position on a ship desperate for hands.

“The plague,” the captain explained, glancing at his undermanned ship which had just the night before been freed from quarantine and was behind schedule on its next voyage. “You’ve experience on board?” He took in the young man’s size.

The ship bobbed on the water, bringing to Matthew’s mind a horse’s soft nudge as it looked for an apple in its owner’s coat. It helped to think of the ship as a large, yet calm, animal—as a pet even. Matthew stuck his hands beneath his cloak to hide their shaking. He had been around ships his whole life. How hard could it be? “Yes,” he lied, the first of many.

The captain would have taken him even if he had said no. He needed men, and this one was big and seemed hale enough. “We sail with the tide. Say your goodbyes and find a bunk aboard.”

Matthew had no one to say goodbye to. He thought for a moment to send a letter to Richard, but that would give his brother a way to trace him. He wanted to be able to sail away and, one day, to come back to London with his brother none the wiser. To show up at the warehouse with trunks of treasure. To watch his brother’s amazement at his accomplishments. To hear his brother speak with respect in his voice. By the end of the first week, Matthew realised he had made a mistake.

He hated the ocean. He hated being outside all of the time and the way the ship, calm at shore like a lady’s gelded pony, turned into an angry stallion and threw him this way and that on the decks. He hated the other sailors, their ignorance and filth. He hated the food. He hated being cramped up day after day. It was so awful he made up his mind to strike out on his own as soon as they sighted land.

Cries of “Land!” were a sweet lullaby to Matthew. Between bouts of backbreaking work, he watched the strip of green grow on the horizon. And then a ship appeared from around the side of the island, flying Spanish colours.

When the captain shouted orders the more senior hands dashed to their stations, nearly knocking Matthew over. “Hope you can swing a sword better than you can pull a sail, boy,” the captain yelled to Matthew as he ran to the railing.

Dreams of the Sea Dogs never included the charnel-house smell of blood and entrails spattered on a slippery deck, the crack of cannonballs turning the mast to kindling, or the hot embarrassment of realising you’ve pissed yourself from fear. He decided if he were ever lucky enough to have a son of his own, he would tell the boy the truth behind tales so the child would be prepared.

The truth was, after Matthew had been a few years at sea with no clear path back to land or even London without groveling to his brother, a man calling himself a natural philosopher bought passage aboard the ship, and Matthew was tasked with guarding the man on shore while he collected samples. It didn’t take long for Matthew to see he could make his fortune without risking his neck.

He followed the natural philosopher, learning all he could about taking cuttings and storing seeds, planting seedlings aboard ship, and identifying unusual or unknown species by comparing what grew in the ground in front of him to what he found in the man’s books. They spent days at a time together on shore while the other sailors made simple repairs or took to an island’s interior in search of cargo. On the day when he left his brother in London, Matthew never dreamt he would end up a servant halfway across the world. Be he also never dreamed a sailor’s life could be so small, even under an endless sky. Matthew reminded himself that there were other ways to find his fortune. He liked the earth, where jewels and gold could be found, where spices, ripe for the picking, stained your fingers and tongue. He fell into gardening by accident, recognising that rootstock and cuttings were easier to find than gold, easier to take and ship than the heavy—and delicate—fabric cargo that stained in the salty air, and less likely than jewels to be stolen by pirates.

When the philosopher died of fever, Matthew wrapped him up in his hammock and carried him on deck. As they slid the man’s corpse over the railing and into the sea, Matthew realised he was one of only a few men who knew his friend’s life and his burial place. The captain, a good man who had taken a liking to the strange philosopher and his affection for plants, spoke with Matthew about returning the man’s goods to his family when next they were in England.

When the ship next docked in London, Matthew took the trunk—full of books, including a herbal and gardening guides, as well as tools and satchels and cloths for collections—and waved goodbye to the captain, saying perhaps he would sail with him again. Rather than hiring a wagon, Matthew stashed the trunk in an inn, rested for a day, and then found a new position on a new ship heading west again to islands lush with flora waiting for discovery. He was sick of the sea, but James Hitchen's trunk—and his name—were Matthew's way out.

And now here he was, master gardener for a rich lord, responsible for acres of gardens and orchards, fish ponds, wilderness, and the park. Keeping his secrets from everyone, he decided, would be easy enough with the help of the books in the trunk.

#

Joan kept her own counsel, her lips tight and her tongue stilled.

She did as Hitchen ordered—weeded when necessary, swept paths free of twigs and leaves, harvested hops and fruit—but only nodded, eyes lowered. She assisted Her Ladyship in the sowing of herbs and flowers and roots and seeds, but avoided any conversation beyond that necessary to keep peace between them. She watched Will as she always had, but dared not question his actions. She even kept quiet with Gwen, but their friendship had weathered so many losses that, she trusted, Gwen knew she would return and confide in her when it was right to do so.

Most of all, she avoided the walled garden, finding every excuse to stay away.

Truth was, she didn't trust the garden.

It watched her, she knew, waiting for her to get within hearing distance where it could entice her with promises or strike her dumb with horror. So she stayed away when possible and, when it wasn't, kept her mouth shut when near it.

The voices knew who she had seen in the garden and would tell Her Ladyship, who would chase her like a fox after a rabbit.

The voices knew she had made her mother's syrup for Ned and would tell Will and he would beat her or, worse, tell the village and the people would come and take her away as they had done to her mother.

The voices knew about the book, and they would tell the master gardener, who would tell His Lordship. She had kept it too long to pretend that she had just found it and was returning it. She would be arrested for theft, branded, whipped, transported or

even executed if His Lordship desired, and her family would be thrown out of the garden.

#

The storms finally gave way to clear skies. Any crops in the garden that hadn't succumbed to rot had a chance to grow, and the hay could finally be harvested. In spite of the dry weather, little Ned's cough returned. Joan couldn't stay home with the child or depend on Beth to care for him—and the girl's help, like everyone's, was needed for the harvest—so she carried him in a sling all day, taking short breaks to feed him when he fussed. He was nearing a year old but had the heft of a child half his age. He rarely babbled and slept much of the time when he wasn't coughing. As Joan was kept busy with a constant stream of tasks, she sang to Ned, his little body burning against her chest. Her Ladyship sent all manner of simples. Some stopped the coughing for a night; others left the boy as slack as a trussed-up hare, his breath shallow and quick.

Joan tried not to think of the book while she worked and Ned grew paler. Every hour of daylight—and several hours each night after sunset—was taken with work: weeding when she was needed and could spare the time, harvesting, making cheese and butter, sewing, baking, skinning what game she could get, taking anything extra to the market. Beth worked in the dairy and helped in the Hall, only coming home late to drop into bed for a few hours' sleep before dawn saw her up and out to milk again. Feeding Ned even the little he would drink left Joan hungry and limp. She had no daylight to stop and try to read, try to find a cure, and no privacy over the dim light in the cottage at night. She put the book out of her mind as a useless burden: it may as well be used to prop open the door for all the help it was, and if it were ever found, she would feel the punishment twice as much for never being able to put it to the use it was made for.

While she worked, she made up her mind to sneak the book back out and leave it in the walled garden for Hitchen to find. Perhaps Her Ladyship would even find it and question Hitchen about it. Regardless, it soon wouldn't be on Joan's conscience anymore.

#

The apple trees that had been grafted with the new stock started to die.

“I don’t understand it,” Will said to Hitchen as they inspected the orchard. “You are sure of the stock you brought?”

Hitchen, one hand on the shriveled branch of an apple tree, turned to Will. “You must have done something wrong, grafted it without thought or at the wrong time.” Will clenched his fists. “Spring is best, of course—” “—Of course.” Hitchen nodded.

“But the graft would not wait. These trees have always thrived under me. Every other apple which His Lordship has bought—even sickly ones from Savoie—have brought fruit.”

“If that is so, then everything you plant should thrive.”

Will set his jaw, fists at his sides. The man, for all his strange ways, couldn’t know about Ned. Could he? He gazed over the corner of the orchard where they’d tried for Hitchen’s new type, its ground covered in brown, withered leaves, and remembered his son that morning. The baby’s eyes were closed, his skin milky pale with a hint of green the same as newly unfolded spring leaves. Nearly everything Will grew in the garden did thrive: fruit filled out and ripened, bursting with juice; he piled baskets to overflowing with vegetables; and his beloved apple trees—along with the cherries and plums—flowered every spring with great promise. But except for Beth, who was a bonny child, his own stock failed. Joan, once as pink and fat as an apple herself, had grown thin and wan and as lifeless as the leaves he trod upon in this corner of the orchard. As the head of his family, he was tasked with their protection, and he couldn’t even do that.

“You followed the usual methods?”

Will nodded. “This afternoon I’ll cut the bark to let the humours out then plug the wounds with clay. I’ve had the boys bring dung to pack around each tree’s base.”

Hitchen made small noises and nodded, patting his hand against a tree’s trunk, the tattoos on his face rippling in the sun like shadows on the pond. “I do not wish to tell His Lordship his hopes for the rarest apple in the county—in England even—have been dashed.”

He’ll discover, Will thought, that his hopes for a clever master gardener have led him astray.

After Hitchen left, Will glanced back over the dying trees. He’d done the best he could to hide the sabotage, but the new gardener hadn’t even looked twice at the grafted branches. His Lordship may want to blame the orchard man, but, ultimately, the fault lay with the master gardener. It was only a matter of time before Hitchen was gone for

good and Will took his place. Will deserved it. Maybe then his wife and children would prosper, and Joan would look at him again with respect, or even love.

Will took note of a bee bole that required repair and started a list of spots here and there that needed attention. Even in the winter when the grounds were still, the bees were quiet, and—for the most part— the birds were away and the other animals hidden deep in the woods, work in the garden was never done. The land still breathed then, Will knew. It depended on them—on him—to keep it safe.

Late that night, he woke from a sleep so heavy that for a moment his thoughts were confused and he felt that the shadows in the darkness were the walls of Her Ladyship's enclosed garden and he was locked in, the sky above imprisoned with him inside the walls, the desperate sounds nearby the screeching of a hare in a fox's jaw. The dream left him and the hare was Joan, curled in on herself, blowing breath onto Ned's face to bring him back to them. But like the apple trees grafted with the new stock, Ned would never grow any larger, never blossom or flourish, never see another season.

#

Will threw open the trunk lid, looking for the new shirt his wife had stored away. Though he had buried more children than he cared to count, burying a son who had lived beyond its birth was a somber occasion that required Will's respect, and a man who spent so much of his life in the dirt wanted to be clean for this office.

He grabbed a pile of cloth, not caring it had been folded with care, chamomile tucked between the layers. He cast the pile aside, flicking his hands over his sleeves to dislodge the flowers that stuck to him. Its light apple scent reminded him of early summer and bees and his little son who should be learning to walk and not lying in a box waiting to be put into the ground. What could a father, a gardener, grow in such haunted soil? Naught but dead branches holding wormed fruit.

He flung another handful of cloth over his shoulder and screamed in frustration that his shirt wasn't there. The one he wore hung heavy with sweat and grease, its sleeves showing holes where brambles and thorns had caught it, its neck black at the edge.

Will smeared his hand across his face, rubbing away tears and grime, and dived into the trunk once more.

His hand closed around a hard shape. When he pulled the book from the bottom of the trunk, he felt again, as on the night Ned had died, as if he were in the wrong place. He pulled back his arm to throw the book across the room and into the fire, but the weight of it stopped him. He dropped his hand and took in this object that had no place in his home. His reading was slow, but as vital as it was that he clean himself for his son's funeral, solving the secret of the book could not be ignored.

A compleat collection of plants and trees as described by Wm. Tusser, natural philosopher, including receipts for physic and offering all of the secrets of the garden.

She'd stolen everything from him—his vitality, his son, and now his position in the garden. Had Joan been before him he would have beat her and felt a deep satisfaction from it.

He opened the cover and found, written in a very pretty hand on the first page, *James Hitchen*. Nearly every page held notes in two hands, one smooth and sure, the other cramped. Will scowled as he skimmed the words, almost unable to make them out, more because of the bad hand than his ability. In places, the better handwriting was blurred and faded. The darker but harder-to-read hand described places in the garden—the very garden he had tended for years and knew as well as he had known the curves of his son's cheek—where certain plants could be found. A drawing of M'Lady's walled garden lay inside the back cover in the same dark ink. Will's hands shook from shock and grief and confusion and anger, and a page dropped out. When he picked it up his arm felt as if it were attached to someone else's body, someone far away.

It was a letter in the same cramped hand, the lines so close together that Will could barely follow it, and his eyes hopped from word to word.

> *Dear Brother—*
>
> *I did leave you as a boy these fyve yeres ago but write as a growne man of no small means with the order of a goode companye of workers under my command. … spent at sea … that learned man my friende who was taken ill … and do now finde myself a gardner at a manor in a countye north from*
>
> *London … having left my name behind … forgive me … As Ever, Matthewe Hayes*

By the time he returned the letter to the book and closed it all up together, he was sucking in great lungfuls of air, and the sound he thought was the lowing of cows outside was, he realised, himself laughing through sobs.

#

Will did not speak to Joan before or after the short funeral service for Ned, and for that she was glad. Though the churchyard was far from Her Ladyship's garden, Joan did not trust herself to speak with her own voice in a place where the souls of so many rested. Perhaps the walled garden had once been a burial place. Joan prayed for the strength to go back to that strange place, and then prayed for forgiveness for thinking only of herself while she buried her son.

Beside her Will stood clean in a shirt she recalled finishing during the winter, so very long before. His nails, usually begrimed, were the pink of Ned's when he was newly born. She couldn't look away, no matter how much her attention should be drawn to the service. Had she ever looked at her husband's hands before? Each finger, every knuckle, the scars and scratches. They were useful things like a pot or rake, yet beautiful. As she stared, she saw Will's hands, his arms, even his body shake. She dared a glance at his face, unwilling to pry into his private grief. He did not cry. With his jaw set so hard she was sure she would soon hear his teeth crack, he clenched himself tighter, swaying out of her reach.

She smelled the anger on him, hot and sharp, stronger than the scent of apples that always reminded her of him.

At the finish of the service, Will stalked away in the direction of the orchard. Joan let him go without a word, leaving him to tend his trees.

#

In the orchard, Will stood ankle-deep in dead leaves that swirled round his feet in the breeze while he cut the shriveled limbs from the apple trees where he had grafted Hitchen's foreign offering. For just a moment he wondered what the apples would have looked like. Red or green or orange or yellow? Tiny or great? Round or oblong? He shrugged. It was of no concern to him any longer for the new apples would never grow. He'd made sure of that, and how he had paid for it.

He found Hitchen with His Lordship just outside the larger walled kitchen garden.

"Mr. Cookstole," His Lordship began. "I am truly sorry for your loss."

"As am I for yours." Will dropped the dead branches and the book at his master's feet.

Hitchen jumped back before reaching down to pick up the book.

"Your apples, Your Lordship," Will said. "I am afraid they did not take."

"Hitchen?" His Lordship turned to the master gardener. "You promised me a new apple."

Hitchen ran his hands over the book's cover and glanced at Will before answering. "I trusted the grafting of them to Cookstole."

"And I left the accountableness of my orchard—of all of my gardens—to you. If you please." He held out his hand and Hitchen reluctantly placed the book in it. The pages flapped in the wind. Rue to Daisy to Chamomile to Mary's Thistle. Lists of receipts and simples. On the planting of trees. On the keeping of bees. On the phases of the moon and the planting schedule to keep. His Lordship opened the back pages and then turned back to the first.

"M'Lord," Will said. "The author has much to say on the growing of apples, near the middle pages."

His Lordship pulled the letter from the book and opened it, his finger sliding down the lines found there. "Mister Hayes," he said without lifting his head.

Will watched as a blush, ruddy as a new apple, spread up Hitchen's neck. The orchard man took a small step back, bowed at the waist, and waited. His Lordship waved a hand, and Will took his leave.

#

Entering the cottage, Joan expected the familiar smell of cheese and wood ash. The tang of old milk was there, but it lay beneath the overwhelming scent of herbs. Things were not as she had left them. *Of course not, Ned is gone.* She barely recognised her own voice between her ears.

It took several minutes of staring at the floor, and then she saw them everywhere: tiny white and yellow flowers scattered in the rushes like stars on the ground, everything wrong and upside down. A blanket lay too near the fire.

Joan mindlessly kicked it out of the way, her feet so far down her legs that they seemed to move on their own. Moving the blanket drew her attention to another pile of cloth on the floor, which she bent down oh so slowly to pick up, her hands as far away from her body as her feet. She was a dumb animal being herded from one place to the next. When she noticed the open trunk, she didn't bother to look inside.

Without deciding on a direction, Joan found herself in the Hall's garden. The wind pushed her skirt and tangled around her legs as tree branches thrashed overhead.

As she walked, each step sent gravel rolling, mixing red into blue into green. She would be on her knees the following day, picking singular stones and re-setting the pattern. Is that what all of this toil was for, to set a pattern, watch the rain or wind or sickness or death ruin it, and then spend more toil pushing the pattern back to rights? Each edge of the knot was clean and straight, each plant inside it placed where it was meant to be. The knots twined together and untwisted, creating a loop that never ended. Soon it would be autumn and then winter again and then spring and summer and Joan felt the pattern of the years upon her. She would have another child early next spring and the pattern would loop back on itself until she buried the child or it grew and thrived and buried her one day.

The dark green gate stood open, the wind slamming it against the wall. Joan, spurred to action, grabbed the handle and made to pull it shut, but movement drew her inside.

In spite of the high walls, the plants inside the enclosed garden danced in the wind. Honeysuckle vines slashed against the stone, rosemary shrubs shivered as if alive with dozens of hidden birds, and pinks and redder poppies beckoned to her, pulling her into the garden. Her broad-brimmed hat flew off, the straw snagging her coif, freeing her hair to whip over her eyes where it stuck to the tears on her cheeks. When she uncovered her eyes, she saw him. His hair—longer than last time he stood in this garden—did not move in the breeze. His long green coat—plain now and without vines and flowers—hung still. His eyes watched her, never wavering. She waited for him to speak to her, not with his mouth but inside her head. Joan felt she should scream, call for help, call for anyone to witness this man and help her prove to herself that she was not mad, yet she found relief in his appearance.

Joan Cookstole stood near the centre of the walled garden, one hand on the sundial, and looked around as if seeing the garden for the first time. Edmund Vale standing before her at the end of summer was part of the pattern. The man and woman she saw at the beginning of summer were part of it, too. James Hitchen, Will, Her Ladyship, the apples, the book, the harvest. Ned. All of it had happened and would happen again.

Vale faded and disappeared.

Anne. Mary. Doris. Toni. Joan.

She startled, having forgotten about the voices for a moment, lost as she was in the pattern that was as strong as the knots that twisted beneath the Hall's windows.

"Joan." It was louder, just behind her, and the pattern fell apart.

Will's miraculous hand, clean and pink, took hers. She felt callouses at the bottom of each finger.

"Come home, wife."

"And the book?"

"His Lordship has it. He seemed pleased by it." Will shrugged. "But I don't need a book to tend the orchard. Just as you don't need one to weed or gather or plant. Come away now, Joanie love. I am tired and would lie down."

Back out in the strong gusts, Joan pulled the green gate shut behind them, and as they walked away she thought she heard a baby crying, but it was faint and the birds were loud and she wasn't sure.

1770s

As he walked, he leaned upon the old crutch, its surface battered by use and even burned along one side. Another soldier had handed it to him from a pile in the corner of the hospital tent where he'd been taken, screaming and clutching at his knee after being shot. He still woke from terrifying dreams filled with rusty, jagged-tooth saws that gnashed and bit at his flesh. Thomas Hill stopped along the road's edge, giving himself a moment to slow his heart and rest his leg. The vision of the army surgeon standing over him with the amputation saw still left him sweating and shaking, even all these months later, as if this moment here beneath the trees was the dream and he would wake on the cot, still begging for his leg.

A wagon rolled up behind him. He turned and pulled his hat down on his forehead.

"Heading to the manor?" the driver asked. The wagon's bed was piled high with hay, and the cob's hide shone with sweat. Thomas stared at the drops of spittle that fell from the horse's mouth and mixed with the dry road dirt to make dark brown beads of mud. He'd seen it a thousand times in his life, this everyday occurrence, but still couldn't look away from the quiet innocence of it.

"Asked if you wanted a ride."

Thomas pulled his attention from the ground to the driver. The boy—for he was a boy, Thomas noted, a few years younger than himself in age but aeons younger in experience—was familiar. His hair, bright red beneath his hat, gave him the look of a fox, and his eyes held a smile even if his mouth did not. There was no hiding that he was a Barlow. He'd have been too young when Thomas left to recognise the broken man standing on the road in a threadbare uniform. But Thomas knew the boy's family

like he knew his own. He nodded, and the boy shifted over in the cart to give him room and waited while Thomas climbed onto the bench. Thomas gnashed his teeth at the sharp burst of pain in his knee, took a deep breath, shuffled himself onto the bench, and grunted in relief, resting his forehead on the crutch for a moment.

The boy chucked at the cob and the wagon started rolling again. Thomas didn't ask the boy about his sister. He decided it best to give himself time to understand what home was first. The rest could wait.

The boy, Luke, talked about the comings and goings of the Lord and Lady and the villagers as if the newcomer were just that: new. Thomas let the chatter settle over him, noting familiar names.

Luke cleared his throat and a comfortable silence settled over them. Thomas, lulled by the cart's movement and the sun's heat, jumped when Luke asked, "How many red Indians did you kill?"

"How did you—?" Thomas began.

"Mr. Hill liked to boast about his son the soldier."

"None." Thomas smiled to think of his father proud of him, but then frowned when he imagined Samuel's face when his crippled little brother returned. His hand rested on the outside pocket of his leather satchel.

"Think I don't recollect you?" Luke asked, staring at Thomas's stained and washed-out coat. "That you were going off to see the world and leaving the plough behind?" The boy ducked his head, hiding the blush spreading up his neck. "Begging Father did me no good. And Anne—"

Thomas held his breath to hold the twist of pain in his chest for just a moment longer. It had been years since he had spoken to anyone who knew her. And saying her name in the hearing of the other soldiers led to questions about when he was going to marry her or—of more interest to the soldiers—when he'd bedded her. He'd given one new recruit a black eye for mouthing off about Anne, describing her skirt up round her waist in a grassy field. Later he had to admit to himself he'd hit the man more out of guilt and discomfort from the memories than out of anger.

Thomas waited for what her brother would say next. That she was married. That she had children of her own. That she was long gone, away to another village. She was surely gone to him, like the home he remembered. He would have to recast everything, create a new place for himself.

"How does your family?" Thomas started with the easiest question he could think of.

“Good, good.” Luke nodded. “The little’uns are home, noisy as ever, but me’n Henry work for M’Lord now.”

“And your sister?” Thomas was unable to make himself say the name aloud even though it echoed in his head and he yearned to speak it, to feel the sigh of it— Anne— between his lips. He felt between places: between soldier and civilian, between home and away, between the Anne he remembered and the Anne she was going to be now.

Thomas had wanted to write to her, but Anne could barely read, and he felt nauseous at the idea of his letters being read aloud by her father. Older soldiers talked about their lost sweethearts with a shrug. But Thomas never forgot about his, and not hearing about her was as painful as having her in front of him but just out of reach. He was as haunted by his memories and her spirit as a graveyard at midnight.

“You’ll see soon enough,” Luke said.

Thomas clutched the bench seat to keep himself from grabbing the boy’s shirt and shaking the answers out.

They rode along in silence as the wagon passed a field Thomas didn’t recognise. “What happened here?” The few cottages that used to huddle at the road’s edge were gone. A new wall had been built, grasses and wildflowers stuffed into its recesses to make it pass for an old one. Thomas spied, through a new copse of trees, the church’s crumbling walls.

“M’Lord took it in spring. Was blocking his view, he said. He took it and then had the same men who’d just lost their homes put up stone walls. To keep his herds in, he said.”

“He took the hamlet? How does a hamlet fit in a pocket like a snuff box or a sweetheart’s token?” He patted his satchel again.

Luke sucked his teeth. “They gathered in the road, ready to stop him by force, some said, but that’s just talk. Father said they stood in the road like sheep, waiting to be told where to go. ’Twas a right shock when he told them to dismantle their cottages and dooryards to move them, not destroy them outright.”

Thomas, who had never built a house, tried to imagine how to go about unbuilding one, taking the rafters down, removing mortar from bricks, digging mud from cracks in the walls. The destruction of anything seemed like such a waste to him. Gardeners may pull up weeds and tree stumps, but it was all in the work of creation. He had no illusions about his work as a soldier, when he was trained to destroy. From the very first he knew it was a mistake, to make a gardener into a killer. He had to make amends: to Anne, to the garden, to himself.

The warm scent of horse brought him back to Luke, who still spoke. “They’re out beyond the far field. Father says it’s naught more’n a plaything and the people left’re naught more’n His Lordship’s dolls. Took the common land, too, he did. You got nowhere to graze the sheep, you got not much reason to stay, eh? As if their hundreds of acres ain’t enough.”

Beneath the wheels’ crunch, Thomas heard laughter as they made their way past the old church ruins, where he and his friends would dare one another to commit what they believed were unforgiveable offenses, but which he now knew were nothing when compared to what men did to one another on the battlefield. Thomas and Luke peered off the road and into the shade of the newly planted trees and shrubs where a party of ladies enjoyed the warm afternoon. They sat on small upholstered stools, their gowns spread around them, and ate from dainty plates. Servants stood behind them, just out of reach of the shade. The women’s voices carried, but Thomas couldn’t understand what they said. Birdsong mixed with their exclamations, turning it all into noise in his head. A scream pierced through and he was back in the hospital listening to the screams of the wounded. Listening to his own screams. But no one in the hospital laughed, and now it was laughter that he heard. A woman laughing: another sound of home, so foreign to soldiers in the field.

They rode in silence for a few minutes. Luke clucked his tongue at the horse to keep it steady. Thomas pulled at the neck of his shirt again and wished for the cool of the trees along the roadside even though it meant walking. Finally he decided what he wore on a wagon didn’t matter to anyone, least of all the boy, and he pulled the heavy coat off. Without it he could breathe deeply again, and his body felt like a room aired out for the first time after a long, dark winter.

When the Hall came into view, Thomas found himself unable to understand what he was seeing. “Where is it?”

Luke laughed. “That ball take your eyes as well as your knee? The house is right there.”

From where they sat on the road, the lawn was a smooth green blanket, uninterrupted by hedges or parterres or even a flower, all the way to the house’s front steps.

“No,” Thomas said. “The garden. Where is the garden?”

#

Her Ladyship slid her fingers along the window's glass, marring the view. She moved aside to look out of another pane, knowing that the next morning the window would be perfectly clean once again. It took all her self-control not to smear her fingers across every pane of glass. She was tired and feeling dyspeptic—too much wine the night before—and had excused herself from a picnic to nap until the afternoon.

"This aspect," her husband said, "is not pleasing. I should have had that man take out the walled gardens two years ago when I took the remainders of the parterres, but it wasn't the right time to move the kitchen garden, and then there was the building on the house." He let the excuses trail off. "I wish for a lake."

"You have a lake." Beyond the gardens that upset her husband a wagon rolled along the lane and towards the stables. She thought at first it was the golden hay piled high on the wagon that had drawn her attention, but then a flash of white and the sun gleaming off a head of dark hair—one of the men on the bench—caught her eye.

On three sides, the rolling lawns came all the way up to the house, right up to the windows, close enough to peek in like someone with low manners. From the approach, new arrivals could see some of the older gardens off to the east of the house, but their kinder visitors allowed this breach of fashion without comment, for the sweep of lawn best viewed from the front and back windows gave the illusion that the house floated alone in the countryside.

"I wish for a lake within view of the house," he continued. She was used to being spoken to as if she were simple. "I wish for a lake here. I wish to look out any window and see a pleasing view. No more walls. They make my head ache. I wish to have as pleasing a view as our guests. Why do you think I removed the hamlet if not to open the view?"

Because you're cruel, she thought but didn't say. She had to admit, however, that he was a good steward of the land. "I won't argue about that again."

"There is nothing to argue about. The land is here to be used to its best profit, which means acres for grazing."

"But the families…." The Lady thought of the village she had visited in the neighbouring estate. Charming though it was, her friend had disclosed—without any hint of regret—how much was spent to keep it looking quaint now that the villagers couldn't keep themselves. Her Ladyship didn't know how her friend's husband kept the estate running as well as paid his wife's gambling debts. She cringed to think of the receipts piled in her own secretary.

“I promised those who stay can work for me, as they always have. It’s my place to care for this land and people. The land is to do with as I see fit. Take care you remember that.”

“It’s not your land,” she reminded him for what must have been the hundredth time. The fact that the entail passed down the female line was one he liked to conveniently forget, and she liked to remember.

Her Ladyship read her husband’s face for the signs she knew so well. A smoothing of the forehead, his ears pulling back along his head. Eyelids lowered, nose tipped up, nostrils flaring. And a flush climbing like a wayward rose up the trellis of his neck and cheeks.

“Yet it is not your title,” he reminded her.

She held her tongue. Screeching like a harridan never won her any ground. If she were being honest with herself, she would admit that nothing ever won her anything with her husband. Her father had chosen him, a son from a titled family with money, to join with the only child of a landed family. Her mother had gone along, only lifting her elegant eyebrows when the young man showed little restraint with his mouth and less with his hunting rifle. Her mother’s eyebrows lowered when her future son-in-law paid off the family of the beater, a boy of only fourteen, after the fowling accident. It was the least he could do, and by then the marriage had been announced, and all parties went along, happy the matter was resolved.

The one matter that was not resolved was an heir. She wanted a daughter, someone to inherit the entail, of course. But after two miscarriages, she’d begun to doubt her ability to have a live child. There had been rumours of illegitimate children from his dalliances to put proof to the charge that she was barren. She sometimes wondered whether her husband took so much interest in the shape of the house and gardens because he could not mould his wife to his wishes or get from her the son he required to inherit his title.

He continued to glare down at her. “I expect the man before noon. He is bringing drawings based on his earlier visit and work shall begin as soon as possible—within the week—”

“But the party? The invitations went out some time ago, and guests will begin to arrive in days.”

The set of his mouth, teeth clamped behind tight lips, told her he had, in fact, forgotten. But he never admitted a mistake. “We shall keep the party to the better parts of the grounds, and have a more lavish party next year, once this is seen to and sorted.”

His Lordship waved his hand in dismissal at the garden and left the room without saying goodbye to his wife.

Her Ladyship shrugged, used to her husband's moods, and gazed into the corner of the enclosed garden below. Her grandmother had told her the walled garden was placed so it could be peered into from rooms above. Ever since the new wing had been added to the house, the only people who looked into the garden were the family and the maids. Every guest, His Lordship insisted, was to be given a view over the improved grounds.

"That wall has been there longer than the house," her grandmother had said once when Her Ladyship had been nothing more than a young Miss in a short dress. "All these changes they make, tearing down and rebuilding. You'll come to understand there are things older than us, and who are we to destroy them? It's not only a waste, it's a crime against the family!"

The young Miss had been too afraid of her grandmother to argue.

But still, Her Ladyship knew, one had to change with the times. The old woman was long gone, and fashion dictated that walls be torn down.

Let His Lordship concern himself with the gardens, she decided, for she had much to do. There were rooms to have prepared—many guests were expected from London—a kitchen to oversee, the dressmaker to greet for her final fitting, and special entertainments to plan. It was to be the last party before they went to London for the season, and she wanted it to be the first topic of everyone's conversation once there. She also hoped to recoup some of her losses before she had to face her creditors in London: the dressmaker, milliner, glover, even her friends. Perhaps her luck would be better in her own house.

She ran her fingers along the windowsill in her room. From this angle she could only see the outside wall with its blue painted gate and one corner of the inside, but she filled in the rest with her memory. Its flower beds and paths, the sundial in the centre and the water goddess basin in one wall. Its cool shaded benches and hiding places. Its ghosts.

A figure crossed the cool green shadows then stopped and turned, his facial features blurred by distance and the waves in the window's glass. Her Ladyship unlatched the window and leaned out to get a better look.

There was no one there.

Yet she was sure she had seen someone, a gardener most likely, and he hadn't moved quickly enough to be out of sight, hidden in the near corner.

There it was again. A dark figure moving from shadow to shadow along the far wall, its edges undulating as it moved. But Her Ladyship wasn't looking through the flawed windowpane this time.

It was all hers, but her husband was right. It was an embarrassment. It simply had to go.

#

Thomas tried to climb down from the wagon, uncomfortable when Luke rushed to clamber down from his own side and come to his aid. He'd found himself standing on the step on his good leg, wondering how to hop down on his bad leg without crumpling to the ground.

"Would you keep this a secret?" Thomas asked.

"You can't hide a limp like that." Luke pointed his chin at Thomas's crutch.

"I don't suppose I can." Thomas shook his head. "What I meant to ask is, can you keep me a secret, at least for a while? Word travels faster than I can these days."

Luke held out his hand. "Promise to tell me about the colonies and the red Indians, and I'll be sure to keep mum 'til you say otherwise."

He shook Luke's hand, and the boy was back up in the wagon before Thomas had a chance to get his bearings. He was alone behind the stables, glad not to be forced into a decision because of company. How to greet people, how to explain the past few years? This realisation made him want more than anything to be back on the wagon, rolling away from the estate, away from his family and the garden and even Anne.

Thomas had been relieved during the drive to see that not all of the gardens he remembered—the gardens he had grown up in—were gone. The planted wilderness with its maze of intersecting walks and blue-roofed summerhouses was still there, along with the orangerie, and the kitchen garden as well as the old walled garden. Luke explained that the old hedge maze, more wild than the planted wilderness, was still to be found at the park's edge. The boy also described what was new but hidden from first view: a small lake with meandering brook and grotto, a plaster temple dotted with busts of important men, and a second temple—more small house than monument—used as a banqueting house by His Lordship.

He stashed his bag behind a trough, leaned on the crutch, and took off down the path towards the walled garden. He moved as quickly as he could, which wasn't very, his knee expressing a difference of sentiment with each step. Grieving for the days

when he ran along these paths without thought, he cursed his knee for the thousandth time and turned his mind from the pain and weakness as he left behind the sounds of scraping shovels and ringing hooves on the stable's stone floors. The overwhelming smell of horses and manure gave way to the fresh air of the garden—the smell of the colour green. Afraid to be spied sneaking away and breaking the spell of his homecoming, he kept behind hedges and ducked into out-of-the-way niches when he heard voices. When he took in the long view across the lawn in front of the house, it was still a shock to see everything flat and green. No decorative topiaries, no flowers, no fences; a lone statue here and there, looking like a spirit floating uninvited in the daylight. Such a violent change should have left marks on the land, seams where the new design hadn't yet taken hold. Yet it all looked as if it had been this way forever.

The sight of the walled garden spurred him on, and he hobbled faster on the crutch than his leg could keep up. He stumbled over his own feet, let out a yelp and grabbed at a shrub to catch his fall. His hands caught nothing more solid than twigs and leaves, and he ended up off the path and on his knees, moaning now as the crutch thumped to the ground behind him. Getting back up to his feet took minutes, but Thomas refused to rest before continuing towards his goal. He ignored the slight tremor in his hands and the flush of nausea that came on, from the heat or the lack of dinner it didn't matter, because he was back where he belonged.

While he'd spent years listening to the other soldiers talk about home and describe their mothers' or sweethearts' dooryards, none of them knew that what Thomas often dreamed of was the door he was about to open. As he got closer, his pace slowed, his toes uncurled inside his shoes and his shoulders fell from around his ears. His hands were steady again, and he felt less tired than he had while on the wagon. Thomas attributed this rush of vigour to being here, away from the army and especially away from the hospital. That must be it, for why else would his knee not ache as much as it had even before he crashed to the ground?

The walled garden's wood door showed neglect where its blue paint had peeled and faded, and some stones were missing from the top of the wall, leaving it gaptoothed. But even for all its faults and age, there was something reassuring about seeing that the garden was still there. Thomas brushed off a small pang of guilt over not going directly home to Mother and Father, but he wouldn't have to explain to the garden.

He curled his fingers around the gate handle.

A bee hovered drowsily above his hand.

He waited, watched the bee as it flew above his knuckles. It seemed to be about to land and he anticipated the kiss of its tiny legs on his skin.

He didn't open the door, and the bee sped away.

His hand went to his hip, where his satchel had been his constant companion these past months of the trip home, to pat at the pocket and be sure the lump was still there. When it wasn't, Thomas panicked, the feeling of something missing overwhelming him. Then he remembered he'd left his satchel tucked behind a trough and cursed silently to himself.

It didn't feel right, going into the garden like this, without an offering.

The last time he'd been in the enclosed garden was with Anne. They had argued, and he'd stormed off and left her crying. He'd stayed away, finding work elsewhere on the grounds, and then returned to find her gone. He left for the army the following morning without seeing her. And now it was as if time had doubled back on itself, and he was at the gate ready to walk in and apologise, as he should've done three years ago.

Slumped on the crutch, Thomas put his hand in his pocket and rubbed the feel of the iron handle from his fingertips. As he turned away, a twist of pain spread from his knee to his ankle. He was tired was all, needed a rest. He thought of the shaded bench inside the garden, and the desire to sit was almost tangible.

Instead, he limped away.

#

1750s

"Thomas! Boy! Where have you gone?"

Thomas pressed himself further back in the shadows beneath twisting vines where the cool stone wall scratched against his ears. Dust and pollen floated around his head, picking up light in the early summer morning.

A hand, calloused and dirty, slid between the vines and clamped around Thomas's arm, pulling him out into the garden. His father's tall form blocked out the sun, creating a black, man-shaped empty space. The boy closed his eyes and wiped the tears from his cheeks, and the dark shape burned itself, blue and yellow, against the inside of his eyelids.

His father shook him and his teeth clacked together. “What is amiss with you, boy? Your brother Sam hauls three barrows of manure to your one, and he’s not even half a head taller.”

“Not my brother,” Thomas mumbled.

“Says who?”

“Sam.”

The hand not holding his arm lightly slapped the back of his head. “Don’t you let your mother hear you. She suckled the both of you, sometimes at the same time.” His father kneeled down and forced Thomas to look into his eyes. “You’re the only brother either of you is likely to get, so enough. I heard what he said to the other boys about you.”

“You did?”

His father nodded. “It’s the way of things, the older boys picking on the younger. If you want to be a head gardener one day, you have to learn how to take thorns with petals. The Hill family men work in the garden, and that includes you. So back to it,” he said and gently pushed Thomas towards the abandoned wheelbarrow.

Thomas had seen piglets, foals, and calves suckle, but the image of his mother holding him and Sam at the same time with her bosom out? Disgusting! If that’s what made them brothers, he wanted nothing to do with it.

Manure piled high in the barrow, Thomas returned to the walled garden where an under-gardener was spreading the muck in the new flower beds to ready them for the young plants from the greenhouse. Thomas wasn’t yet trusted to work in the greenhouse, to keep the heaters stoked at the correct temperature, but he sneaked in there when he could to see what was being tended, to measure the grapevine—which was trained up and down and back along the slanted ceiling—with the biggest steps he could take across the flagstone floor, to touch the pointy crowns on the pineapples and wonder for the hundredth time what one tasted like.

“Tom!”

The voice woke him from his daydream. He was still in the walled garden, but the under-gardener was gone. Sam and the other two apprentices stood around his wheelbarrow, blocking his escape.

“What did Da say to you?” Sam’s freckles were dark against his red cheeks.

Tom shrugged and avoided eye contact with the bigger boys. Instead, he looked beyond them, into the cool shade in the garden’s far corner. The man in the green coat was there, standing and watching.

Sam poked his brother in the shoulder. Tom steeled himself and tried not to sway.

"What are you looking at, beef-head?" Sam's eyes widened and he spun round, his hands behind his back in a posture of obedience, ready to face a gardener. His shoulders sagged when he saw the garden's far corner was empty but for a small bench and the always thick vines covering the walls.

He turned back and pinched Tom's upper arm. "Seeing things that aren't there again, changeling?"

"Stop calling me that!"

The other boys mimicked him, their voices high and whiny. Sam joined in, and Tom felt tears beginning to pool behind his eyes. He clenched his jaw to keep from crying.

"Hey!" Father stepped inside the walled garden. "I catch you belly-guts standing around once more and I'll thrash all of you. Now back to work."

Sam stuck his tongue out at his younger brother and left, the other boys right behind him.

The man in the green coat never spoke to Tom and never came any closer than several feet away, but knowing he was there made Tom feel protected, as if the garden itself was watching over him. He knew never to tell anyone about the man, that to do so would be to ruin the secret. The man in the green coat was the only one of them who ever looked at Tom. The rest went about their business, pulling weeds, pruning the fruit trees, pushing wheelbarrows, raking, chopping, planting, sowing. They were familiar, caring for the garden the same way he and his family did. But just as Tom couldn't bring himself to ask Father what the word Sam called him—changeling—meant, he couldn't bring himself to ask any of the gardeners if they'd seen the others. Tom was afraid of the answers, was afraid it would mean having to leave the garden. And he would never do anything to be thrown out of the garden.

#

1770s

"Thomas!" A woman's voice carried over the garden wall and down to where Harvey Ralston was busy drawing.

He had arrived earlier in the day, called to the gardens by His Lordship, who wasn't expecting him for at least another hour. But Ralston liked to be early. It gave him

a chance to see things as they truly were and not as clients wanted them to be seen. He had spent his time sitting on a half-hidden bench, drawing the walled garden as it was: the wall in need of repair and flower beds full of half-spent roses and lilies, leggy lavender and herbs that had long since bolted. The enclosed garden was just that—enclosed—a mere closet when what should be here instead was a grand hall.

Ralston had begun his favourite part of the process—the second drawing in the pair to show the space as it should be, without the walls and as part of a landscape of undulating rises and valleys—when a woman spoke. He stilled his hand, and the scratching of his pen stopped. The best perquisite of the task was the secrets he became privy to. The thickets of late summer were rife with keyholes through which to spy young lovers, and a garden's walls, with only the sky for a ceiling, were never completely impermeable to any sound louder than a house sparrow's song.

"Anne." It came out in a hoarse whisper, as if the man were surprised. Or frightened. Or overcome with emotion.

Ralston tried to picture the couple, their dress and manners, how far they stood from one another. The familiarity with which they spoke indicated kinship, or something even more intimate.

"Your leg," Anne said. "What happened? When?" Ah, so these two were familiar with one another, but they hadn't seen each other in some time. Ralston set down the drawing book and pen and stepped up onto the bench, being careful to keep the top of his head just below the top of the wall. A thick ivy patch scratched his face, keeping him from getting much closer. He tipped his ear towards the sky, hoping for a shift in the breeze to bring the voices closer.

"It is nothing." The man's voice was louder now. Ralston's imagination filled in the man's face and carriage: tall but not too tall, young and strong, and handsome, of course. It wouldn't do to have an ugly hero in this tale. Injured, so a cane, perhaps? For dramatic detail, Ralston added a bandage wrapped around the young man's thigh, edged in blood. That would make the audience gasp in sympathy, the ladies yearn to heal him.

"No, it is something, Thomas." Anne's concern was edged with anger.

Ralston replaced the man's cane with a crutch. The drawing filled in more. The woman was young, just out of girlhood. Slight, with supple wrists and a graceful neck. Creamy skin. And hair the colour of a spring doe. Carrying a basket filled with flowers. A small dog at her heels. She hesitated, wanting to come closer to the man yet afraid, but she extended one white hand towards him.

Ralston leaned closer to the wall, crushing the vine. It pushed back, forcing him to readjust his stance, and he placed one foot atop the bench's arm to gain some balance. He craned his neck sideways to peek over the wall, but the vine was too thick. He would have to pull it apart, surely attracting attention. Ralston was stuck where he was.

"And what about that?" Thomas matched her angry tone. "That is most definitely something!"

What? Ralston wanted to shout. What had she done? He couldn't help himself. He inched higher over the vine, straining his eyes as far sideways as they could go, just to get a peek.

"Mister Ralston!"

Startled, he jumped up and spun to face His Lordship, who stood just inside the garden's gate. A small thunk alerted him to the fact that he'd just knocked over his ink pot.

The woman—Anne—yelped. Ralston turned back to catch her looking at him. He had just a moment to memorise her and Thomas as they stared at him in shock before turning and rushing away.

His Lordship cleared his throat and Ralston returned his attention to his client.

"M'Lord, I was just getting a different, ah, perspective on things. Come." He stepped down off the bench, took up his book, and shook the drawings out. Ink splattered across his hose and onto His Lordship's shoe. "Take a look here, and here." He shoved the half-ruined drawings beneath his client's nose to hide the stains. "Once this wall is gone, you shall have a clear view of everything."

While he described the garden's future, Ralston drew Anne and Thomas in his mind from memory, impatient to get them down on paper just as soon as His Lordship was satisfied with the plans. Anne with her lank hair and tired eyes, one hand on her swelling stomach, the other carrying a basket of limp vegetables. Thomas, looking as tired if not more so, his threadbare uniform hanging from his gaunt frame, leaning on a more battered and scratched crutch than Ralston had pictured. But beneath the surface the rest of the world would see, he sensed the energy that pulled them towards one another.

#

Samuel Hill pushed the gate open. The hinges grated on dirt and he made a note to send the apprentice back with an oil can. “M’Lady wants a small vegetable plot for her party. Let’s be quick about it.”

A flowering bindweed choked the sundial’s column, covering the motto carved along its top and bottom. Samuel spied *viret* and *last* through the masses of white flowers. Once, as a boy, he’d pulled back the foliage to get a look at the motto, but he had little Latin beyond plant names, and had no time for fancy words. He wondered for a moment how heavy the sundial would be, how deeply it was set into the dirt. He would find out soon enough when the order came to move it to its new home, but for now he had other concerns.

Samuel unfolded the drawing Her Ladyship had sent to him. She had a good eye, he had to admit. Once, when he was little more than an apprentice moving plants in the orangerie, she was in the middle of a lesson with her drawing master, studying a fritillaria. Not much more than a girl herself, she’d marched over to the apprentices and had shown off her drawing to them before the master pulled her back to the lesson. He recalled how her drawing had showcased the petals’ delicate curls, looking much like the actual flower, though for his money he would rather have a dozen flowers in a vase than a drawing on a wall.

Today, she wanted a plot with a half dozen small rows. She had left it up to him where inside the enclosed garden to dig, but ordered it be done without His Lordship’s knowledge. The rest of the enclosed garden had to be cleared of any weeds, the shrubs and flowers pruned, and the seating cleared of moss and bird droppings.

“Why plant vegetables here when there’s a good garden over yonder?” one young apprentice asked.

Samuel shrugged. “What Her Ladyship orders….”

“What’s to be planted here, then? The first frost is coming and there’s no hot beds here.”

“Those.” Samuel pointed to a small pile of floppy radish and carrot tops and a couple dozen cabbages the boy was hauling in a wheelbarrow. “But our orders are to prepare the rows first and then place the tops on the furrows.”

A journeyman gaped. “What is she playing at? It must be a jest. Those won’t grow!”

“It’s for tomorrow’s party,” Samuel said. “Enough talking. I’d like to finish before supper.”

"And then we'll be back after the party and set things to rights," the journeyman complained.

"Not precisely." Samuel scratched his shovel along the ground to mark off the new bed's edges. "Just received orders from M'Lord that all this is to go. From where we're standing to the other side of the kitchen garden."

The men turned their heads as one, unable to see through the stone garden walls, but able to follow the imaginary sweep of lawn as it rolled from the windows of the manor house, through where they stood, and ended at the far side of the vegetable plots. The men who had been there for the destruction of the gardens on the other three sides of the Hall had been unable to imagine that part of the grounds without its hedges and curling beds, staircases and straight paths. Now they had to imagine the last of the old gardens gone. And again, none could do it.

"What is he on about?" asked another journeyman. "We spent months pulling out trees only to plant more trees! We moved tonnes of earth. What does he want now?"

Samuel cleared this throat, wishing not for the first time that his father were there to relay the bad news. "A vista, he says. A view to the horizon. That man with the book has returned with new drawings and paintings. This time he's to stay to oversee us tear it all up and replace it all with grass and trees. Very few flowers. No knots or parterres. No wilderness. We are to move the fountain nearer the house. The sundial will go somewhere, possibly at M'Lord's new temple. We have to dig another lake, build more rolling hills, a hermitage—whatever that is—and more glasshouses for exotics from the Americas, he said, and the Orient and Africa even to please his guests. M'Lord wants more."

"More what?" asked an under-gardener as he marked off the rows.

Samuel speared his shovel tip into the grass and leaned on it as if it were a cane. "More everything. Although I've no clue who's to go and fetch these foreign things. I don't belong on a ship." *Would that Thomas's ship had sunk.*

The apprentice grumbled. "What will be left to do, once it's all gone?"

They sized up one another. Three years before, the gardening team had been twice as large. Only so many men would be required to keep the glasshouses warm and the kitchen garden productive, and much of that could be done by the apprentices. His Lordship would have no problem finding more sheep and cattle to graze the extensive lawns and keep them short. The rest of it—the trees and shrubs—didn't require daily care and attention.

"The plan is to move the kitchen garden and expand it," Samuel explained.

“Bigger garden means more hands needed.”

“What about your house, sir?” one asked, referring to the small cottage built into the kitchen garden’s wall.

Samuel shrugged. “It’s not my house, not yet. Most like it’ll move with the garden, all the way down to the hollow. M’Lord said something about putting a rise in to hide the kitchen garden from sight of the house, but then he seemed to change his mind and wanted it moved altogether.”

“And the bothy, too? But that’s near a mile off.”

“We’ll have to go from baskets to a horse cart to haul the veg and fruit all that way,” another said. “What about the sheds and outbuildings? The stable? The smithy? Are they moving, too? The man doesn’t have a clue what’s needed.”

“It’s his land,” Samuel said as he took off his hat and wiped his sleeve across his forehead. “But M’Lord can have an open ear to this sort of thing, as long as it’s relayed in the right tone, of course.”

“The right tone,” one mumbled. “All His Lordship cares about is grazing rights, now he’s taken all the land.”

“Enough.” Samuel directed the men to create Her Ladyship’s little vegetable plot before taking them to start the list of tasks for the new design, the first of which was pulling up the plants that were to be moved elsewhere. He’d been given the responsibility of listing which plants to save for the new landscape, which were to be moved to the farthest reaches of the grounds, and which would be destroyed. While he worked, Samuel calculated how many pots would be required and where to store them for the duration, which men to set to which tasks, and how many days and weeks it would take to complete the designs. For Samuel, gardening was a series of mathematics problems for which he easily found answers. What stumped him was his family. The geometry of Mother, Father, Anne, and even Thomas, never lined up properly. Father was dying, with Samuel fully ready to take over the garden, but Mother wouldn’t hear it. Anne, once a fresh as a daffodil, was wan and tired, unhappy with their small cottage in the village and always asking when they would get the house in the kitchen garden’s walls.

And then there was Thomas.

Samuel stepped on the top of the small shovel and sliced down into the grass, imagining he was finally cutting the changeling away. His brother had always found a way to draw attention to himself. Where Sam was blonde and fair like his parents, Tom didn’t fit in; as a boy he’d been called everything from Black Irish to the little Spaniard. Where Sam was practical, Tom was dreamy. Sam got his work done, but Tom found a

way to change his tasks from something to be finished into something to be enjoyed. The garden had always been work, leaving Sam tired and sore every day, while Tom was first out the door and last home, even spending rare free time in the garden. He'd always been queer, and now he'd limped back into their lives, but unable to do any heavy garden chores, for which Samuel was grateful. The head gardener position was his, or nearly so with Father failing and His Lordship too full of new plans to search for a replacement. Samuel cut into the turf again, wishing for a way to avoid having to make any decisions about Thomas. Yet that was what a head gardener did:

made the decisions necessary for the stewardship of the land in his care. It was too bad humans didn't behave as predictably as plants.

Once the potager was finished, Samuel fished the key from his pocket and locked the gate behind them. In all the years he'd lived in the garden, the gate had never been locked, but Her Ladyship had added the key with the drawn plans. He shrugged. It wasn't for him to question, just to do as he was told. He handed the key to the apprentice and directed him to pass it to the housekeeper, and on to Her Ladyship. Then Samuel crossed the chore off of his list and moved to the next task. There was always something to do in the garden.

#

Thomas slumped on a stool against the wall in his father's house, watching a thin curtain billow out and blow back into the house with the wind, as if the house were breathing. He sat in the shadows and listened to the apprentices, journeymen, and under-gardeners walk back and forth across the courtyard, from stable to kitchen garden, secure in the knowledge that his brother didn't care he was there. He had begged his mother not to send word to Samuel but to no avail, and his brother showed up at the door that first evening. They shook hands, Samuel asked after Thomas's health, kissed Mother, looked in on Father, and that was that. Perhaps it was due to Anne. Coming from such a large family, she had always worked to keep the peace. Thinking about her these past years had left him with a dull ache like hunger, but now, with the renewed sound of her voice echoing in his head, telling him she had married Samuel, he found that the pain of losing her completely hurt more than his knee on a cold, rainy day.

"Go talk to him," Mother said from the table where she sat, needle in hand, sewing him a new shirt. Thomas had arrived with only the clothes he wore, sending Mother to her trunk, where she found one of his father's old coats to alter—it was dark

green and a bit out of style, but beggars ought not be choosers—as well as some old breeches. She finished a knot and bit off the thread.

"Who?"

"The man in the moon!" She put down the mending and blew her cheeks out in exasperation. "Go talk to your brother." He continued to watch the curtain and avoided her gaze. "I should be struck down for saying it, but you know as well as I do you're a better gardener than Samuel," she whispered. "But he's the task of hiring while Father is off his feet."

Off his feet. Thomas fought down a bitter laugh. More like off his head. He lay, still as death, and when Mother tried to feed him spoonfuls of mash, the gelatinous substance oozed from his open mouth and down his chin, while beneath the blankets his body was nothing more than a pile of saplings. He'd been like this since the beginning of August, she said. She refused to allow His Lordship to call the physician. "It will pass," she explained when Thomas first saw him. "He was down for a week last winter. It will pass." But Thomas had seen enough men terminally injured and dead to recognise the same emptiness of spirit in his father.

In the front room, Thomas shifted on the stool and met his mother's concerned gaze. "And what am I supposed to say, Mother? 'Felicitations on your marriage?' 'Congratulations on the imminent birth of your first son?'"

"Lower your voice," she hissed. "Your father." His mother picked up the shirt again. She ran her hands over the fabric, smoothing out the wrinkles, over and over again.

"He cannot hear me! And if he could, he cannot answer!"

"You will respect this house, sir."

"It hasn't respected me. I took up arms for Great Britain. I left because to stay here was to always be second after Samuel. Because to stay was to always be in the same position as an outcast. But I come back to find everything changed. The garden is gone, my father is dying, my health is gone, Anne…. I won't beg him for work so he can take one look at me, at my leg, and finally have a clear reason to refuse me, one no one will refute. A gardener's work is hard, pulling stumps, moving great mounds of dirt, trimming trees on high ladders. I can't help with that. So tell me, what am I to do?"

The air in the room stilled. Even the curtain stopped billowing, waiting for the gale to blow between mother and son.

"You do what you must." Her voice was steady.

“And what is that?” He shook his crutch. “Beg for a position that should go to a boy? Eat the scraps from my brother’s table? Beg in the road?”

“As if you have the hardest end of things. Do you know what your uncle and aunt have had to endure? M’Lord took their homes—”

“—I know.”

“You don’t know the half of it,” his mother spat at him. “He didn’t only tear it down. He had every cottage taken apart stone by stone and rebuilt far from the river that drove the mill—”

“—yes, I heard.”

“No, my boy.” She slammed her palms on the table. “You may have heard the gossip, but you don’t know the story. The hamlet has been rebuilt away from the churchyard where your great-grandparents are buried. He moved the people, too, your aunt and uncle with it, where he dresses them up and brings his guests round to watch the smithy at work shoeing horses and buy clean eggs from housewives. I went to visit and watched your uncle—my own brother—apologise to His Lordship when the pig got out and ate the chicken feed, as if the man cares! And I watched my good sister bow and keep her eyes downcast when fine ladies coo’d over the hollyhocks and irises planted in the dooryard. They are on display like the wonders that come through with the fair. But the worst? The worst, my boy, is that those people lost their grazing land when the Lord enclosed every last bit of common land that was left. They are kept now—the same as any Lord’s hunting dogs or Lady’s caged bird—to entertain visitors.”

Thomas again heard the laughter of the ladies on their picnic and imagined himself the subject, the cause, of those noises. Imagined the ladies poking and prodding at him and throwing him a coin for his troubles.

Thomas had often thought of his mother as a willow, always moving with nervous energy and fussing over her family. He felt as if he were looking at her for the first time, and what he saw wasn’t a woman who was always moving because she didn’t have the strength to resist the wind’s every puff, but a woman who bent with the blows, making her stronger than the trees that resisted the wind and broke.

“I’ve no clue where your future lies. But you do what you must to find your way in the world. It won’t come knocking at the door.”

Just as she finished her statement, there was a knocking at the door. They stared at each other, unsure whether to laugh or throw crossed fingers to ward off the devil.

While his mother smoothed down her apron and checked her cap, Thomas pushed himself to his feet, shuffled across the room, and pulled the door open. The man standing there was familiar, but Thomas knew they had never been introduced. No

name came to mind, and the man's dress showed him to be neither servant nor one of His Lordship's personal house guests.

"Sir, I am Harvey Ralston." The man bowed, his hat tucked beneath an arm.

"Thomas Hill, and my mother Mrs. Hill. I am sorry my father is not able to wait on you."

"I was told Samuel Hill is the head gardener for the interim." The man's demeanor was calm and open, but his face, fleshy and pink with slightly protruding eyes, reminded Thomas where he had seen him before.

"My brother. And the woman you saw me with is my sister-in-law."

"Do let him in, Thomas."

"Mrs. Hill." Ralston bowed his head towards Thomas's mother, who then excused herself to tend to affairs upstairs. "I must apologise," Ralston said to Thomas after she left the room. "I did not mean to intrude upon a private conversation. I'm afraid my curiosity got the better of me."

"Very kind of you, Mr. Ralston. I'm afraid my brother is likely working out in the garden somewhere. But I will take advantage of your visit, and your apology. Please, sit and tell me about your work here."

Beneath his other arm, the man carried a blue-bound book. He held it out to Thomas. "His Lordship hired me to design the gardens. I was here two years ago. I assume you were away overseas?"

Thomas only nodded and took the book. "I haven't seen these gardens in years," he said to himself as he turned the book's pages, full of drawings and watercolours. "It's like looking back in time."

"And see here. Here is what it looks like now." Ralston pointed to a likeness of the east side of the grounds as viewed from the house, towards the kitchen garden and several outbuildings. "And here is my vision of how it could look." The second page echoed what Thomas had seen on his approach to the estate just a few days before. Paths curved, straight edges disappeared, and the view was one of small rises with distant trees, decorative bridges, ponds. "I design gardens in the newest style, but it isn't often I am kept on to oversee the work."

Even more than the crutch that was his constant companion, the images brought home to Thomas how much he had lost. His fingers itched to slam the book shut, but he couldn't stop himself from turning the pages and feeling the hurt over and over again as he looked at the missing gardens. A dark stain spread across the last page, obliterating half of the enclosed garden.

"Ah. I consider that my punishment for eavesdropping."

Thomas noticed that the accompanying page showed the space without the walled garden. Instead, some shrubs huddled close beneath the house's windows. "When?" He pointed at the empty garden, tamping down a feeling of panic, knowing he was looking into a future he didn't want to see.

"Work begins as soon as possible."

Thomas's mother called for his assistance. He excused himself, glad for a few minutes to consider what to do. What could he do, though? The Lord controlled what happened to his gardens. The Lord and the Lady who, he remembered, held the entail on the land. But still, who has he—the head gardener's younger son and now a cripple—to ask for the gardens he loved to be left alone? He may as well ask to go back to that day in the garden three years before.

Back downstairs he found Mr. Ralston sitting at the table with the book open and a small ink pot and pen in hand. "I never travel without the correct tools," he explained.

Tools of destruction, Thomas thought. As deadly as a rifle or sword.

"What about you, Mr. Hill?"

"I don't follow." Thomas joined the man at the table, happy to rest his knee for a moment.

"What are your favourite tools? You are a plantsman, like your father and brother, are you not?"

Thomas leaned across the table towards the man. "I'm not sure what I am any longer." He pointed to the drawings. "At every turn, I find what I thought I knew taken from me."

"But what, sir, do you bring with you? I may carry pen and ink with me at all times, but the most important tools are those I carry inside." He tapped a fingertip to his forehead. "No one may take those away." Ralston capped the ink and rolled up his pen in an ink-blotted cloth. He left the book open to allow the drawing to dry.

When his mother returned, Ralston asked Thomas if he would mind a walk.

"I would appreciate your opinions on my plans, Mr. Hill. If we could go to the walled garden?"

Crutch in hand, Thomas grabbed the leather satchel where he'd dropped it upon his arrival and slung it over his shoulder.

They were silent as they made their way past the under-gardeners, who nodded their greetings to Thomas.

He led Ralston back through the garden, along the paths he had taken the day he arrived. He found himself begin to explain about the hidden walkways, and then

remembered the man had spent time here himself. They skirted around the areas where Samuel and the other gardeners were working, keeping out of sight until they came to the walled garden.

Before he could stop himself, Thomas grabbed the gate handle and pushed the door, but it didn't budge.

"It wasn't locked before," Ralston said.

Thomas turned and walked along the outside wall, running his hands over the stones, dipping his fingertips into the cracks. "Ah." He tugged at a small stone that shifted in the wall. "Some secrets are still safe." In a moment he had unlocked the gate with a small key, which he then pocketed.

Thomas's most recent memories of the garden were bathed in late March's softer light, underlined by the daffodils' vibrant gold. Inside was as he had left it three years earlier, only the spring flowers had given way to those that still bloomed in the late summer sun, and there was a curious vegetable plot near the gate. The men cast long shadows and the heady scent of roses hung in the air.

"I was recently here." Ralston walked around the small potager. "And this was most definitely not here."

"Something for Her Ladyship's party. It would be in your drawing had it been here."

Ralston nodded. "I would have drawn it for the pleasure of it, not to show His Lordship."

"I did bring something back from my travels," Thomas said. Samuel was unapproachable, and Father even more so. Until now he'd had no one to share it with. "A man in your line of work should appreciate it."

He opened his satchel's side pocket and scooped out a small pile of paper twists.

Ralston took one and gently opened it, spilling a few seeds out onto his palm. He looked at Thomas, the question clear on his face.

"From America. *Campsis,* it's called. From what you've shown me, M'Lord wants more glasshouses and more exotics. He doesn't know I've brought some. Some call it trumpet vine, others hummingbird vine because in summer the flowers attract all the hummingbirds for miles around, and the vine trembles with their activity."

Ralston scooped the thin brown seeds back into the paper and handed it back.

Thomas picked up one twist and then another, rattling off a series of names, some common, others Latin.

"I must confess, I know very little about horticulture," Ralston said.

“How is that possible? M’Lord hired you—twice!—to redesign the gardens. I would suspect you to know every tree, flower, and shrub from the Channel to Edinburgh.”

Ralston leaned close to Thomas and lowered his voice. “Ah, no. Would that I were an expert. My talent lies in creating visions for my clients. The job of choosing the plants and bringing that vision to life lies with the clients themselves or, more often, their gardeners. Such as yourself.”

Thomas thought of Samuel tearing out the gardens and being given free rein to create what was in the watercolour paintings. A feeling akin to that when the surgeon loomed over him with the bloody and rusted bone saw washed over Thomas. Unless his brother had been replaced by a changeling in the few years Thomas had been gone, there was no way Samuel would create something of beauty to replace the gardens that were there. The man could follow plans, of course, and he could choose plants according to their growing habits and characteristics. But Samuel lacked the one thing that made a plantsman into a true gardener.

“Can it be stopped?”

Ralston shook his head. “I’ve little influence with my clients beyond the drawings. Truly. Wealthy patrons will get what they want. And what they want is what is new and fashionable.”

“Who decides what is fashionable?”

Ralston gestured to the potager. “Why, Mr. Hill, they do.”

“The last time I was in here was with a woman,” Thomas started. Ralston raised his eyebrows and gave a knowing smile. “This garden exerts an influence—”

“—it is charming.”

If the garden was gone already, Thomas knew there was nothing to lose. He turned around in a full circle, holding the crutch loose and putting weight on his bad leg. He crouched down low, stood on tiptoes, all the while studying the slant of the shadows.

“There.” He strode to an old pear tree that had been trained against the wall, since he was a child. Without giving a thought to his knee, he squatted down in the dirt and dug with his hands, feeling a sense of relief to have soil between his fingers again—soil where new things grew, not bloody mud where men lay to die.

He opened a paper twist and deposited one tiny seed into the hole before scooping the dirt back and stamping it in place.

“There,” he said again, as punctuation to the action.

It was all the incantation required.

“What do we—” Ralston began, but Thomas stilled him with a quick shh.

They stood, still as the statues lining the smooth sweep of lawn at the front of the house. Thomas pulled Ralston into the shade and stood with his own back to the pear tree so he could watch the man's face, bright against the shadowy corner thick with vines. He barely felt the change in temperature from sun to shade, and only a slight vibration though the soles of his shoes. What birds had been singing went silent, and what insects had been flitting about went still, and then they all joined together in a deafening chorus.

Thomas watched Ralston, waited for signs that he was feeling what Thomas did. For a while, there was nothing, only a look of boredom on the man's face as he stifled a yawn, warm from the walk and the sun.

And then it was there.

Ralston's eyes, already prominent, bulged with surprise, giving him the look of a frightened toad. His mouth fell open, and he gasped so loudly Thomas feared a worker outside the wall would hear.

"Do you see it?"

Ralston pointed over Thomas's shoulder. "I am no horticulturist, but even I know that to be a gardener one must have patience."

Thomas smiled. "I have spent three years being patient," he said before turning.

Out of the spot where he had planted the seed grew a solid trunk, thick as two fingers together, and at regular intervals green off-shoots reached and braided themselves into whatever they could find: rough patches of wall, the pear tree's branches, the ivy growing along the neighbouring wall. The vine's leaves, dark green and lush, shone new in the sun, unmarred by insects or dust kicked up by the wind. And as the two men watched, orange flowers with long throats and fat little petals popped open as if to sing. Before another minute had passed, hummingbirds covered the vine, dipping into each flower in turn, their little bodies winking turquoise blue and green against the citrus dazzle of the trumpet vine's flowers.

Ralston stepped around Thomas and reached out to touch the new vine. "Does His Lordship know you have brought back such a prize from the colonies?"

Thomas shook his head. "My brother and I are on bad terms, so I've no way of gaining an audience with M'Lord. Regardless, it's not the vine. In the colonies it grows as any other vine: quickly, yes, but not like this."

"Does Her Ladyship know what you are?"

Thomas stepped back from the designer and did a little dance, kicking up his heels. "It's not me, sir. I struggled to stand up when you came to the door."

Ralston avoided Thomas's gaze and took in the garden once again. "I was here earlier today, and once before that, and never experienced anything like it. I have felt the emanation of electricity as it travels through a contraption with a special crank, and I have witnessed the actions of an air pump as it sucks the life from a bird as if by magic. We are in an age of discovery. It would seem there is something here to discover. Does anyone else know?"

Thomas shrugged and held his hands open in surrender. "I barely know. Truly."

Ralston gaped at Thomas. "I am unable to formulate a question to encompass all I have seen to which a simple answer may be given. Except one: Why did you show this to me?"

"You asked earlier what tools I carry, and I cannot answer. But you have shown me the tools—the weapons—you carry. Your book with its drawings, your charm, your ability to persuade rich men to pursue new fashions. I've returned home after years away to find almost everything I left behind is gone, dying, about to be destroyed. I wanted you to see what your drawings cannot show."

The gate swung open and Samuel strode in. "I locked this garden." "I unlocked it," Thomas said to his brother.

"Mr. Ralston." Samuel nodded to the designer before turning on his brother. "How did you get in? If M'Lady finds out that you—that anyone—is in here…."

Thomas opened his palm to display the key.

Ralston pushed forward. "How are the plans coming along? It's early days yet, but there is much to do before winter."

Samuel turned his attention to the designer. "There is much to do before tomorrow. I returned here to fulfill M'Lady's request." He lifted up a trowel, its silver bowl reflecting the sun, its robin-egg-blue handle tied with a ribbon. "Then I'm off to do some real work." He directed his words at Thomas. "Not all of us are at our leisure in the garden."

"I want to work." Thomas bit his tongue for the words sounded like a call for pity, something worse even than the crutch.

The gate was pushed open again, and Anne walked in. "Samuel, I was told I'd find you—" She stopped when she saw Thomas, who started towards her without thinking. Her eyes widened and Thomas put his hands up, palms outward, hoping to calm her. She didn't have anything to fear from him.

Samuel grabbed Thomas's arm. "You stay away from her. She's not yours anymore."

Thomas knew his brother meant Anne, but he could have easily been talking about the garden. He looked beyond them all, looked into the dark corner, hoping to see the man in the green coat, a sign that all would be well. No one was there, and Thomas realised that since he had been home he hadn't seen any of the others. Perhaps Samuel was right. Perhaps he didn't belong here anymore. But the vine—sharing that with the designer had to count for something.

"Everybody out." Samuel said, interrupting Thomas's thoughts. He held out his hand and Thomas gave him the key. Samuel locked the blue gate behind them, pocketed the key, and turned away. Anne hurried to catch up with her husband, leaving her brother-in-law and Ralston alone outside the walled garden.

#

Thomas woke before dawn. It was his favourite time of day, when the estate was coming to life. He had always looked forward to walking the garden to see what was new. When he was a very young apprentice he'd said as much to his father, who had looked at him with puzzlement. "Not much happens in the garden at night, boy."

"I know," Thomas argued. "It's—"

Mr. Hill looked past young Thomas and studied the kitchen garden's brick walls. The potency of his father's stare forced the boy to wonder what was amiss. "You won't wake to full vines and blooms on the fruit trees," his father explained. "Everything happens in its own time, and night time isn't that time. It's simple." With that, the gardener turned back to his rake, but Thomas heard him mutter, "Your brother has the right way of it. Does his work according to the pattern. Does what M'Lord and M'Lady want, not what he *thinks* they might want. Don't make me doubt taking you on as well."

After that, Thomas kept his more poetic thoughts to himself and did as he was told: shoveling and hauling manure, washing pots, picking rocks out of the flower beds, gathering broken branches after storms, and scrubbing bird droppings from stone paths and walls. Thomas enjoyed the work, however much the other apprentices grumbled. What was more beautiful than purple cabbages, their leaves ruffled and silver at the edges? Or the scent of the orangerie in the summer, when you could drink the air? Or the clouds of pink rose blossoms in June, covered in droning bees? Samuel and the others toiled in the garden, but Thomas lived the garden, storing up moments and waiting for his turn to put his mark on it.

But doing so was up to the whims of the Lord and Lady. He had seen them both in the garden, or driving along the avenue in the carriage, or shadowed against the house's windows, the young Miss with them. Yet in all the years he had worked in the garden, he had never spoken to any of them because they had no reason to ever take notice of him. They were so close, but they might as well have lived on the moon. *Keep to your place* rang in his ears, a constant reminder from Mother and Father. He couldn't help but watch the Lord and Lady though, as he watched the fruit trees, their limbs growing along the training wires set into the garden's red brick walls. The Lord and his Ladies lived in the centre of the garden, like the most exotic and rare plants, requiring the most tender care to flower and thrive. When their daughter married and inherited the house and gardens, Thomas waited for the next generation of hothouse flowers. Meanwhile, he failed to care for the flower closest to him, Anne, and in the confusion left the tending of beautiful things behind.

Thomas listened in the dark for what had woken him. A solitary bird sang, its trills sharp in the chilly pre-dawn air. But it wasn't that. He could hear the garden. He had slept badly since coming home, his mind full of memories and thoughts and dreams of what was next. But beneath the imagined conversations—quarrels, to be honest—with Anne and his brother, the garden called to him.

Ivy creaked as it grew higher up the wall, sending tendrils out to touch him where he lay in a narrow bed in Father's house. The horse carved into the old sundial's gnomon whinnied and galloped down the gravel paths to paw at the ground below his open window. Moonflowers unfurled with a pop once the moon rose and whispered on the wind until he was forced from his bed by their fearful tales of moles and foxes, owls and moths. Thomas paced the small room, foregoing the crutch to lurch from bed to door and back again. He resisted the call the first two nights it came, but he barely slept either night, finding himself swaying on his feet as he helped Mother during the day. The exhaustion was so acute that Thomas saw Anne out of the corner of his eye, dogging his every move from dawn until dusk, until he turned to meet her and only found himself alone.

On the third night, he got up, dressed himself in the dark, and hobbled down the stairs as silently as he could. He knew Father wouldn't stir, but Mother slept as lightly as a newborn, waiting for a word from her husband.

Outside, Thomas leaned against the wall to put on his shoes and made his way along the moonlit paths to the garden's walls. He kept to the main walks, having no need to hide himself. It competed with the rest of the garden for his attention but, like

the prettiest girls in a crowded party, it was the centre around which the rest circled. He could hear the espaliered fruit trees stretching behind him as the few topiaries left loomed over him, hoping to stop his progress. He promised to come back later.

The internal click of his knee lessened the more he walked, as if he were stiff from sleep and not carrying an injury that had left him forever deformed. With the old stone walls in sight, glowing faintly, he dropped the crutch and strode the last few feet until his fingers threaded into the ivy and his palm lay against the cool stone.

Samuel had taken the key.

Soon, the garden promised. *She will be here soon. Wait for her.*

Climbing the wall was easy. The same old handholds were where he remembered them, and the ivy helped with the rest. His knee bent easily and supported his weight as if he were still a boy. That first day, he'd not counted the stones that had fallen from the top of the wall, but as he pulled himself up he noticed more empty spaces, as if the garden were breaking out of its cage. Thomas found a comfortable spot atop the wall and waited for the sun to rise.

And that was where he was when Her Ladyship appeared on the path and looked from side to side to check whether she'd been seen before unlocking the gate.

He recognised her even in a plain dress. It was clear within a few moments that the only gardening implement she had ever handled was a pen and paintbrush to create her botanical illustrations. She was on her knees in the dirt, the vegetable tops upended and covered in soil. He split his attention between watching her ruin the ridiculous potager laid out below and trying to see Anne as she made her way to where he waited. The garden said she would be there. The garden had always been full of secrets.

Thomas's fingers itched to take the trowel from the Lady's hand and show her how to dig. He heard voices behind him—Samuel and an apprentice up early for the final party preparations—coming along the path. They were close and would soon see him.

Go, the garden said. *Go to her.*

So he did.

#

The morning dawned clear and crisp, which pleased Her Ladyship. Too hot and the ladies and their gowns would wilt in the sun. Too cold and everyone would huddle together inside or around the small portable stoves she'd ordered to be place here and

there in the gardens and lawns. She called her lady's maid to dress her in a simple flowered cotton robe and stockings, pin her hair up and tuck it beneath a bonnet, and push her feet into slippers. Then she dismissed the maid and hurried out before anyone woke to find her gone. She didn't have much time to take care of one final detail before the party.

Key in one hand and a small bag in the other, she crept out of the house and dashed along the path towards the blue gate. She wished for a low-lying fog to hide in, just for this morning, but the sun's clean rays lit up the trees and garden walls with golden light.

As she hurried, she glanced at the gardens, noticing that no dried yellow leaves marred the gravel walks or even the shrubs and trees. She had ordered the gardeners to make a final pass through the garden early in the day before the first guests arrived to be sure no reminders of the coming autumn remained.

Houseguests that had arrived the previous week had declared the newer landscape grand yet restful. There was no hope for it, the walled garden and parterres were just too old-fashioned. "You will at least have one final purpose," she said as she unlocked the gate and pushed it open.

She found the small hand trowel behind a bench where she'd ordered it left. She was unsure how her husband was going to react when he discovered her plans for this distraction. He would either argue the idea was wasteful, too extravagant for their circle, or, if he'd been at the wine long enough, he might just laugh and kiss her, call her clever. She hoped for the latter, of course. But more than that she hoped her female guests would find it charming, a lark, something to talk about and remember to their wider circle of friends and to their husbands.

The vegetable plot was perfect. A few short rows, neat and symmetrical, their edges clean. The gardener had also added a clever hazel fence only a few inches high and some glass cloches. The insides of the glass bells were beaded with condensation. She would tell Mr. Hill to have them cleaned before the afternoon and posies placed inside. There was also a sweet little white birdhouse on a pole at one corner of the plot and a wheelbarrow nearby, its basin full of what looked like strawberry plants—strawberries in September! How clever Mr. Hill was! A pair of gloves and some other apparatus lay draped over the barrow's edge. Annoyed at the excess, she would have the gardener remove the offending clutter before the party.

She started at the nearest row and bent to dig a hole in the dirt, the first time in her life she had ever done so. She didn't expect the dark scent of earth and morning

dew, wet and heavy on the cabbage leaves. The dirt turned easily and, after fumbling the first few minutes, she got into the rhythm and understood how to twist her wrist and refill each small hole after placing a prize into the soft dirt. She imagined her guests' surprise when they uncovered each crop and imagined the conversation when he discovered her scheme. The more she rehearsed it, the more real it became to her. She had to be subtle, to make him think it was his idea.

"Think of how our guests will remember it," she could hear herself saying to him. *"It will be like a dream, a fairyland even, when they recall the party—especially this moment—and realise it can never be recreated because that garden is now gone. We will always be remembered for it. The cost won't matter when our name is on everyone's lips."*

He would mull it over, pretend to be angry at her betrayal. But when he considered their guests' reactions, their amusement and even—she hoped—jealousy because their own grounds no longer boasted such a charming little garden, he would relent and decide that keeping the walled garden would be in his favour.

"But I don't want this garden," she reminded herself. She must be tired, she decided. Too much planning for the party, not enough rest.

The damp soil chilled her knees, so she squatted beside the row instead. Soon a cramp in her thigh forced her to stand up and stretch. Her skirts and apron were filthy, and her shoes no better. She looked around for reassurance that she was alone before kicking off her shoes and finishing her planting in her stockinged feet.

A worm poked up out of the ground near her toes, causing her to flinch and step back. When they were children, her brothers had loved to hide the nasty things in her shoes or drop them down her neck. She'd always feared of anything that crawled or skittered or flew about. She bent to strike at it with her trowel.

"Stop."

A man sitting atop the wall had spoken.

He bounced where he sat as if about to take flight like one of the birds hopping from branch to branch nearby.

"Wait," he said. Before she could stop him, he turned to climb down the wall.

She hid the half-empty bag in her pocket and slipped her feet back into her slippers.

#

"What are you doing?"

She gripped the trowel in one hand, the other hidden in the folds of her skirt.

"My apol—" he started.

"—Some final preparations for the party." She didn't demand to know who he was, or claim who she was. She stood, rooted to the spot, her eyes shifting back and forth, looking at everything but focusing on nothing. She even fidgeted like a servant caught in the act, curling her toes inside her shoes and picking at her pocket. Samuel and the apprentice were outside the wall now, discussing the placement of torches. Thomas could do nothing except play along.

"I work for Mr. Hill." He walked along an outside row and studied the cabbages. "We planted this potager yesterday. We locked the gate behind us."

"I've the key, from Her Ladyship. I was told to come and check that all was ready before the torches were carried in."

Why lie to him when with a word she could have him bowing low and begging for his family's very happiness?

He studied the damage she had done. Carrot tops lay covered in dirt and the silvery cabbage leaves he so loved were upside-down in the trenches between the rows.

"Must have been a bird or another creature, in the night," she said. "That is why Her Ladyship sent me, to be sure it was all perfect." She tentatively stuck a foot out from under her skirts and nudged a turnip back into place. Thomas wondered if she expected him to put the other vegetables to rights, but she neither asked nor commanded. What was she playing at?

The sun's rays spilled over the garden's wall, and a wood warbler started trilling from inside a red currant bush. Within a moment, he was joined by others, and soon the garden filled with noise. Insects swirled around them, and a fat bee buzzed past Thomas's ear.

"Keep it away." Her Ladyship ducked when the bee flew towards her.

"It's awake and at work early," Thomas said. "It won't hurt you. It's still cold and sluggish. Be still."

She did as he said and the bee flew low to inspect the vegetable garden. Not finding anything of interest, it flew away and Thomas watched it clear the wall.

"Who are you, sir?"

She didn't know him. He was likely as faceless to her as any of the dozens of house maids who emptied her chamber pot. But, he knew, if he wanted to have the running of the garden one day, he had to stand out. Whatever game she was playing, Her Ladyship possibly didn't know the opportunity she was giving him.

“Thomas Hill.” He bowed, sweeping his hat from his head in a gallant gesture and glad of the velvet ribbon he had used to tie his queue back. At odds with the bits of dried leaf and twigs sticking out of his hair here and there, and with his plain clothes, he knew, but something a person of quality would notice. “It’s in the details,” his father had often explained to his gardeners when discussing how to collect flowers for the house.

She stayed silent. The bee had come back. It slid along her skirt, working its way up and around her hips.

“He thinks you’re a flower.”

She batted at the insect. “It will sting me.” Her voice rose, and Thomas was afraid the men outside the walls would hear her.

He whispered, “It will not, if you would be still. It’s looking for food, but you’re not to its taste, I assure you. However….” He stepped closer and sniffed the air. “There is a perfume.”

The scent on the wind wasn’t her. The headiness of roses, the cloying sweetness of lilies, the spice of pinks. Thomas looked even as he knew without looking that it was too late in the season for those flowers. Except for a few late-blooming roses, the everpresent vine around the sundial, and some tired hollyhocks, the garden was bare. Even the chrysanthemums hadn’t bloomed yet. But the perfume persevered, floating between them. It was nearly visible in the air, and he felt bathed in it, sure if he were to run his hands along her skin his fingers would catch and stick.

Another bee joined the first, and then two more until Thomas and Her Ladyship stood in a buzzing cloud. She stood, frozen and scared. He laughed and let the bees light on his coat and hat. “I expect they believe we are a bouquet, standing together.”

“Please, make them stop.”

“They’ll go. When they have their fill and find something else to draw their attention.”

The perfume lingered, and Thomas gave in to the urge. He swallowed great lungfuls of air like a drowning man. “If I could see this heavenly scent, it would be the purest pink of a rose shot with the blues of hyacinth and the purple of the flag iris. It’s subtle, a little bit of nothing at first, and then it plays with you. Flirts. A coquette in velvet skirts, hiding behind her fan, then lowering it.”

“Poetry.” Her voice, softer than the birdsong, echoed in his mind. “I smell nothing. But the light. Do you see it?”

He shook his head, his eyes drooped.

She reached a hand out to him. “The light comes right through my skin. I can see the sun and the moon at the same time. I can *feel* the light. Can you feel it?”

He caught her fingers in his and, without pulling her, she fell against him, tripping over the vegetable tops and trowel she had dropped.

“The garden—” she said.

The garden walls pushed in towards him. The birds’ music increased, and Thomas was sure were he to break Her Ladyship’s gaze he would find every branch heavy with tiny feathered bodies in red, yellow, blue and black.

And bees crawled along his sleeves and he smelled honey beneath the heady perfume he couldn’t identify.

And her skin was as soft as the petals of a new rose.

And he brought her wrist to his mouth and licked it. He couldn’t have stopped if Samuel himself walked into the garden. If the sight of the woman in coarse linen and wool kneeling yonder and pulling weeds couldn’t stop him, nothing could.

And her mouth on him was as warm as the soil in July, as warm as a heavy lily under the summer sun. And she tasted how sugar smelled, like a new pink’s spicy sweetness.

And, Thomas knew, as well as he knew every secret the garden held, that the garden didn’t want to interrupt him and the Lady. The garden gave one last push, and he and the woman before him knelt in the dirt.

#

The birds’ chittering died down, and Her Ladyship found the bag of jewels was empty. She smoothed the dirt where she’d disturbed it, replaced the vegetable tops where some had tipped over, and stood to brush her apron and skirts. After hiding the trowel where she’d found it, she inspected the garden to be sure it was ready. There wouldn’t be time later, and she had to get ready before the rest of her guests arrived. She also had to get ready to talk, again, with her husband, and tell him this garden was going to stay. He had the rest of it to show off, but this…. She rested her hand on the blue door. It was cool still, not yet warmed by the sun. He would have to understand: it was her land, and she had to honor her family. The garden and its ghosts were her responsibility.

In spite of the early hour, final party preparations were already underway. The gardeners from the closest nursery were busy planting the last of dozens of rose bushes

and giant blue and pink hydrangeas, brought in to fill in empty spaces or even replace old stock, and the estate's own gardeners were at work with their secateurs, crisping the boxwood edges. Potted orange trees were rolled out of the orangery and lined the paths, their sharp citrus scent making her stomach grumble with hunger. She plucked an orange from a tree and pocketed it for later. No one saw her. She was invisible among the servants.

While Her Ladyship agreed with her husband that the lawns were calm and peaceful, she could not countenance giving up the flower gardens. A copse of trees and shrubbery in the distance, even with grazing sheep to please the eye, wasn't a garden. True, the smell of manure and stoves from the kitchen gardens blanketed the house when the wind shifted, forcing Her Ladyship to order all the windows on the house's east side closed too often for her comfort. However, it was easy enough to move those gardens farther from the house. She would miss the old gardens' colours and scents if her husband had his way and they were torn out.

Up in her rooms, the Lady sat to her toilette. Her maids layered, tightened, pinched, tucked, and sewed her into linen undergarments, stockings, corset, petticoats, hoops, robe, and all manner of ruffles and lace. Then her hair was pinned and glued to pull it back before the maid placed the simple white wig, sporting just a few bows and feathers, atop her head, which was then covered in a wide-brimmed hat to shade her face. A more elaborate gown and wig waited on the couch for later that night. The gown was a white confection covered from hem to neckline in embroidered flowers. The wig was complete with flowering vines and a gold birdcage housing a mechanical canary that trilled a little tune when a key was turned. The ensemble made her feel like a garden, fertile and fill of life, holding its breath for as long as possible before the next change. She was sorry that fashion dictated she only wear it in the evening, but she liked to imagine how it would glow in the dark, like a moth in the moonlight.

While the maids fluttered about her like agitated birds, Her Ladyship gazed out the window and into the gardens. Her grandmother's voice came back to her:
That wall has been here longer than the house. She looked at the old walled garden. Actually studied it, as she never had before. It had always been a part of her life, something to walk past while on her way to somewhere else. The wall slumped a bit at the corner, from age or disrepair she didn't know, but the red brick lining was still strong. It looked solid, though, and she could imagine it there a hundred years later, long after she was dead.

Her Ladyship didn't like to think about death. Even dead flowers in the garden made her sad. The gardeners were under orders to pinch back spent buds before they had a chance to drop their petals on the path. She looked forward to winters spent in London, where outside her window was a much smaller garden rather than acres and acres of green, and the change of the season wasn't as obvious.

She smoothed her hands down over her stomach and hips, taking pleasure in the texture of the fabric of her day dress, decorated in roses and ribbons. It is still summer, she reminded herself, or nearly so.

#

The birds were coming home to roost for the night, and they chattered to one another in the trees and shrubs circling the garden's walls. The fire and candle-light, the birds' singing, the far-off sounds of a lone violinist, and the lingering scent of the roses in the early-autumn evening.

The daytime entertainments had been a success. Her Ladyship had set up childhood games for her guests to play while they enjoyed a light picnic lunch of strawberries, grapes, melons on ice, and pineapple—all from the glasshouse. "Daytime," she had explained, "is for lighthearted fun, for innocent diversions." "And nighttime?" a Countess asked.

His Lordship had laughed. "Who knows what manner of amusements my dear wife has planned. Even I don't know beyond dancing on the grass under torchlight. But you may join me at the temple at midnight." He had smiled at the Countess, his teeth sharp and wet, before drawing some of the men away to discuss business. Her Ladyship had smiled into the middle distance to hide the slight.

Her Ladyship and the other guests played hoops, skipped rope, and chased each other around the lawns in a rousing game of blind man's bluff. As the sun sunk towards the horizon, the games came to an end.

"Ladies, please," Her Ladyship called. "If you will gather round, I have a surprise for you before supper … and everything that happens afterward." She looked to catch the Countess's eye, but the lady was nowhere in sight. Neither was His Lordship.

The female guests followed Her Ladyship across the lawn and around the front of the house to the east side. Some had been to the old gardens, but many had not.

"How quaint," one said under her breath. "And by quaint I mean wretched."

"I'd rather wear my great-grandmother's hoops than have this beneath my windows."

"It feels so closed in, so small, with so many walls about."

Her Ladyship heard every syllable. The garden was waiting in silence. No birds, no bees. Unlit torches stood here and there, waiting for nightfall and the evening's pursuits. She had at first thought to "garden" earlier in the day, but decided that the light of late afternoon slanting across the gardens and throwing long shadows from the trees and yews was closer to the light she had experienced that morning.

Having spent the day on the sweeping lawns, Her Ladyship had come to believe her husband was right. That all the grounds should be such a calming influence. She pulled the key from her pocket, and at that moment she decided to forget the plan. To embrace everything new and light. To let him bring these walls down and open the garden to the horizon. What was wrong with new? Being traditional didn't make something correct. And her friends would agree. They hated the garden. What was she doing?

One hand closed on the latch, the other fitted the key into the lock.

It really was a lovely garden, she had to admit to herself. Being here again reminded her that His Lordship wouldn't be able to deny her good taste. And once the guests were in possession of their special crops, they would agree.

She opened the gate and led them in. Servants in full livery followed and took their stations at the four corners ready to do her bidding.

"Absolutely charming!"

"Such fun!"

"I must have one of my own!"

The ladies' exclamations competed with the songs of the birds that jumped from branch to branch in the fruit trees around the garden's edges. A cat lay atop one wall, soaking up the last of the sun's rays, and the small wall fountain burbled.

She had been right: late afternoon was the right time for her plan. Too early and it would have been lost in the day's activities, too late and it wouldn't have drawn anyone's attention away from the gaming tables.

At her gesture, a servant came to stand beside her, bowl in hand.

"Please, choose a token," she explained. One by one her friends picked a carved wooden chip from the bowl. To get to her, they had to walk around the tiny potager's corners, but none of them, she noticed, anticipated that the plain green carrot tops and cabbages had anything to do with them.

"Who has number one?"

The young new wife of an old Lord raised her hand slightly. “I do.” Her voice could barely be heard over the birdsong. But then, the girl’s voice was barely ever heard. Her husband did most of the talking for her, which challenged Her Ladyship’s friends to ask her questions to see what he would say in response. The more embarrassing the question, the more Her Ladyship and her friends laughed behind their fans.

She really is quite beautiful, Her Ladyship thought. *Perhaps I will make her my special project.*

She took the shiny trowel tied with the ribbon from the servant and handed it over to the girl. “Dig up a vegetable from the garden.”

The girl’s eyes widened. “You want me to…. But, I have never…. I don’t—”

“It is simple. Just poke the trowel down into the dirt beneath a carrot,” and she pointed at a carrot top, “or a radish,” and she pointed at a radish. “And your crop will pop up.”

Another servant came forward and laid a cloth on the ground before the girl, who pulled her skirts back and kneeled down. She studied the garden a moment before making a decision to dig up a carrot. Down went the trowel. The carrot top fell over and up came a small shovelful of dirt.

“Oh!” Light glinted up from the dirt in her trowel and she fished out a small glass carrot, delicate and fine, hung on a gold chain. The servant took the prize and cleaned the dirt from it with a soft cloth before handing it back to the girl.

As one, the other ladies began to chatter, and Her Ladyship would not have been surprised had they begun to hop about on the pear or apricot tree branches in their pastel coloured gowns.

One by one they took up the trowel, after it had been wiped free of dirt of course, and chose a vegetable. A dainty gold pea pod set with peridot peas. A silver tulip the size of a thumbnail. A nest with two tiny opal eggs.

“What number did she have?” one lady asked and pointed towards the shadows.

“Who?” Her Ladyship peered where the woman pointed, but all she saw were the growing shadows beneath the espaliered plum trees.

The other woman laughed at herself. “La, I’m sure I saw someone. Must have been a trick of the light.”

At the end there was one cabbage left in the centre of a row. But they were one woman short. The Countess hadn’t shown up. By then, though, the sun had set and a glow over the top of the wall indicated to Her Ladyship that the torches throughout the

grounds were being lit. It was time to go to change for supper. She left the last cabbage in the garden, meaning to go back and dig up the final jewel later. She double-checked the gate behind her to be sure it was locked and pocketed the key.

#

Supper was a late affair, beneath a shining canopy set up on the lawn and surrounded by torches. Samuel and a few under-gardeners were kept close at hand so the footmen could serve at table and not be bothered to keep the torches lit or move them when needed. The tent, crowded with people, looked like a miniature of the house rising behind it, every window lit and beckoning to the guests, promising more entertainments and delights.

After the meal, the party moved indoors to the gaming tables in the grand salon. Her Ladyship watched her husband from across the room as he fawned over the Countess. It was the game they played: she knew that he knew that she knew. The game just wasn't fun anymore.

"You win again." The Earl laughed at his bad luck. His yellow velvet coat and chartreuse waistcoat—embroidered with pink and red birds a la Chinoiserie—strained where it was buttoned against his paunch. Her Ladyship wondered whether the gossip were true. If so, the buttons were likely paste rather than diamonds, and the money he had lost to her a loan from a kind friend. She probably owed money to the same people, making her win nothing more than a transfer from one hand back to that same hand. And so it goes, she thought, all of us caught in a mad dance from one step to the next and back again.

As another tray of champagne made its way around the room, the Earl plucked two glasses, offering one to Her Ladyship to show no hard feelings. Already lightheaded from wine and feeling queasy from the rich meal, Her Ladyship excused herself and found a seat in an alcove. She pushed her slippers off and, pleased with the party's success, watched her guests enjoying themselves. Every time she saw a lady show off her little gardening token, Her Ladyship knew sure she had done something worthy of attention.

Across the room, her husband stood with his back to her. She craned her neck to see who he was talking to and recognised the Countess in a bright pink dress with embroidered birds in chartreuse and yellow, the design the opposite of her own husband's outfit. It was clever, to be sure, but a bit too droll. She wasn't sure whether to

be offended that His Lordship barely tried to hide his affection for the Countess, or be happy that at least the woman wasn't a threat. Jealousy was wasted on the man. He treated indiscretions the same as he treated the grounds: it was his wife who worried about the consequences. He would become wrapped up with this Countess, and the Earl would look for entertainment elsewhere, likely at Her Ladyship's bedroom door.

She considered the possibility. The Earl was attentive, to be sure, but so was every other man in the room. It was part of the dance. She wanted…. To be honest, she couldn't have said what she wanted right that minute except for someone to rub her feet, and she had a maid for that. And the knowledge that they would be sore again the following night.

Her Ladyship imagined a close friend asking her what she wanted. She had no answer beyond those things she was supposed to want: healthy children, the funds to do as she chose, the knowledge that her house was running smoothly, a just government, and a healthy monarch. She wasn't sure what bothered her more: that no one would ever ask her, or that she had no answer that had to do with her as an individual beyond being a wife, mother, Lady.

The sounds of glass breaking and hysterical laughter interrupted her thoughts. She slid her feet back into her slippers and rejoined the party.

His Lordship laid down a card. "I win again, my dear." The guests stood around their hosts in a circle, three deep, silent except for quick whispers to report to those who couldn't see what had happened.

The other gaming tables had been abandoned and the party crowded around one of the faro tables. Every host was expected to provide unique entertainments, and was criticised for failing to be clever enough, but all most guests cared about (beyond the food and wine, which were taken for granted) were the gaming tables. And when it was the hosts themselves at the faro table, the guests considered themselves entertained beyond their expectations. To open one's account ledgers as well as one's house was to give society a topic for the season. Later, certain guests would accuse the Lord and Lady of setting the whole thing up; others would argue it was too realistic to be playacting.

Her Ladyship's hands trembled with anger. She swore to herself, ordering herself not to cry. Just this once she wanted to win. There, she thought, you've finally figured out something you want. Her guests probably thought she was upset over losing money. What did they know? They went to party after party, lost or won ridiculous

sums, schemed to bed this woman or that man—or both. They lived for the spectacle, for gossip, for scandal. Her Ladyship was different. At least she was now, she decided.

"Once more," she said.

Her husband spoke slowly, relishing the effect his words would have. "Your purse is empty."

A few ladies gasped at his cruelty. A few others tittered at his wit. Her Ladyship's barrenness was a well-known secret.

"I have a few coins left." She fought the urge to run.

"But not enough to make playing any longer worth it."

She studied his face, wondering how she'd once hoped theirs would grow to be a love match.

"There are other stakes we can play for." She spoke with a smile, hoping to turn the crowd to her side, to make them believe this was all good-natured jesting between husband and wife, a farce acted out in real life with all the players knowing their parts. Society was a game, was it not? No level of logic and explanation could bring a crowd to your side. They had to be tricked into it.

"What do you propose?"

The crowd shifted around them. Soft hands touched her wrists, her friends offered support. Men winked at each other and laughed as if His Lordship had made a great joke.

She pictured the bills piled upstairs in her room. She was unable to pay any singly, and could in no way pay them all. But he could, she knew. If she lost, she would only owe her husband money, and everyone knew those debts didn't matter.

"I can pay your debts," he offered, as if reading her mind.

She didn't dare open her mouth and acknowledge the truth of it. Everyone had debts, but no one was so vulgar as to mention them in public.

He sipped his drink and stared at her over the glass's edge. "A wife's secrets are her husband's, too." His friends laughed at that. Some of her friends did as well. "Now, what shall I get if luck is somehow on my side?"

"Wait," Her Ladyship said. "I haven't agreed to the terms if I'm dealt the winning hand."

She looked at her guests, hoping to think of something one of them had, something she wanted. She needed her debts paid, of course, but then what would that leave her with? Stained silk shone in the honey-coloured candlelight, but she had plenty of dresses. It wasn't worth it to gamble for another that she could easily buy. Jewels—

diamonds, rubies, sapphires, pearls, paste even—glowed on bare skin everywhere, soft and liquid rather than sharp and jarring. Her Ladyship had more jewels than she could wear at any one time. Here and there, one of the prizes from the potager winked at her from the hollow of a throat or the graceful curve of a wrist. They were clever, she told herself, and was again proud of the game. While she stalled, she listed each item again as she had done for days before burying them. The thing that had been nagging at her finally chose to settle: one was missing. Pea pod, rose, bee, tulip, carrot, nest, watering can, sparrow…. And then she remembered the Countess hadn't come to the garden, and no one had found the robin's egg jewel. "The garden," she said before she had a chance to stop herself. "I win this next hand and the garden is mine to do with what I wish." There. She wanted something that meant more than a passing fashion.

His Lordship laughed, a great barking sound without any true mirth. "My Lady plays for what is already hers."

She gave him a tiny nod but didn't speak. Let him think what he wanted. When she won she would end up with more than he realised.

"And if I win?" he asked.

She slid her hands along her ear, her fingers extended gracefully, and shifted her wig back into place. "Oh, sir. If you should win, then I give you something you've not had in a rather long time." She waited for the crowd to settle. "Myself."

Laughter and talking erupted, and she watched as her friends made bets. Only she couldn't be sure who bet for her and who against.

His Lordship's mouth stretched wide in what passed for a smile among those who didn't know any better. "Whether the cards are with you or no, I end up no poorer." He shrugged. "Play on."

His Lordship lifted his glass. "To my wife. May her garden be fertile." He downed the drink and turned away, some men following in his wake. The crowd dissolved and reformed into smaller groups, each circling its own gaming table. Her Ladyship was left standing, alone, in the middle of her own party. She had thought she wanted congratulations and attention, but more than anything she wanted to be outside, away from everyone, able to cry or laugh as she wished without witnesses.

The last thing she wanted was to go to his temple, but the mask and cloak His Lordship had ordered for her was a good disguise.

Always aware of how she looked, she floated from the room, holding herself rigid, not giving away her nerves or the lightheadedness from the wine. Before going

upstairs to don her mask and cloak, she ordered a manservant to meet her at the door with a lantern and a bottle of wine.

#

Thomas cursed the crutch for the thousandth time as he maneuvered through the garden in the dark, looking for his brother, who had been hired to help with the party in the garden. He wouldn't be out now except that Father was worse and Mother wanted Samuel there. "For the end," she said.

Thomas was grimly pleased Mother was finally accepting the inevitable, but he hated himself for it. "As if I'm doing the same," he said to himself—and to his knee, to his ridiculous idea to come back to the estate, to his loss of Anne.

He took the path around the outside of the grounds to avoid the main hub of the party. He didn't belong at the party, of course, but the last thing he wanted was to watch his betters drunkenly stagger through the gardens his father, who lay dying, worked so hard to make beautiful. Who were they to dance while a family lost someone right under their noses? They were dancing on a grave.

And who was he, the son who had left, to complain? He was as guilty as any of them.

Up ahead, torchlight flickered more closely than he expected. He slowed down and stepped off the path and behind a thicket of shrubs. The temple's walls, a soft cream colour in the daylight, glowed a sinister yellow beneath the moon. Shadows stretched and slid across the wall, like demons dancing in a fire. Men carried torches and chased women, all of them masked and caped, all of them laughing and screaming. The flames illuminated other men and women, kneeling or even lying in the grass, breasts and buttocks, cocks and cunnies open to the night air. Thomas didn't know what to do or where to look, so he stood as still as possible and watched, straining to see details in the flashing torchlight and feeling himself grow hard. He hadn't had a woman since being shot, and not very often before then—only a random whore or farmer's daughter in the countryside. None he remembered. None vivid enough to make him forget Anne.

At the thought of Anne, an image of her—her eyes scared but sure and staring into his—flashed through his mind. He'd had one hand beneath her skirt, the other down the front of her bodice, and she had sighed and arched against him. He remembered what she'd said. "Please." Right there, in the middle of the afternoon in the enclosed garden. No matter how many times Thomas re-imagined that afternoon, he was unable

to untangle Anne from the garden. She moved beneath him and the garden moved around him. They lay in the grass, his gloves thrown down nearby, the watering can on its side. As he ran his hand along her body, he saw movement out of the corner of his eye. Anne had asked him was he all right, and he just breathed a quick yes, impatient to finish what they had started.

He kissed her. She kissed him. Yet movement, shadows, off to each side distracted him, and when a tender young vine, the lightest of spring green, snaked through her hair and twined itself around his little finger, Thomas watched it, unable to move.

"What is it?" she asked when he stopped kissing her.

He pulled his eyes away from the tendril of the vine, the coils of her hair, afraid she would turn her head and see. He knew she felt him tense up and likely saw the terror in his gaze. That was all it took—one tiny second of doubt.

"What?" she asked again. "Tell me!"

He'd been unable to say anything. He kept his eyes on her but, out of the corner of his eye, watched the vine retreat. Anne had gone white and still.

"I—" He closed his mouth. He'd never shared the garden with her. How to explain it then?

"You don't love me?" She started crying. "You don't love me and you won't even bed me, here, in your secret place." She laughed then through the tears, a sharp sound in the silence of the garden. "You won't marry me—" "I can't."

She wiped her nose with her sleeve. "You won't! And now you reject me here. What is it? Am I not beautiful enough? I'm not clever enough for you, I know." As her voice rose, he flinched, afraid someone outside would hear. He patted his pocket to be sure the key was still there.

"Your brother fancies me." Anne backed away from him and stood, brushing the dirt from her skirts.

"I know." Thomas's voice came out in a croak. Samuel had made no secret of his feelings for Anne, yet he'd never done anything so obvious that Thomas could confront him. "Anne, please, don't."

"Don't what? Don't lie here with you? Don't let you kiss me and make love to me?" At that, she turned away from him before throwing back one final accusation. "I don't know what you're sadder about—leaving me or leaving the garden!" The thought of leaving the garden tightened his throat.

It was too much. When did it all become so complicated?

Above them, the trees shook in the wind, and birds flitted from branch to branch. Inside the garden's walls, though, nothing moved. Thomas had felt the garden holding its breath, waiting.

So he had done the only thing he could: walked out the gate and left her there, unable to control his urges, unable to control the garden, but unable to tell her why, that he loved her and would come back for her. And he had cursed himself for a fool every day since.

"Who are you?" A voice came out of the darkness just behind him and he lost the image of Anne. Startled, he thought to run but the crutch in his hand reminded him that his running days were over.

Her mask was askew, but her eyes were liquid in the flickering torchlight. She stumbled and put a hand out against the tree. The cloak she wore rendered her nearly invisible. Had she not spoken, it's possible he never would have seen her, and then he could have been on his errand without any offense. Now he was stuck.

"Just a gardener, ma'am." He removed his hat.

She giggled and he was reminded of the women's laughter on the day he came back home. The firelight flickered brighter for a moment, throwing long shadows in the trees.

"Isn't it a bit too dark to garden?" She stepped towards him, smelling of wine and sweat. Her cape swung open and he saw that the top of her dress had been pulled down below her breasts. She saw him looking and cupped each breast, offering them up to him.

Thomas took a step back. She took another step forward. "I'm looking for my brother, ma'am." He felt foolish for being forced to explain.

She dropped one hand and used it to steady herself against him. With her other hand she continued to rub herself absently. Night insects buzzed around them, and a moth brushed his hair. A breeze sent branches swaying and a few leaves fell and landed on Thomas's sleeve. The physical closeness of her—of another body—confused him. He took her hand from his jacket and pushed it back. "Ma'am. I must be on my way."

She swayed in one spot, opened her mouth as if to speak, and vomited down the front of her cape and dress. Thomas stepped back, saving his shoes but not his nose. The woman turned and wretched two more times at the foot of the tree while Thomas waited. He then moved in, took her arm, and turned her towards the house.

She sagged against him, almost knocking him over.

“Stand up.” The sooner he could get the woman to the house, the sooner he could get back to his parents.

He shoved his hand in her armpit and wrenched her up. A disembodied moan from the group at the temple carried on the wind. The feel of her beneath his hand made him want to squeeze her arm until he left a bruise. He wanted to tear and bite her, rub her until her skin was raw and make her groan beneath him.

She cried, a small pathetic sound, and he softened his grip. The garden, in turn, softened around him, thin branches reaching out to comfort him as they walked.

She staggered, and it was all Thomas could do to keep her upright and keep himself balanced. As they made their way to the house, other party guests ran through the trees and over the paths on their wild hunt, some with candles or lanterns, but many without.

The house’s glow pulled them forward. At one point, the woman stopped to vomit into the bushes again. When she stood back up, a branch caught in her wig and scratched her face. She swore, her sour breath hot in his face, and Thomas felt a surge of anger again, and the backs of his hands hurt as if small burning embers had lit upon them. He pulled her along the path.

A man, silhouetted against the lights in the house, appeared before them. Thomas yanked the woman so she stood next to him.

“Sir,” the man said.

“I’m no gentleman,” Thomas said.

He handed the woman over to the servant. In the light from the house, he saw her cloak was red and not black, as he had believed. When she let go of Thomas’s sleeve, the rage that had been building in him slid away. She was gone without a word.

Thomas turned, putting the house at his back, and surveyed the garden. The light from the windows threw deep shadows. He imagined walking beyond the lights and stepping into another world, a hell inhabited by faeries and sprites and demons.

He limped ahead and into his own dark shadow, leaving the beauty of the Hall behind him, hoping to find his brother yet hoping he would never find him, but, most of all, hoping for the night to be over.

Thomas couldn’t find Samuel anywhere. He crossed the garden, joining the moths in their search for torchlight, listening for any hint of people in the garden, the weight of guilt heavier with each passing minute. Mother was alone with Father, and Thomas had failed. He wanted to return, convinced that Samuel was likely back at the

house, but the thought of Mother's face if he returned to find that Samuel hadn't arrived was too much to bear. Just once he wanted to fulfill his role as a son. To finish something. To feel like a man again.

Much later, empty-handed, he returned home to find Anne sitting at the table, head in hands. She glanced up, her eyes watery and swollen in the dim candlelight. "Upstairs." Her voice was a broken whisper.

With each riser the pain in his knee increased until he was forced to use the wall for balance. She had lit every extra candle in the house, sending the shadows away for Father's final night. The look on Samuel's face told Thomas he had been expecting his wife and was disappointed to find his brother. Thomas ignored him and shuffled over to where Mother sat, her husband's hand clenched in her own.

With every rise of Father's chest, Thomas held his own, waiting for the end. He had watched so many men die, but their lives drained away quickly in great spouts of blood, or slowly as their flesh putrefied. Both ways were violent and obvious. None died calmly, in bed, surrounded by their family. Thomas didn't know what to expect or when it would happen.

And then it did.

He held his breath, and held it, and held it. And Father's chest fell one final time and was still.

Anne had come back upstairs so quietly Thomas hadn't noticed. *How could you not know she was there?* he asked himself, pushing the memory of her hair entwined with spring-green vines out of his mind. That memory flowed into another, this time of a woman glowing white in the sun, her lips and hands vibrating with the buzzing of bees, and Thomas smelled honey and roses and….

A hand on his shoulder brought him back to the small room where his father's body lay, the room full of the kitchen garden's smells: manure, dirt, sweat. He followed Anne and Samuel from the room, giving Mother some final moments before she and Anne were to ready Father's body.

When Mother joined them, Samuel said he would arrange the burial. "I will speak with His Lordship about the head gardener's position," he added. "To make it permanent."

"But—" Thomas began.

Samuel turned to Thomas, his hair a dull gold in the dark room.

"I plan to continue the work my father did here. *My* father."

Mother grabbed his arm. "Show some respect."

“I’ve held my tongue under threat by him.” Samuel pointed his chin towards the ceiling. “Enough of these secrets.”

“Samuel,” Mother started. “Please. Take Anne home. She needs rest, for the babe’s sake. I can prepare my husband for his final rest on my own.”

Samuel stepped towards Anne who drooped against the table. “Things will be as they were meant to be now. Our son will be born soon, and he will know his grandmother and his true mother and father, unlike the changeling.”

Thomas remembered the feel of cold mud pushed into his mouth and hair as that word was chanted over him. He’d forgotten the memory, until now.

“He is your brother,” Mother said.

Samuel shook his head.

“He is as much of a brother as you will ever have,” she pleaded.

“Then I choose not to have a brother. Come along.” Samuel took Anne’s elbow and steered her out the door.

Thomas sat down and waited for an explanation. The candle flickered, the only movement in the room. She reached across the table for his hand and he felt her callouses and rough nails. “It was the month after Samuel was born. He was a tetchy baby, always thrashing and crying. Your father—” She looked towards the stairs and some of the energy went out of her. “God rest his soul. He would sometimes take him out early to watch the dawn so I could get a bit of rest. One morning, by some miracle, the baby was quiet but your father was up and gone before I woke. He found you in the walled garden, right next to the sundial, not a scrap on you. When he brought you home and we laid you next to Samuel, well, you were as different as chalk and cheese. Him so fair and you dark as a selkie. He fussed and you watched the world. It seemed only right I should feed him while the cry went out to find who had abandoned you. She was never found, and here you stayed.”

“Changeling.”

Mother shook her head. “Son.”

#

She was flushed from the wine, warm even as the cool night air slid along her face and shoulders. The light from the lamp she carried didn’t spread far enough to extend beyond her skirts, but she liked the idea of floating inside a bubble of light and imagined how she must look to others, her face and hands disembodied against the dark cloak. Moths gathered around the lantern, around her, their pale wings flittering in and

out of the light. She wished she could grow wings and fly through the air and watch, everywhere, as the party spread and guests drifted into the gardens, in pairs or groups of three or four. Who would she follow? Her husband and the Countess? The Earl and whoever he'd found to share a drink? One of the servants?

The garden was a different place at night. Copses of trees and shrubs lost their shape and became nothing more than deep shadows threatening to swallow anyone who strayed from the path. Indiscriminate talking and laughter nearby alerted her to her husband's whereabouts. At the far end of the house, he led a parade of caped and masked men and women away through the trees, most likely on their way to the temple. He didn't let a party go by without planning his own entertainments there. She laughed to herself when she remembered the one time he'd staged a play in the grotto and had slipped and fallen into the pool. After that, the temple, with its locking door and fireplace, had become his favourite hideaway.

She made her way across the garden, following the party with enough space that they'd not notice her. She supposed now she could have the temple torn down. But she didn't want to tear anything down. Nor did she want to put up anything new. Mr. Ralston's drawings would come to naught, but Her Ladyship didn't care. The man would be paid and dismissed. That was all that mattered.

A woman ran past her, so quickly that all she saw was a dress and wig fly off into the night. A second later, a man followed, whooping as he ran. He brushed against Her Ladyship, causing her to stumble, but, being loose, she regained her footing and continued towards her ultimate goal.

"On second thought," she said to herself, "I can send Ralston to the hamlet. There's no use moving the cottages back, and we might as well make it beautiful." So, as she walked, she planned, and she thought of what her grandmother would have said had she known that at least one small part of the family's legacy was saved. Her Ladyship sighed to think that, without an heir, the whole thing would be lost soon.

She found the enclosed garden dark and abandoned. The potager lay as they'd left it, with cabbages and radish tops lolling in the dirt, the wheelbarrow still off to one side. Her Ladyship set down the lantern and strolled beyond its light. Moths threw their bodies at the lamp's glass sides, each tiny plink another rejection as they tried to reach what they most desired. She stood, quiet and still, inside her desire.

The garden held its breath.

She didn't have to wait long. A key clicked in the lock and the door swung open on silent hinges.

#

Even out of sight of the torches, the raked paths glimmered under a bright, full moon, reminding Thomas of nights on the ocean when the moon lit a path from the ship to the horizon.

He followed such a path, one only he could see, from his mother's house to the dark gate.

The key was warm in his pocket, as mouldable as the woman's skin, and the anger rose in him again. He'd missed his chance with Anne, walked away from her because he couldn't share her with the garden. He couldn't share the garden with anyone, not even Father, the only one who loved it as much as he. And soon it would be gone.

Thomas unlocked the gate.

She was there, waiting for him. The garden, his love, breathed around him in the dark.

"Anne," Thomas said.

She kissed him.

It was all it took. He grabbed her, pressing his fingers into her skin, and the garden sighed around him.

"Oh," she said against his mouth as the first tendril caught and twined up her dress, becoming indistinguishable from the embroidery that decorated it.

Her skin glowed blue beneath the moon, a statue come to life in his arms, cold and smooth and flawless. She wasn't real. She wasn't calloused hands and cracked skin, dirty feet and greasy hair. She wouldn't age and fade. She was green and new, plump as a spring bee, sweet as a ripe apricot, warm as the sun on his skin. She was the garden, casting off winter's grey coat to be reborn each year.

In the small spaces between kisses, the vine lay itself along her cheek, and she whispered, "It belongs to you now." Moonflowers, white as her skin, bloomed along her neck and shoulders, and a yellow rose snagged its thorns in her hair. Leaves like fingers lifted the hem of her dress. With a tug the vine took Thomas's crutch and he stood, unaided, while moths lit in his hair and along his sleeves, nearly lifting him into the air. But the Lady held him to earth, held him to her.

#

Early the following summer, a girl was born to Her Ladyship. His Lordship, dead in a hunting accident that winter, never saw the child. When the girl became the newest Ladyship, her gardener, young Mr. Hill, kept the walled garden to her specifications. “There are things older than us, and who are we to destroy them?” her mother had often said to her as she grew up. Stewardship of the land was one she took seriously, and she kept her ghosts close in spite of changing fashion.

1865

“Please do try to look more serene, dreamy even,” the painter said. “The garden is your domain, is it not? You are one with the garden. It speaks to you.”

One with the garden? she thought. *All it tells me is that it needs weeding and hoeing and to be spread with manure, pests killed and fruit picked. It tells me of toil and split nails and aching joints, and the same next year and the year after and on and on.*

The young woman stretched her spine, smiling at the cracking relief. She’d been standing in one position for an hour, her neck bent at just the right angle so that her face, in three-quarter profile, caught the last of the sun while she held an unlit lamp aloft in one hand. Her other hand trailed behind her, a rose held just between her fingers, on the verge of falling to the ground. She set down the lantern then dropped the bloom to give her fingers a rest without fear of ruining it. It wasn’t real. All the flowers in the scene were made of fabric and glue, clipped to wire stems or tied to branches overhead to create a look of lush high summer. She shivered in the October chill, shook out the dress’s heavy velvet folds, picked up the objects again, and twisted back into the pose the artist had devised.

John Alexander Seawell took up his brush and ducked behind the canvas, only his booted feet and right elbow showing beyond its edges. It took two of the garden hands to cart the canvas out each evening and then return it back to the house after the sun finally set. He’d been working on it for weeks, and so far none of his subjects had been allowed to see it. Mary could only guess what it must look like, a painting of garden labourers, one by one scrubbed free of the day’s dirt, dressed up and posed with milliner’s flowers before being allowed to their supper. She stifled a yawn. After several days of rain, she’d been determined the night before to take advantage of a clear sky and had stayed too late in the enclosed garden. *Pose me in that garden, and I’ll show you a thing or two about how a garden speaks,* she imagined saying to the painter.

Mary's father was the head gardener and a man with little time for her. He was only interested in his elaborate carpet-bedding designs dreamed up to make Her Ladyship happy and in keeping the workforce's attention to the grounds, which made him happy. The painter had asked him to pose, but he'd said no. "Painting on canvas isn't the only art. This," he had said and pointed to the red and yellow and green swirls and lines made from hundreds of hothouse begonias, geraniums, and pot marigolds, "is also art. Taking what is there and making much of it, making it better than nature. And keeping it that way. That takes skill and vision, young sir." Mary didn't agree with him, but would never say so. The only person who had ever asked her for her opinions on art was likely dead.

So far the painter had asked everyone else from the garden staff, from apprentices to improvers to journeymen, to dress up and pose, and they had all agreed. But not her father. And she knew, from the gossip that travelled from Her Ladyship's personal maid down to the kitchen staff and out into the grounds, that the artist hadn't got his way on choice of setting, either, and the enclosed garden's gate stayed locked to him.

The artist's connections to Her Ladyship were murky: some said he was a distant cousin, while others said he was a "pet" brought in to replace the last artist who had barely arrived before leaving early one morning after a fracas had been heard behind closed doors the night before—Her Ladyship's closed doors, that is. In any event, none of the servants were clear on who John Alexander Seawell was or how he knew the family, but when it came to the gardens Her Ladyship had final say over who was allowed where to do what, when. At least, she acted as if she did. Mary knew better, though. The walled garden was closed even to Her Ladyship, His Lordship's second wife. When his first wife lay dying, she had given the key to the walled garden's red gate to her eldest daughter, a symbol of the estate she would inherit in full one day. It wasn't long after that the Lord remarried, and the daughter left on an extended trip with her aunt to visit relatives. And to find a husband, it was rumoured. The only other key to the garden was in the head gardener's possession.

"Look dreamy, I said." The painter's voice came from behind the massive canvas, bringing Mary back to the here-and-now in the medieval garden, which butted against the enclosed garden's side, as close as Her Ladyship could get to placing it inside the old stone walls. The rumors of that argument were legendary among the staff for its volume and vehemence and because of the order placed the very next day for another sixteen-piece pink Limoges table setting, because not even Her Ladyship would

dare invite thirteen to dinner. His Lordship allowed his young wife her own lead on almost everything, but the walled garden stayed locked.

In this small garden, enclosed by hedges, Her Ladyship had had a turf seat built beneath the ivy-covered wall and insisted the space be planted with authentic flowers. She used that word often: authentic. In this case, it meant planting a scene depicted in an embroidered fireplace screen, a family heirloom that showed a flowery mead with violas, strawberries, carnations, primroses, daisies, peonies, columbines and so many others. But to be authentic, they had to be evenly spaced in the lawn, and all bloom together. Mary's father had spent months planning and worrying over the plants in the greenhouse, coaxing strawberries and primroses to bloom this past August, when Her Ladyship had planned the great unveiling at a party. The velvet gown Mary wore now was left over from the fete: one of many Her Ladyship had ordered but not worn, according to the household servants. And, of course, it was authentic. The authentic slippers that matched, however, were not loaned out to the gardener's daughter, and the skirts soaked up late-day dew from the grass. Slug trails shone on the wilted strawberry leaves in the late afternoon light, and a tiny, frost-burned strawberry was the only bit of colour in the lawn, dotted as it was with sludgy humps of once authentic primroses and violas and periwinkles.

Artists, writers, and other celebrated people visited the Lord and Lady, bringing carts full of who-knows-what in boxes and trunks. Mary hadn't been inside the house—beyond the kitchen—in years, but when her father was away two of the housemaids, Clara and Maude, would visit the house in the kitchen garden's wall and tell stories about the rooms to rival anything in a book. One month, Clara mimicked the Lady saying, "This is an authentic reproduction of an Ancient Roman mosaic." The next it was Abyssinia, wherever that was, and soon after it was ancient Egypt. Paint and fabrics, even murals on the walls, changed the living areas, all according to the authentic mood the Lady wanted to capture. Maude complained about the mess, claiming she'd had to have her uniform replaced once already because the laundry couldn't get the stone dust out of the skirt, and Clara described the constantly changing rules for cleaning the variety of statuary and wall hangings that were moved from room to room. These descriptions inspired in Mary a feeling of impatience, a fear that she was missing something. Her fingers itched to capture the designs before they disappeared forever. She thought of the house she shared with her father, would share with him until he died, a place of muddy boots, simple plates and spoons, and thin drapes. It was a place for her father to rest, while the Hall seemed like a place to dream.

Mary held her pose, her gaze on the Renaissance garden across the way, behind a short hedge and a line of thin trees. Shadows of swans and horses, dancing bears and lions, all sculpted of box and yew, grew long on the grass, and the green-and-white striped poles set along the paths turned black and grey in the twilight. Mary stretched and caught sight of the painted wooden animals perched atop the poles. She bid the leopard and birds of prey, their mouths gaping wide, their eyes sightless, a silent good evening as they loomed over the scene. Unknown to the garden's owners, Mary had helped paint each carved wooden animal in vibrant blues and reds. Her favourite was the unicorn with its gold horn pointing to the sky.

A cold breeze kicked up, and the painter began to pack his brushes. Michael and Will, the youngest apprentices, soon came to take the canvas, covered with a brown cloth and its edges laced shut with twine. The man didn't even trust the boys not to peek.

"Why don't you paint in the daytime?" Mary asked. "The light's too short this time of day."

The painter rubbed a brush on his smock's hem, leaving a streak of purple.

"The light is perfect. Just before sunset, the sky takes on the dark lavender blue that bores into your soul." He pulled the smock over his head and put his jacket on. "And then there are the shadows. Shadows make light."

It's in the shadows, girl, that you find the shape of things. Mary wondered what her aunt would have thought of this young painter.

"My dress is green. None of the flowers tied to the bushes are purple. The sky isn't purple."

The painter gaped at her as if she were simple. She pointed with her chin at the paint on his skin.

"Oh," he said. Then, clipping the end of each word, he explained, "No, they're not. But this is art." He turned to walk to the house, motioning the boys to follow with the canvas. "Tomorrow," he said over his shoulder, "same time. Wear the dress again. But do something with your hair. Put it up. Braids, perhaps."

And then he was gone and Mary was left feeling foolish all alone in the garden in the dark wearing a great lady's cast-off over her work boots and shift.

#

John scrubbed his hands before dressing for dinner but couldn't get the purple paint out of his nails. He already felt on shaky ground in the house: a guest, yes, but one who was expected to sing for his supper. Coming to dinner with dirty hands would only draw attention to his background.

He scrubbed for a while longer before giving up and sitting to dry his hands. With only one evening suit—and with a new under-footman assigned as his valet—he had to be careful when dressing.

Not wanting to appear downstairs too early, John studied the sketches for his most recent piece. The maiden—the model's name was Mary, he reminded himself and considered it fitting for the painting—stood in the foreground. In some sketches she smelled a rose cradled in one delicate hand.

The pose was too stiff. The flowers didn't seem natural. *What do I know of flowers?* He'd grown up in a chemist's shop, sweeping and dusting until old enough to be trusted to mix the chemicals that filled the carboys in the window. The magic of combining tincture of ferric chloride with sodium salicylate in a bucket of water and ending up with an amethyst liquid that was like a melted jewel was his first inkling of what it meant to be an artist. From the shop's window he watched the world, seeing the dirt and grime and strife and hard graft through clean glass. He was used to sketching people in the city streets, showing the world as it was, not as people wanted it to be. Having a patron changed that. How did other artists stretch and grow when their livelihood was paid for with their company and talent?

Her Ladyship wanted "something different" she said. "Something beautiful but shocking."

What had started with the girl holding a flower up to her face had changed this afternoon when she arrived carrying an unlit lantern for lighting her way home later. Something about the glass bowl of the lantern lit against the purple-blue sky had caused a frisson in him, and he changed the painting's composition that instant.

But still it was only a woman in a garden, holding a lantern.

What did it say?

What did it mean?

What would Her Ladyship say about it?

What would the Academy think?

Would anyone even notice it?

John slumped on the end of the bed and chewed the pencil. He closed his eyes and saw the garden as he'd seen it earlier that afternoon. Clean flagstone and brick paths

led from flower bed to allée to parterre. One garden was cool and dark, the ferns a raised mattress of green shadow, while the next laid itself bare to the sun, its flowers orange and yellow, small coins of colour in a fading year. The medieval garden held the expired promise of beauty, the small square lawn pock-marked with little humps of slimy green where flowers had died in the frost.

He sketched Mary again, this time as a faerie-woman in gossamer robes, almost iridescent in the light right before sunset. He crumpled the drawing up and threw it on the floor for the maid to pick up later. Beautiful faerie women were nothing new.

Then he drew her again in heavy velvet robes, as thick and soft as the turf her pointed-toed slippers—the slippers that sat before him on the desk—sank into, a design of vines curling among the folds. He caught her hair up in the brambly climbing rose behind her. The lantern was lit, illuminating the roses and casting deep shadows all around her.

He imagined the roses. A deep pink, full of perfume. Thick with thorns. Their branches knotted together … and the whole thing just hung there in space. Unattached to anything—physically or emotionally.

It was too clean. Too perfect. Trying too hard.

It bored him.

John threw the drawing on the bed. There was some time before he was expected for dinner, and he wanted air. Before putting his jacket back on he had a quick rummage in his paint box to find the bottle of black drop. It was only half full, but he didn't need much to get through the rest of the evening. Rather than bother to get some water, he took a tiny sip and checked himself one final time in the mirror. He considered changing back into his day suit, but he was too agitated to go to the trouble. A walk was safe enough. Some air would do him good, would do his suit good, and he felt able to keep himself clean. As the door swung shut, his pencil rolled onto the floor and beneath the bureau, where the maid would miss it for the remainder of his stay.

#

John wished for a lantern or a candle to light his way. Or a jar of the tiny glowworms that burned arsenic green beneath the shrubs. A city boy, he had only recently become familiar with these uncanny little bugs, but he was still charmed by them.

Glowworms. Green. Absinthe. Faeries. Flitting through the trees. Shadows against the sky. Iridescent wings. Lighting on a branch. Watching below. Watching the people. Their eyes hidden behind the orange leaves. Watching. Always watching.

He wandered from garden to garden, along paths by turns dark and light, stumbling on unlit steps as he passed a half-size Egyptian obelisk in one garden room and a mural-decorated Bavarian-style cottage in another. He entered through low hand-woven gates and tall open-work iron gates as he made his way through the grounds. He'd never been alone in the garden before. In the daylight, workers swept or raked paths, clipped back shrubs and deadheaded flowers, spread mulch and pruned trees. They were quiet, but always there, and sometimes the only evidence was an abandoned wheelbarrow full of cuttings with a pair of gloves, empty but worked into the shape of their wearer's hands, laid across the handles.

John wondered where they went at night. Did the workers all live on the grounds or in the village nearby? How many were required to keep the glasshouses hot and the paths clean? He imagined waking with the dawn and working in the sun all day, going home with dirt caked into his skin, tired but healthy and happy.

Workers. Work. Hands working the earth. Feet walking the earth. Something about the earth. Something in the earth. Of the earth. People planting. Plants growing. The garden growing, dying, growing again. Forever and ever.

At the gate to the kitchen garden, he reversed direction and headed back towards the Hall. On the way, he passed the head gardener's cottage built into the kitchen garden's wall. He thought he saw a lace curtain twitch and then fall back over the glass, but there was no shadow. He stood and waited for the shape of someone's head to appear and block out the light from inside. But while he could hear voices far off, everything around him was still. He stepped closer to the house and placed a hand on the wall to feel the day's heat radiating from the brick and remembered doing the same thing in an attempt to warm his hands when drawing butchered pigs outside his uncle's shop.

Blood red. Brick red. Cut hands. Cold hands. Blue hands. Bone. Dirty nails. Dirt. Black and brown and green. Cracked skin. Chilblains. Gloves. Smooth skin. White skin. Blue skin. Bone. Flesh. Bruises. Shadows of green and blue and yellow beneath the skin.

John continued on the path towards the manor and his stomach clenched in hunger at the thought of supper. He'd forgotten to eat while painting.

Lights around the edges of the Hall's shutters and the faint sounds of people laughing beckoned him. He tried to retrace his steps, always moving towards the slices of light behind the far-away windows, but he had to follow the path. It took him down steps and around walls, where he lost sight of the Hall. He was sure he'd come to an opening around the next corner, and the house and its immediate surroundings would appear, with no obstacles between himself and supper.

Around the next corner, the yews, darker than the sky, crowded against him like giants.

He came to a wall. To go around it would mean to leave the path and walk in the black gardens to each side, and he felt the topiaries near him, too close. The night breeze was their breath on his skin.

A faint light glowed above the wall. Someone in the house must have opened the shutters, spilling light out into the night garden beyond.

He looked back the way he'd come but didn't see a fork in the path that would take him around the walled garden. On either side of the path, the black shapes of lions and horses and oversize butterflies waited. John could judge the safety of an alley, but he had no defence against green things.

Forest green. Pine. Oak. Beech. Forest black. Tree limbs moving like arms, branches like hands. Reaching for him. Eyes glowing in the caves of shadow. Yellow eyes. Jaundice. Ochre.

The light above the top of the stone wall reassured him. Perhaps there was another gate on the other side.

John reached out and pushed at the gate. It was unlocked. The glow increased and summoned him inside.

#

John woke up with his hands shoved deep into the dirt, twigs in his hair and beard.

"Sir." A voice came out of the dark. Then a touch and a hand helped him up. "Sir, they're calling for you."

A candle flame floated in the dark above his head. Behind it a face glowed, yellow in the highlights, deep midnight blue and green and black in the shadows of mouth and eyes. What hair was uncovered shone like mourning jet with a glint of

darkest red, and then the head moved and the colours changed. Yelling from beyond the walls came to him, faintly, like the speech remembered from a dream.

"Joan," he said.

"No, sir. It's Mary. The head gardener's girl." She brushed at her skirts, plain dark wool and not the velvets he'd dressed her in earlier. "They're calling you, sir," she repeated. "Please don't tell them I was here. My father—"

She pulled him along the narrow path. He shied away and bumped into a wall. No, not a wall, a plinth, half as tall as a man. A horse—a dull bronze shine with specks of chrome green and king's gold in the lantern light—ran between the clouds, wolf-grey and Roman-silver and newt-yellow and coal-smoke beneath a full ice-blue and ice-white and ice-green moon. Nothing was the correct colour. Everything was all of its colours. John closed his eyes to remember it.

"Sir." The hand tugged and he was herded along as if he were a lost lamb.

"Your father?" His voice came out harsh and cracked.

"Never you mind." Her hand pushed him, one final time, out the gate and into the night. He stumbled along, following the path around and towards the squares of light. For the second time in as many minutes, he ran into a solid shape. This one was made of fabric and flesh, and it was only black and white and grey, no other colour.

"Seawell." It was Brant. "Man, where have you been?"

"Walking." He patted at his jacket to dislodge the dirt and bits of leaf and silently cursed himself for thinking he could keep clean on an innocent walk through a garden.

"Mary found me." He turned, but only Brant was there with him on the dark path. And he re-heard the sound of a gate latching shut behind him, and felt again Mary remove herself from him and stay inside the garden, behind the gate, black in the moonlight.

"Mary, eh?"

John didn't need the light from the house to see the smirk on the writer's face.

"I got lost. Needed a bit of air," John explained. "The gardener's girl took pity on this city boy. Supper," he said and led the way back to the house, hoping his suit had survived whatever had happened in the garden. More than that, he hoped he could survive Brant's suspicion.

Archer Scott Brant. They had first met at the Royal Academy in a crush at a new exhibit. "Staid," Brant said as they stood looking at a portrait of a count done in an outdated style. "No energy. No story."

They immediately recognised in each other a pursuit of something new, which led to hours of debate over drinks. What made something new? Weren't all artists rehashing the same old ideas, but in new forms? Whose new was newer? Granted, Seawell was a painter and Brant a writer, but the creative arts—regardless of medium—were always on the lookout for the next big thing. And, as two possible next big things, they'd both come to the attention of Her Ladyship, herself one of the newest big things among the set. Being the second wife and without the pressure to produce an heir, Her Ladyship enjoyed collecting beautiful—and scandalously new—things: paintings, sculpture, clothing, ideas, images, causes. Some of those things were people.

In what John thought of as the real world—the non-art world—he and Brant would never have been more than acquaintances, possibly never even met. Brant's family came from money, John's from trade. No matter how many chemist shops John's father owned or how many of the Upper Ten he could claim as clients, John would never get the stink of medicines off his hands. But in the art circle, they knew all the same people. Art was where the energy was. Art was universal: a client might not read the latest novels, but he was sure to look at the latest paintings in his friends' and colleagues' parlours. So their worlds crossed when Brant wrote about exhibits for the papers, or when his poetry opened up salon doors.

They weren't close, but it still felt good to have a friend of a sort here with him, far from London. He followed Brant back inside to dinner.

Later, between courses, John noticed his fingernails were still caked with purple paint. He stuck his hands beneath the table and into his pockets for good measure.

The pockets weren't empty.

Feeling like a stage magician, he pulled a rose from one pocket. A deep pink rose, fresh and new, a June rose. Before he could stuff it out of sight, Brant asked from across the table, "What have you got there?"

John dropped the rose in his lap, lifted his wine glass, and tilted his head towards the woman on his right, hoping to catch her attention and start a conversation.

"Come on, man, what is it? I find you out in the dark, looking like Puck himself in a dinner coat, and now you're being mysterious and quiet. What secrets do you keep?" Brant's voice, light and playful, set John on edge. He could imagine what Brant would do with his secrets—anyone's secrets—judging from the man's latest articles. Discretion was not in his vocabulary.

John lost the opportunity to deny possession of anything, secret or otherwise, when the woman to his right said, “He’s got a flower.”

He held the rose above the table’s edge. Its perfume, thick with memory, floated around his head like an invisible cloud. Every inhalation brought with it the quiet drone of bees, the feel of sunlight soft on his skin as if through a screen of leaves. It was hard work to stay here, now, in the dining room with the others, laughing and talking over wine while starched footmen came and went with dishes piled high.

Their host asked, “Pass it down, would you please?”

The rose was passed from hand to hand down the table, each diner taking the opportunity to catch its scent.

“Dark tea and biscuits on a winter day.”

“Wood smoke and wool socks.”

“Honeysuckle. No, violets. No, wait … jasmine.”

His Lordship took hold of the rose by its thin stem and studied it. “Where did you say you got this, Seawell?”

“I didn’t, sir. I mean to say, I found it in the garden. The enclosed garden with the dark door.”

“That’s im—” His Lordship started, when his wife interrupted from the opposite end of the table.

“May I see it, please?” she asked, though of course it was just a command in kind language.

The rose made its way down the other side of the table.

“Cinnamon.”

“My grandmother’s shawls.”

“Florence White.”

“Who?”

“The first girl I ever loved.”

Brant sniffed and said, “Smells like a rose to me.”

Her Ladyship took the rose and twirled it in the light. “No. It’s not one of ours. And that garden is always locked. What game are you playing at, Mr. Seawell?” John

opened his mouth.

“Another one of your pranks, Seawell?” Brant winked at him across the table.

His Lordship laughed. “Splendid! A little mystery, eh? What do you say, dear, did he not trick us all? My grandmother’s shawls, indeed. The rest of you were in on it, too, no doubt.”

Brant laughed. “No, sir. Only Seawell and myself. A little experiment, you may say.”

Her Ladyship, John noticed, didn’t join in the laughter, but passed the rose back to John, who set it next to his plate for the remainder of the meal.

Afterward, when the ladies left the room and the men lit cigars, Brant winked again and picked up the rose, then threaded it through John’s boutonniere buttonhole. “No need to work so hard, man. She liked your paintings enough to have you here, chemist’s boy or no.”

Its scent, so close to his face, was far headier than the cigar and cigarette smoke. He felt sick and wanted to get away. As soon as he was able, he left the room and headed for the stairs to have a moment alone to remember what had happened in the garden. He tore the rose from his lapel and swung his fist to send it flying when a hand on his arm stopped him.

“A word.” Her Ladyship had appeared seemingly out of nowhere, her dark dress blending in with the shadows in the hallway.

For the second time that night, he was guided towards a door by a woman he barely knew. This time, though, the woman came through the door with him and they stood in the library. When she spoke, her voice was muffled and flat, a striking contrast to Mary’s voice in the garden.

“Now, young man, where did you get that rose?” John tried not to laugh at the ridiculousness of being called “young man” by a woman the same age as he.

“In the walled garden.”

“Impossible.”

He waited. What could he say—that he’d passed out cold on his walk? That her head gardener’s daughter had woken him up? He remembered the lantern light shining on her hair, and her pleading that he not give her away.

“I said, it is impossible. There is only one key to that garden, and it is somewhere on the continent with my husband’s eldest daughter. And that rose, whatever its species, does not grow anywhere in my garden.”

“It’s a big garden.” John tried not to sound condescending. He wondered how long it would take to pack and how far the train station was. And what he would do with the unfinished painting.

Her Ladyship sniffed. “Yes, it is. And I know every plant in it.”

Mary had mentioned her father. “Perhaps the gardeners?” he suggested. “Maybe they’ve planted something new.”

Her Ladyship held out her hand and John placed the half-crushed rose into it. “I shall have a word with Hill tomorrow.”

“Ma’am.” John bowed his head.

Her Ladyship opened her hand. She hissed through her teeth. “A thorn.” The palm of her glove was stained red.

Once he was in his room, John fished out what he’d felt in the other jacket pocket. A jewel the size of a robin’s egg rolled in his palm, the lamps’ soft glow making it sparkle green and blue.

He closed his hand back over it and rushed to the door, checking that the lock was secure. If Her Ladyship was that upset about a rose, how was she going to react when she discovered there was a jewel thief in the house?

You didn’t steal it, you buffoon, he told himself. *At least, I don’t think I did. I don’t remember.*

To calm down, he took another small sip from the black drop bottle, again foregoing any water. Then he lay on the bed and retraced his steps from this room to the garden, and then along the paths to the gate in the stone wall … The light glowing above … The looming topiaries … Pushing open the door….

And then nothing.

Absolutely nothing between the feel of the wood gate beneath his fingertips to the light the girl shone in his face.

The girl. Mary. She was where she wasn’t supposed to be. And now he had a jewel he wasn’t supposed to have.

She must have a key Her Ladyship didn’t know about.

She *was* the key to his missing memories.

John undressed and hid the jewel in his shoe so he couldn’t forget it in the morning. He’d find Mary, show the jewel to her and watch her face, and then maybe he’d remember what happened in the dark garden.

#

That night, John dreamed about walls, climbing over them, falling off them, digging under them. He dreamed about running with his hand outstretched and his fingers scraping along the stones of a high wall and catching on a rose’s thorns. The rose petals opened to him like mouths like lips and he leaned in to kiss and fell into them and the branches turned to hair and his fingers were twined in Mary’s hair and his

lips between her legs, kissing her and the perfume of the flowers and the earth and Mary floated around his head like a cloud until he choked on it and woke up to the late autumn sun piercing through a crack in the curtains like a sword blade lying across his face.

When he rolled over, his drawings crumpled beneath him. He pulled one out from under his leg. Mary was there, her hair twined in the climbing rose, its thorns long and sharp, dangerously close to her face and hands, some even already caught in the folds of her dress, threatening to tear the soft velvet.

In the background, garden workers were busy pushing wheelbarrows full of manure or clipping hedges and fruit trees using secateurs, sharp and thin. Women kneeled to gather fallen fruits, their fingernails long and pointed. Their faces were all Mary's face. And in the shadows, creatures hid from the daylight. Sprites, goblins, elves, the fey, ears and teeth ended in barbs, eyes wide and frightful, their skin by turns rough and smooth like tree bark. At Mary's feet, flowers lay stamped and crumpled. Irises and lilies shaped like tiny hands and fingers, the rounded tops of foxgloves and aquilegia took on the shape of little skulls with the soft curl of ears, and the roses, the roses all looked out at the viewer—at John—with clear eyes. He threw the drawing down before those eyes could blink at him.

The other pages held scribbles, detailed views of the horrors of the larger piece.

He didn't remember drawing any of them.

His arm moved against his will and he picked up the drawings again, studied them. They were beautiful, in an awful way, he had to admit.

What had happened in that garden?

He had to get back in there. He needed to see it by daylight. He needed, more than anything, to see Mary again, for her to explain what had happened there, to explain how he'd created this.

John got up, dressed, splashed some water on his face, and rushed down the stairs before anyone could ask where he was going.

#

1858

Jonah Hill liked to tell his daughter, "You were born in this garden, girl," a reminder that she belonged there and nowhere else. She knew she'd actually been born

in the house built into the kitchen-garden wall, but her father liked to explain it as if her mother had lain down under the apple trees and come out later with baby Mary in her arms. There was plenty he never said.

One day, when Mary was ten, she was hiding in the courtyard between the garden sheds. Jonah was forever yelling at her to stay out of the way, to be unseen and unheard, to be invisible, except when he told her to pick up dead flower petals or leaves from the grass the other gardeners' rakes missed, to take cut flowers to the Hall, to help with the washing and cooking and cleaning, and do as he said and earn her keep. As Mary shook her rag doll for behaving badly at the supper laid out on rocks and leaves in a corner of the courtyard, a woman's voice caught her attention.

Mary looked up from her doll to see a woman more crow than human. She wore dusty black from head to foot, her hat a hunched shape over her brow with dark, ebony wings sprouting from each side. Her back was hunched so high Mary imaged that, when she straightened up, she must be as tall as a cherry-picking ladder. The woman squinted in the sunlight. Mary crawled back behind the corner of the house.

"Lillian," the woman said.

Mary looked around, but there was no one else, and the woman hadn't brought a travelling companion. Mary had learned that word, companion, from the maids' gossip one day as they took a break out behind the Hall. It seemed a friend of Her Ladyship had a particular companion, a young man. Mary wondered about that because usually the apprentices were put to work painting the sheds. If one of the ladies who came to the Hall made friends with apprentices, then why had Mary, who was the same age as the apprentices, never met her?

The woman stopped a few feet from Mary, put down her bags and then slid the large black pack from her back. It left her looking like a house without its roof. "Lily."

"My name is Mary."

The woman, her face and arms all angles and straight lines, kneeled down. She reached towards Mary. Her fingers were stained with something dark but her skin was dry and flaked off, her knuckles raw. She took Mary's chin in her hand and turned the girl's head one way and then another. Mary pulled away, unused to being touched, but her skin tingled where the woman's hand had been and Mary regretted its absence. "Oh, Lily. Trust that man to erase any trace of her." "Who?" Mary asked.

"You can call me Aunt Madeline," was all she said by way of explanation. Mary knew her father had no sisters or brothers. Until this moment, he had been her whole family. But now, a new possibility opened before her. Did she have more aunts? Uncles

perhaps? Cousins? Where did they live? Could she go and visit them? Before Mary could ask any questions, the woman—this aunt—picked up the larger case she'd brought, a hard-sided black case, almost square. She gestured to the softer bag and said, "Don't just stand there gawping, Lily, help me in with my bag. And you," she called to an apprentice crossing the courtyard with an armful of spades. "Bring this in. Carefully!"

The woman had to have the wrong house. There was no one called Lily. She wasn't Mary's aunt, come to help make a family. Father would send her away.

"Who is it?" Mary's father called from inside upstairs, his usual bellow sunken to a human level.

"So he's home. I expected him to be busy, and for us to have a chance to get acquainted," she said to Mary.

"He's got a catarrh." Mary hoped maybe the lady would stay. She wanted to know what *getting acquainted* meant. She said the word in her head, a-*quain*-ted, with its short front and back and long middle. Her stepmother, dead since after Christmas, had never used words that took so much work to say.

"Likely." The woman set down the black case, removed her gloves, and inspected the cottage. She opened and closed the cook-stove door, stuck her head into the pantry and ran a hand over the heavy wood table that took up most of the front room.

"He says he is still busy, that the garden cannot grow without him," Mary continued. "A journeyman—Walter is my favourite—comes every morning and evening to talk to Father and get orders. And they wind up their watches." She felt as if she were giving away a secret. The look on the woman's face—Aunt Madeline, she reminded herself—made Mary want to tell her more secrets about Father.

"You!" Jonah, in his nightshirt, stood on the staircase behind the fireplace, one hand on the door handle.

Mary flinched. Father knew the woman, but he was still going to send her away.

Jonah moved forward to descend the final two steps, his grip unsteady. "You call that a hat, or has your broomstick taken lame and forced you to fly by other means?"

Aunt Madeline stared at Jonah. Mary waited, knowing how the stand-off would end and was sad because now she would never get to meet any cousins.

"Says the man who fell from a hayrick, so soused he'd tried to ride it like a horse."

Jonah took a final step down and landed with a thud. He gripped the mantelpiece and bellowed. “Gypsy!”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Jonah. I am sister to your lost wife. Now, think of the girl, motherless yet again.”

The blood drained from his face until he was the colour of new leaf shoots in spring. Aunt Madeline pointed at him, her finger as long and straight as she was. “Back in bed. Now. I’ll tend to you soon.” And he went.

Mary wondered what magic this woman had, to appear from nowhere and talk to her father as if he were a misbehaving boy. She decided she didn’t want this new aunt to have children. Then Mary would have her all to herself.

“Right.” Aunt Madeline tied on an apron she’d found hanging on the back of a door. It was a gardener’s apron, a mess of pockets and loops of different sizes, stained with old soil, manure, and the juice of rotten fruit and vegetables. “It’s past time to set this place to rights. Who usually cooks?”

Mary shrugged. “Me. Father does some. Sometimes the woman from the bothy cooks extra and we eat there.”

“Do not shrug. Cleaning?”

“I sweep the floors, and sometimes a girl from the Hall comes in to beat the rugs. Since father’s been abed, the Hall has sent a maid to help, but she doesn’t come ’til late. We send washing to the house, but that’s a secret.”

Madeline sniffed. “Seems as if there are quite a number of secrets around here.”

They scrubbed floors with some old tea leaves Madeline found in a forgotten tin, scraped out the stove, sifted the coal ash, dusted the cobwebs out of the corners, brushed the upholstery, shook out the curtains, and wiped the windows clean. Mary brought in several bucketsful of water and took almost as many dirty ones back out. At one point, Madeline turned her attention to Mary, scrubbing the girl’s face and hands and even brushing her hair. When Madeline inspected the pantry only to discover there was little food beyond a quarter of a cold pie, she sent Mary out to collect eggs—“As many as you can get!”—and gather what vegetables, fruits and herbs were the head gardener’s share. In the large pot she started a soup, and in a smaller one she set water to boil and added several handfuls of this and that. The smell, dark and green, was somewhere between January rot and May bloom. Then Madeline sat Mary down on a kitchen chair. “Do you go to school?” Mary shook her head.

“What do you know how to do?”

“I can read from the seed catalogues. And Father tells me when I miscount the apples and pears during cider pressing.”

"And?"

Mary shrugged.

"Don't shrug. If you don't know something or don't understand, ask. Shrugging is lazy, and I won't abide laziness." "Ma'am," Mary answered.

"And don't call me ma'am. I am your aunt, your lost mother's only sister. Can you sew?"

Every time Aunt Madeline said her mother was lost, Mary imagined her in the woods, calling for help, like the time one of Her Ladyship's friends was lost and the gardening team was called to go look for her. The woman—a small, sort of pinkish woman in more ruffles than Mary had ever seen—was finally found before supper sitting on a felled tree. The whole way back to the Hall she asked over and over again about a man in a green coat. Mary wrapped up tight that bit of gossip and waited for the pink woman to visit again so she could watch her in the garden. No matter what Mary did, the man in the green coat never spoke to her, but perhaps he liked pretty ladies.

Mary held up her pinafore's hem for inspection. Aunt Madeline ran her finger along the edge. "It'll do for this place. I don't suppose you play any musical instruments?"

Mary shook her head.

"Well, I've seen your housekeeping skills first hand. Though you are only ten." Madeline studied the small front room. "Can you draw?"

"Never tried."

The only pictures on the walls were cut-outs from seed catalogues and the odd *Gardener's Chronicle.* "If you are your mother's daughter, you will have talent in you. Somewhere. In spite of him," she added, pointing her chin towards the stairs.

She retrieved the black case from where it had been stored, out of the way near the door, and opened it on the table. Mary kneeled up on a chair to peer in. Madeline pulled the object from the case and, after peeking beneath the fabric cover, set it back.

"Get a pitcher and a bowl, please. Something light enough to carry for a distance. And fill the pitcher with water," Madeline instructed.

Madeline put the pack on her back, picked up the black case in one hand and a rectangular basin in another, and headed for the door. She was outside before she turned and called, "Coming?" Mary scrambled off the chair and ran upstairs to grab the enamelware bowl and pitcher from her room, making sure to tiptoe past her father's room. She didn't dare disturb him, awake or asleep. Outside, Aunt Madeline waited for her in the courtyard where a few chickens pecked in the dust.

"Where shall we go?" Madeline asked the air.

"The walled garden?" Mary suggested. It was her favourite place on the grounds. She felt protected there, hidden behind the high stone walls.

Madeline shook her head. "No, never there. I've not been there since…. Never you mind." She turned in a circle, deciding. "The pinetum," Madeline said, and began walking in the opposite direction from where the walled garden lay.

Her aunt walked quickly, navigating the twisting paths and occasional gate as if she'd always lived in the garden. They passed around the outside of the kitchen garden, skirted the rose garden and parterres where gardeners were busy changing the bedding plants, and escaped into the cool shadows beneath the trees. Sometimes Mary heard visitors call it a forest, but even she knew forests didn't have raked paths or small metal labels nailed to each tree to identify its type. Mary's father warned her to stay inside the garden's boundaries, and so she never played in the real woods.

Madeline kept up a constant monologue. "The process of photography is the process of delineating light from shadow. Nature is my particular study, how one thing can throw shadow on another, from the smallest blooms to the largest trees. And people. Oh, yes, people throw their shadows onto one another, often without knowing it."

Madeline walked off the path and along a rock wall embedded with all manner of shells, broken crockery, pieces of bricks, small pebbles, and even the broken-off hand of a statue, its fingers curled as if at any moment the rest of the stone lady—for Mary always thought of it as a woman, though its hand was barely larger than her own—was about to push her way free of the rough and sharp wall and step out onto the soft moss below. They skirted a bed thick with ferns and found themselves at the grotto.

Mary stopped at the cave's entrance and watched her aunt disappear into the dark.

"Lily," Madeline called.

"I'm not allowed," she said to Madeline's back. Mary wondered whether the woman heard her or if the wrong name meant Madeline was talking to—and listening to—an imaginary niece, someone she thought was following her. But Father had recognised her, and he was never wrong. This must be her aunt, as odd as it was to think this woman, who had appeared out of nowhere, was related to her. But who was Lily? "Why ever not?" Madeline stepped back into the open minus the black pack.

Before she could stop herself, Mary shrugged, but then quickly said, "Father never says why. Just says that the grotto is no place for little girls."

An eyebrow, as sharp and pointed as her elbow, lifted on Madeline's forehead. "And has that stopped you?"

Mary didn't trust herself to say anything.

"No matter. You can put down the water and bowl."

Madeline unfolded the wooden sticks, extended them, and pushed them, point end, into the ground. She opened the square case and removed the item within. A camera, Madeline explained as she attached it to the tripod and arranged a black cape over its back. She removed a piece of glass from the case and disappeared back into the cave, taking the pitcher and bowl with her. She reappeared to grab the rectangular basin and remove the camera from the stand, and then was gone again.

Mary licked a finger and rubbed it on one of the shells decorating the cave's entrance. The dull grey turned a deep blue with faint pink lines, and the pebble next to it, when wet, shone with tiny flakes that sparkled in the sun.

Madeline kept up her lesson from inside the grotto. "If little girls always did what their fathers said, Lily, the world would be a much less exciting place."

Mary stared hard at the wet pebble in the wall. When she blinked, the reflections shone inside her eyelids. "Can I please ask a question?"

"May you?" Madeline asked from inside the cave.

"May I please ask a question?" Mary used her most polite voice.

"Yes, you may."

"Why do you keep on calling me Lily?"

The sounds of splashing and a smell sharper than the smell of herbs Madeline had set to boil came rolling from the mouth of the cave. For the rest of her life, Mary never smelled gun cotton and bromide without thinking of Aunt Madeline, without thinking of witchcraft and tall dark trees and the summer she was ten.

"I call you that because that is your name. Lillian Marie Hill. You were named after my sister, your mother." Mary felt hollow in her stomach and hands and feet, as if she were full of holes. A new aunt and a new name in the same day, and something else was coming on the wings of the awful smell. "Now come in here, please. I trust you are old enough to know better than to touch anything without instructions. Yet now is as good a time as any to learn what it is you are good at."

Mary knew from previous forays into the grotto that it was dim, though not completely dark. The floor was paved in round pebbles, laid out in swirls and curled patterns. Some walls even had pictures made of smaller pebbles: fish and birds, their eyes round and staring, fins looking like wings and wings like fins. Beneath an arch in

one corner was a small sunken pool, and a statue of a lady crouched in a niche on the far wall. An arched opening, embedded with shells like the entrance outside, looked out over a brook. The light from outside was almost blinding from inside the cave, and Madeline had set up her dark room—for that's what she explained it was to Mary—as far from the light as possible. The bowl and pitcher sat on the floor in a puddle of spilled water, and the pack she had worn had grown thin legs, making it look like a house on stilts. Madeline stood hunched, her upper half hidden beneath its black cape, her movements causing the fabric to shift like wet laundry swaying in a breeze. More smells wafted out from the tent, accompanied by clanking and a sharp hiss of breath.

"In another minute the plate will be ready." Madeline's voice was muffled, leading Mary to imagine the newly tall pack was eating her head first. "Consider what I said earlier, about light and shadow, and go find a spot nearby to be photographed."

And there it was. The third thing. The thing with wings that swooped in Mary's belly. An aunt, a new name, and now this.

Mary had seen a photograph. Only once, and so quickly it was like a whisper, leaving her unsure whether she'd actually seen it or had imagined it. One of the maids had a *carte-de-visite* the size of a pocket, of her sweetheart standing straight in a uniform. She showed it around to the other maids every chance she got, and Mary had caught a glance at it one day when she'd been waiting outside the back of the Hall for Father to return from the flower delivery. The boy in the photograph had new whiskers and a frown, reminding Mary of the older apprentices as they became journeymen.

And now she was going to have a photograph.

She looked at the pine groves and tried to see them as she thought her aunt might. She stood near a tree and thrust her hand beneath the branches to test the light. It wasn't a particularly sunny day, and the shadows didn't have sharp edges. Mary's favourite tree in the pinery wasn't a pine tree at all but an aspen. The pines towered over her, forcing her to tip her head back so far just to see their tops that it gave her an ache in the neck. And the ground beneath them was always so clean. They were like single flowers in a vase, there to be looked at. The aspens, though, felt friendly. Clumped together, they drew Mary to them, and she loved to walk, faster and faster until she was running, threading her way through them.

Madeline emerged from the cave several minutes later carrying the camera in hands that, impossibly, were more stained than before.

"Hurry," Mary said. "I found the perfect spot."

Aunt Madeline set the camera back on the tripod.

“Come on.” Mary skipped down the path a little way before stopping to look back at her aunt. Madeline grabbed the tripod and followed the girl.

Mary disappeared around each corner but waited for Madeline, as if the woman was likely to get lost on a raked path. At the garden’s far reaches, Mary stopped. “Like this?” She positioned herself in front of the small aspen grove.

“They’re not very regal,” Madeline noted. “But the bark is slightly brighter in this light.”

She ducked beneath the fabric draped over the back of the camera and Mary could hear her mutter to herself.

“It’ll do,” she said when she reappeared from beneath the cape. “Step forward just a bit. Yes. Now, to the left. No, my left. A bit more. Yes, there. Now be still. Don’t move at all.”

Madeline removed the cap from the camera’s lens, explaining to Mary they had to time the exposure. “Let me count. Keep your lips still.”

Mary didn’t understand how a pitcher of water and bad smells were going to turn her into a photograph, but the excitement of it made her shake inside.

“Finished,” Madeline said some time later. She replaced the cap on the camera, grabbed the whole contraption, and returned to the cave, inviting Mary to follow her again. The sloshing and dripping of liquids as Madeline developed the negative plate echoed through the grotto. “It sounds like we are under the sea,” Madeline said, “two mermaids, playing in the waves.” Mary smiled at the image, and thought of what Father would have to say to such an idea.

When Madeline set the glass plate to dry in the tent and explained they would make a print the following day, Mary was disappointed. “Why isn’t it finished? I want to show the maids.” They would crowd around to look. They would talk to her. She would tell new maids her name was Lily, if they asked.

“Sulking does not become you. Photographs take time. That is the first lesson of photography, even before the one of shadows and light: a photographer must have patience.”

Mary expected a small *carte-de-visite,* like the maid had, in a folding cover. Something she could put in her pocket. She didn’t know what to say the next day when her aunt presented her with a piece of paper the size of the garden calendar and seed catalogues Father kept in piles around the house and in the potting shed. “It’s a cabinet card,” Madeline explained.

The aspens' bark shone against the shadows behind them, but Mary's white pinnie, worn over a dark brown dress, blended in with them. She was all but swallowed up by the trees, with everything in the photograph a variation of brown and cream.

"The trees are beautiful. I'll have to try some studies of them," Madeline said to herself. "What do you think of it?" she asked Mary.

Mary felt the burn of coming tears. "I'm in the trees. There's no… It's not…" She couldn't think how to explain what was wrong. She loved the trees, but they didn't have any life in the photograph. Every now and then she got to see herself in the cracked mirror that had belonged to her mother, but in the photograph her face was lost—her eyes a dark slash, her nostrils two smudged dots, her lips pressed together. Here, in the world, she was Mary, the gardener's daughter. She had hoped for magic. To be Lily, her lost mother's daughter, finally come to life in the photograph. But the piece of paper showed she was just a little girl, looking lost in the woods.

"It's all right, I suppose."

"No, Lily, it is not all right. Anyone can take a photograph, which is what we did. But it takes practice to make a piece of art, to capture something special."

In the picture, her hands, as light as her face, were a blur. "You moved your hands here," Madeline said. "The exposure takes a while. Any movement is picked up by the lens. The camera feeds back to you everything that happens in one quick moment of time. If you smile or frown, if you turn your head at a noise. That makes photographing children especially difficult. Most men don't have the patience for it, inventing ways of keeping children from wiggling about and ruining the shot, but I've made my living by it."

"What about your husband? Did he die, or do you wear mourning for someone else?"

Her aunt sniffed. "Not all of us are lucky enough to be in such a situation. And others are lucky never to have found ourselves in one. I count myself among the latter. And I wear black because it is simply easier than trying to get chemical stains out of frills and ruffles."

"But children?"

Madeline peered down at her niece. "I spend my days taking photographs of children." Mary was unsure whether this meant her aunt considered these photographed children to be a replacement for the ones she didn't have, or an excuse for why she didn't have them.

"Do you hope to have children one day?" Madeline asked.

Mary nodded.

"And what does Jonah have to say about it?"

Mary was puzzled. "Father never says anything about anything except for the garden."

"It's time that changed. He is so busy with sowing and reaping he doesn't take the time to appreciate his best bloom." And with that, Madeline placed the photograph of Mary on a shelf in the front room and went upstairs to tend to her brother-in-law.

#

1865

This late in the year, most of the flower beds were nearly bare. Some roses still clung to their thorny branches, and here and there a clump of chrysanthemums had avoided the worst of the early frosts. But most of the garden was dull green and brown, ready for the winter winds and snow. It was difficult to imagine the garden in spring, alive and full of colour, when it was so empty now. How did it happen? He knew how in a general scientific sense, but John wondered how it happened in a spiritual sense. How could there be something out of nothing? Colour out of brown and black and grey? As an artist, he knew brown and black and grey came out of colour, but not the other way around. He put paint on canvas and it stayed there for all time. To plant a garden only to have your imaginings go to rot would be maddening, he decided.

What was most maddening was that he could not find the door. He stood in the garden some way from the house and recalled his view of the dining room windows from the previous night, their shape and placement. He had heard everyone else inside at dinner, the sounds of talking and cutlery unmistakable even through the closed windows. He was in the right place, he was sure of it. But there was no wall with a dark wooden garden gate stuck in the middle of it. There were plenty of walls in the garden, to be sure. He walked from garden to garden along paths of brick, paths of stone, paths of gravel, paths of bark. One garden led to another, and on and on, until he found himself back where he started. There were plenty of doors from one garden to another, some of stretched and curled iron, others half-doors of wood pickets, and one of bent branches, bringing to mind the quaint charm of a cottager. But none was the dark door set into the stone wall he had seen in the eerie glow.

"Sir," a voice said behind him.

John whirled in place, startled. The gardener's daughter stood there, her hair beneath a bonnet, sleeves rolled up in spite of the day's chill, her plain dress covered in a dirt-smudged apron. She carried a basket of squash and sprouts. "Pardon me," she said.

He stood, staring at her.

"Can I help you, sir?"

"The garden, from last night. I cannot find it." He clenched the jewel in his hand, keeping his hand in his pocket. He couldn't show it to her, not here. But behind the garden's walls he would take the chance.

"You're in the garden, sir." She focused on the kitchen entrance just yards ahead.

He hurried in front of her and stopped, forcing her to come up short or risk running into him. "You found me, last night, in a garden behind a wall. You had a lantern and said something about your father. And then you pushed me out the door but stayed inside."

Mary's eyes shifted to the house and then back to John's face.

She sighed and turned, looking back over her shoulder to see if he was following. He had to jog to keep up with her along the paths and around corners until they stood in front of the red door set into a stone wall.

"Here it is. And now, I must hurry back. These are expected in the kitchen, and I have plenty more work to do." She pushed past him and disappeared around the corner, her skirts swinging behind her.

John, perplexed, didn't understand how he had missed the door. It wasn't covered over with ivy or hidden deep in shadows. He shrugged and pushed on the handle.

It didn't budge.

He rattled the handle, hoping it was just stuck. But it was locked.

John stepped back and studied the top of the wall. It wasn't that high, but he didn't see any way to climb it. He felt, for the hundredth time that morning, the solid weight of the blue jewel in his pocket. He had to get into the garden, to put the jewel back at the very least, where it could be found by someone else one day, or where he could "find" it. He would be a hero to Her Ladyship, relieved to have it back. Maybe the woman, in a fit of magnanimity, would gift it to him, and his future after leaving the estate would be more secure. *Maybe you'll wake up from this daydream and find a way into the garden. Your only future will be prison—and the poorhouse—if you don't get in*

there and get rid of this thing, he told himself. *But maybe, once in there, you'll remember what happened. And where those drawings came from.*

While he looked along the top of the wall, hoping to come up with an idea, John realised his guest room was on the same side of the house as the garden. In fact, it was possible he could see inside the garden from his room.

#

1858

After the first photograph beneath the pine tree, Madeline took full control of Mary's education. Reading, writing, and mathematics before dinner—during laundry or when scrubbing floors—and history, languages, and drawing in the kitchen while Madeline prepared supper. When there was time on Saturday, Madeline lectured her niece on natural sciences.

"What's the aim of teaching the girl Latin? And drawing?" Jonah asked one evening. He had recovered from his fever and gone back to the garden within days of Madeline's arrival. Mary thought her aunt would leave then, but the woman moved into the room beneath the rafters at the top of the house and claimed a small shed that opened into a corner in one of the smaller glasshouses as a more permanent workspace.

"All a girl needs is to cook and clean, watch the children, make clothes. The other gives her high ideas. I'll end up with a daughter who thinks she's the Little Lady in the Hall," Jonah continued, "too good to get her hands dirty."

Madeline put down the darning. "What is wrong with ideas? Lillian had ideas—"

"—I will thank you to leave my wife out of this."

"And I will thank you to remember that she was my sister. I see her fire in the girl. I don't plan on letting it go to waste, and neither should you."

"Nothing in a garden ever goes to waste," Jonah said, as a way to end the conversation. Madeline let it go, for the moment, and returned to sewing up the hole in a stocking. Her stitches were lumpy but passable, and she found herself running her finger over the raised bump of thread over and over. Something about the texture of it made her imagine how to photograph it, to show beauty in imperfection.

#

1861

Her aunt's tutoring left Mary more at odds with her life in the garden than before. She could read better than any of the apprentices her age, and picked up Latin more quickly than some journeymen, able to name every plant and tree in the garden. She was a passable seamstress and could cook enough to keep herself and her father—and whatever journeyman or gardener visited—fed. But at drawing she excelled.

When Mary was thirteen, her aunt went on a photography tour of the countryside for several months. She hitched the portable darkroom onto her back and left, leaving Mary instructions to work on a new drawing every week, keep up with her reading, and to write to her.

Not until her aunt was gone did Mary realise what it was she had missed all those years without a family. But she was smart enough, as the only girl among a male gardening team, to keep her tears to herself. She wrote to her aunt every week, sending the letters to a list of friends and acquaintances Madeline had left for her. She related happenings in the garden and house, gossip and stories the servants passed on—or she overheard. When she ran out of news about people, Mary described the garden to her aunt: the newest blossoms, the changes in the bedding plants, and what new ideas Father had for the coming seasons. And when she exhausted that line of information, Mary sent sketches to her aunt, showing her what was happening.

Madeline swept back in on the heels of a summer storm, cape and hat drenched, shoes muddy, carrying the same black pack and cases as before. The first thing she wanted to see were Mary's drawings.

"What is this one?" Madeline asked, holding out a drawing. "Where another might only smudge a few lines to indicate an overabundance of stamen or the pollen which has powdered the petals, you have shown patience far beyond your years in drawing each and every grain. I daresay, my nose itches at the pollen."

"That is Her Ladyship's *Lilium Candidum.*"

Madeline laid the drawing aside and studied her niece instead. "We will start you on chemical lessons. My darkroom is still set up?"

Mary nodded. She had kept it clean and dusted, waiting for her aunt's return.

"This Madonna Lily will be your first photograph, then. A belated birthday present."

Mary's chest went tight. The first photo she had ever been in was still tacked to the wall, and she ignored it most of the time as the mistake of a much younger girl. Being able to take a photograph, though, was a completely different thing. Having been born and raised in a garden, Mary often took for granted what surrounded her. The change of seasons was as mundane as the progression each day from breakfast to supper. Vegetables and fruit ripened, flowers bloomed, the leaves fell, naked branches were covered in snow, and then it all began again. To capture a moment in time and hold it forever, though, was magic. She could draw the moment, but it wasn't true. It was too easy to change a line to make a leaf more perfect, to subtract wilted petals. But taking a photograph meant showing the thing as it was, and holding it for all time. For as much as fourteen-year-old Mary could understand the notion, photography was forever.

#

1865

From his room, John could see into one corner of the enclosed garden. The view though the wavy glass wasn't perfect, but it would do. Later that night, he retired with the excuse that only in isolation could creativity flourish. He often liked to paint late at night with candles blazing and everything around him silent. But tonight he didn't set up his paints or change into a smock. Instead, he kept his room dark and pulled the drapes open a hand's width, hiding behind them to keep anyone outside from seeing his shape.

John kept watch while the house went to bed around him. He heard other guests and the family wish each other good night, and once the servants finished their final rounds, the house was still. He imagined being in the garden at night. A full moon shone down, inspiring in him the urge to capture the mystery of the grey-silver sheen of the sleeping garden. What animals—or other creatures—walked beneath the black trees in the moonlight? For all his belief in showing the world as it was, John couldn't leave behind his ancestors' superstition, knowing the world changed after the sun set.

She was no more than a shadow when he saw her steal across the garden. He wouldn't have noticed except for a flash in the darkness. Something she carried reflected a lone light up at him. He strained to make her out, but her shape disappeared

into the deep black shadows. And then the same flash, but fainter this time, winked at him from inside the enclosed garden.

So there was another key. Her Ladyship had lied. Or perhaps not. Otherwise, why would the gardener's girl be sneaking into the garden at night?

Because he could only see into the garden's corner, her movement across the space was over before he had a chance to get a good look at what she was doing. John stood by his window for over an hour that first night, waiting for her to come out of the gate. Nothing happened.

The next night, he waited at the window before the sun had fully set. The sky was a colour between peacock and indigo, with streaks that matched the jewel he'd barely let go of in days. John itched to paint the sky, but to turn away from the window meant missing her arrival. As he waited, he daydreamed, imagining her sliding into the garden in the velvet robes she wore when posing for him, the folds of the fabric glowing light and dark in the night, the gown whispering as it slid along the path behind her. Her hair was caught up in a jeweled comb, and gold rings on her fingers softly clicked together in the cold night air. But what did she do in the garden, in that dress? Tame the unicorn, soothe a lion, settle a man? And how did the garden look? Would the flowers be more perfect, brighter? Would a pure garden, a garden from the better past, smell different? And how to capture that scent in oils, drawing the viewer in to sniff at a bloom that, up close, is no more than a few slashes of paint?

John's musings were interrupted by a glimmering below. He recognised her by the way she walked, with a purpose and without the light step the house servants used to keep themselves invisible. If he were to paint only her, he would name the painting Marian or Magdalene, something poetic and historic. But in the garden she was a Mary: plain, hardworking. And right now, she was carrying a black case. She set it down on the path outside the enclosed garden's gate, and then set something down atop it. There. The reflection again. It came from what she had been carrying in her other hand. The light was almost gone, but John was sure she was carrying a camera of some kind, only it was smaller than any he had seen before. Where would a servant get that kit, he wondered? Perhaps she'd stolen it from the house.

And then she was inside the gate and gone from view. John dressed and went down to supper. After the meal, the men retired to the den smoke and drink.

"How's the new painting coming along, Seawell?" His Lordship's face was grey behind the cigar smoke.

“Swimmingly,” John answered. He grimaced to himself. Swimmingly? He’d never used that word before. Not ever. It felt preposterous coming out of his mouth. He knocked back his drink to hide his embarrassment.

“Splendid,” His Lordship answered, never asking for details. When they had first met, the Lord expressed concern that he might interrupt inspiration’s flow and thus ruin the end product. “Too many cooks and all that,” he would explain when Her Ladyship asked why he never questioned their more artistic guests.

“When will you show it?” some railway magnate from York asked. “I’m not interested in art as much as my wife, but she goes on about what a great investment it can be. As if she knows anything about money other than how to spend it.” The other men laughed and nodded their heads.

“It won’t be finished for a while yet.”

“How about a hint, Seawell?” The man prodded John in the ribs with an extended pinky finger. John flinched away, careful of the lit cigar so close to his best waistcoat. “Give me a little clue, something to tempt my wife with.”

John looked to His Lordship, wondering whether the man would show possession of a piece being painted under his own roof. But His Lordship was at his leisure, his feet up on a small tufted footstool.

“I’m exploring dreams. And the past.”

His Lordship spoke up from his spot near the fire. “I was under the impression that your metier was capturing real life, Seawell. The peasantry, the workers. How did Brant put it in his latest review? ‘The gritty toil of the fields’?”

“I’m exploring a new path, M’Lord. Art is all about finding something new in the world you look at every day.”

“What’s new about the past, Seawell?”

The railway tycoon interrupted. “According to my wife, art is all about making something that someone would pay for. And for her, that’s something pretty to look at.”

“Your wife is wrong,” John explained. The man’s eyebrows met above the bridge of his nose and he opened his mouth, but John didn’t give him a chance to respond. “Art is about emotion, about pushing the viewer to feel something. I express myself on the canvas, and you see it and feel what I was feeling, whether it’s angry or sad, joyful or jealous.”

“Or lustful,” His Lordship said. A smirk passed from face to face around the room. John thought of the men’s wives in another room with Her Ladyship and tried to

imagine what the men themselves imagined. But all he could see was Mary in his dreams, in the garden in velvets, her hair caught up in thorns.

"But what if I don't feel what the painter intends? What if he is unsuccessful?" the man asked.

"Is it the artist that is unsuccessful in that case? Can we blame him for a viewer's failings?"

His Lordship laughed. "Touché, Seawell."

The railway magnate muttered into his drink, and talk turned to His Lordship's plans for a rail line from the local station directly to the estate to bring in the coal required to keep the glasshouses warm.

#

He waited for her every night. Some nights she arrived at the garden in time for him to watch her unlock the gate and walk inside before he had to be downstairs for dinner. Other nights she never showed up. He never saw her leave the garden, but when he was lucky enough to see her in the daytime, carrying vegetables or flowers to the kitchens or walking to and fro on her errands, he studied her. She never looked tired or drawn. She was always as she had been—plain, silent, a touch stern.

Drawing her when he was awake wasn't as simple as he'd thought it would be. Even the painting he had started didn't look like her. Not any more. Not like the woman in his dreams. John had spent weeks, months, studying the whores and beggars on the streets of London and Liverpool, capturing every wrinkle and scar. Mary should be easy. She had barely lived, hidden away in the garden all her life. What could her face be hiding? But night after night he ended up with a pile of torn and crumpled sketches. They were all too simple. In those drawings she looked like any girl anywhere, someone no one would ever notice.

So he decided to paint her instead, but this time from memory. Skip the drawings and go right for the oils. Maybe she had to be in colour, her flesh brought to life with shadow and highlight.

He started by sketching directly on the canvas. First what he could see from his window of the garden behind the wall. It was bare, as October ran to November. Maybe, he thought, that was the point—to paint her as she was and not as he had initially hoped her to be. John rather liked the idea of painting her surrounded by dry brown stalks and rotting leaves. He only ever saw her in the garden, and she was a part of its upkeep.

Painting her as a part of it appealed to his aesthetic. The moon in his painting, a sickly yellow-grey, would illuminate the winter garden. He could show her surrounded by death, trying to photograph the darkness. She wore a long black dress with her face and hands, the only parts of her skin uncovered, floating, glowing, in the night. A few white blossoms here and there, their colour reflected in the camera's lens and similar to Mary's skin, would highlight the fact she was mortal and her youth would fade as would theirs. What would her subject be? John toyed with the idea of showing her working on a self-portrait. Too obscure, he decided. That appealed to him, being purposely abstract, but he needed a piece to sell and the fashion was for something the viewer could grasp and hold onto.

He approached Her Ladyship again, hoping she didn't blame him still for the trick with the rose.

"At night?" she asked. Her Ladyship, in a blue day-dress covered in a lady's gardening smock, complete with colourful embroidery along every edge, was busy directing a pair of apprentices in the conservatory.

"Yes, I wish to study the garden at night."

She didn't act at all as if she had heard his answer. "That one there." She pointed at something that seemed to be a tree. It was spindly, taller than the boys, with jagged teeth pointing all along its limbs, daring a touch. She directed them to move its pot, a monstrous green and white thing painted with fat pink cherubs, to the opposite corner. She did not say please. "A young *Araucaria araucana,*" she announced.

At John's lack of response, she filled him in. "A monkey puzzle tree. From Chile. Hill insists it can survive outside, but I will keep it alive in the conservatory until the South American garden is planted, where it will have pride of place."

"Where will that garden be?" He hoped a show of interest in her diversions would help, not that he could in any way imagine Her Ladyship planting anything, or even ever touching dirt herself.

"Beyond the stumpery, I should think. Have you been there? It's positively frightful," she said with a smile. "The perfect place to visit in the dark for artistic inspiration, I should think."

"Yes, M'Lady." He resisted tugging at his sleeves to make himself more formal, presentable. "You did suggest I find inspiration in the garden."

She turned the full energy of her attention on the artist. "I'll send word to Hill. He can assign an apprentice to assist you."

"I don't need any help. I plan to take a lantern and a sketchbook—"

“He can answer any questions you may have.” She motioned with a pair of secateurs for the boys to move the pot a bit more to the right. “And,” she said, returning her attention to John, “I expect to see the piece you have been working on. Soon. I look forward to an authentic reimagining of the medieval garden, something to hang in the dining room. It is a shame that I was not able to plant the flowery mead inside the enclosed garden, where it belongs, you must agree.”

He risked a slight nod, sure she could smell that damn rose on him again, or that his pocket would magically lose stitches and the jewel would fall to the floor where it would ring against the tiles.

“Yes.” She turned away to direct the boys again, bringing the conversation to an end. “An assistant. To be sure you do not get lost.”

#

1864

Madeline left for another tour when Mary was sixteen. As when her aunt had left on other trips, Mary sent letters to a list of addresses, only occasionally receiving a written reply. When the date of Madeline’s expected return passed with no word from the woman, no one worried. While she moved from chore to chore, Mary found herself looking at the paths, the roads, the hills on the horizon—as far as she could see, to be the first to spy her aunt’s return.

“A parcel has arrived for you, Mr. Hill,” an apprentice said as he entered the main shed. “I was up at the Hall getting the day’s orders.”

Mary was in the adjoining shed updating the seeds lists. She didn’t hear her father’s reply. There was the sound of twine being cut and then paper ripping. And then silence.

“Mary!” her father called.

She set down the ledger, expecting to be told to collect the package and organise the seed order. What she didn’t expect was to find Father standing, silent, with a slip of paper in his hand, Madeline’s camera case—for Mary would know that wooden case anywhere, even in the dark—on the table in front of him.

“Here.” He handed her the card. She was afraid to take it, afraid it meant never again would Aunt Madeline come flapping up the road, her darkroom on her back, her camera case in one hand and small bag in another, trailing her chemical smell behind

her. There was too much still for Mary to learn, she knew. And no way to leave the garden to learn it. Madeline had to bring the world to her.

For Lily Marie.

That was it. Mary turned the note over, looking for more. She looked beneath the case, then opened it, sure there had to be more than that, sure Aunt Madeline wouldn't leave her without some instructions. Without a good-bye.

"Did you get word and not tell me?"

Jonah just shrugged. "I've heard nothing. She and I weren't exactly regular correspondents, as you know."

"But she lived with us. She wasn't a stranger. She's my aunt. She's our *family*."

"Madeline has always been for Madeline, ever since I first met her. If she wanted a family, she'd have one." He turned back to his drawings and catalogues, ignoring his daughter's tears.

And that was the end of Aunt Madeline.

Mary stored the camera case beneath her bed. She couldn't stand the thought of using it, could barely even look at it. She loved the camera, the freedom she felt when taking photographs, but she loved her aunt more. She'd have gladly never taken another photograph if it meant having Madeline back. So she turned her back on it and answered the garden's call, with its weeding and digging, thinning out and planting. When Jonah asked her to help him with a drawing a plan for a new bedding design, she just said, "I don't have time for that sort of thing." She kept herself busy, ignored such frivolities as reading and history and drawing. And photography.

One day, months later, another package arrived, again addressed to Jonah, and again containing a single sheet of paper with a single line: *For Lily Marie.* This time it was a set of glass plates wrapped in soft black cloth and a wooden crate with separate compartments, a collection of bottles of the chemicals needed to prepare and develop the plate negatives. Atop the bottles was a package of fine paper, perfect for prints.

"Cost a pretty penny, that did," Jonah said. Mary agreed silently. "I may have a word with His Lordship, ask if he knows a gentleman who has taken up the hobby."

Until that second, Mary hadn't thought much about the camera beyond what it represented. But the threat of her father selling it made her feel she would lose Aunt Madeline all over again.

"No."

"Once you are married and in a house and with children of your own, you won't have time for this foolishness. You don't have time for it *now*." Jonah picked up and

dropped a catalogue, upsetting Mary's favourite ginger cat, which loped out the open door. "Just like a woman," he said quietly enough that anyone else would think he was speaking to himself. Mary knew better. "They walk in and out of a man's life with no thought of what they're doing."

"No," she said again, as an answer to everything.

Jonah and his daughter studied one other then. He wasn't a big man. The young journeymen always seemed bigger, but that was probably as a result of their youth and energy. Her father looked not so much physically thin as spiritually pared down, as if he was no more substantial than a poppy petal. She wondered what he thought about, here in his sheds or out in the gardens while he worked. Beyond discussing garden plans, they didn't talk together much. Mary didn't underestimate him; he scared his undergardeners, of course. But she knew, in the way children who grow up under the shadow of a parent's pain unmistakably and quietly know, that he was brittle like cold glass. When Aunt Madeline had first appeared and told Mary her true name, she had decided not to insist on being called Lily out of respect for her father. But she held onto the fact with the same tenderness you cradle a baby bird that's fallen from its nest.

Mary held out the card with her name written on it. "No," she said one last time. "This is all mine. She sent it to *me*." He lowered his eyes.

She gathered up the plates and paper, put the lid back on the crate of bottles, and stored it all in a corner of the darkest shed. And there the collection stayed for many weeks. Mary caught sight of the crate on a daily basis. It was always there, like the piles of dirt-smeared seed catalogues and horticultural journals, something to see but not look closely at. Mary was waiting for something to photograph. She was afraid of wasting a plate, of discovering she hadn't thought out the shadows and light and composition. Of ending up with another photograph like that first one of her in front of the trees. She didn't know where her aunt had gone, but she wanted to have something to show Madeline if she ever came back—something to make her proud.

#

1865

Mary wished, not for the first or last time, for Aunt Madeline. She would know a shortcut, a trick as quick as magic, to what Mary was trying to produce. Yet there would

have been no way to explain to her aunt why, so perhaps it was better Mary was on her own just now.

It was past nine o'clock and all was dark and silent except for the chirrup here and there of a grasshopper. Mary knew her way along every path and around every corner. She missed the late-blooming moonflowers and Casablanca lilies, for their silver-blue glow was a welcome sight in the black garden, keeping her company on her nights behind the high walls. She knew that, soon, she'd have to give up her experiments—for that's was what she called them, as if she were a scientist like those Madeline had told her about—at least until spring. It would be too cold for the glass plates and the chemicals, which was too bad, for soon the family would leave for the season in London, giving Mary more freedom, but there was no avoiding the weather. Mary kept a running list in her head of things she would attempt once she was stuck in the sheds and glasshouses for the winter.

Again she wished Aunt Madeline were here, not so much for company—though Mary would welcome that—but to answer her hundreds of questions. Madeline had given her a small book, *The Gentleman Beginner's Manual to Photography* by C. Henry Wilcott, but C., whom Mary thought of as Charles, seemed never to have taken a photograph of a living thing in his life. While she ignored his inability to imagine a woman taking up the activity, she could not fault his thorough attention to procedure. A photograph of the author himself had been included in the frontispiece, where he peered out at the beginners reading his book with a look of smugness that bordered on obscene—Aunt Madeline would have definitely had something to say about that, Mary was sure. But he seemed to be so in love with the sound of his own voice, using twenty words when five would suffice, that Mary imagined Charles Henry's glass plates would have dried long before he had finished fussing over his subjects. He never got to the point.

As she pulled the key from her pocket and turned to unlock the gate, a flash of light high up and to her left drew her attention. Mary thought she saw movement behind a curtain on the second story, where a lamp's soft glow shone around the edges of the drawn drapes. The other windows on that floor were all dark. She stared at the house and waited so long that the shape of the Hall against the night sky began to shift, its edges dissolving like a lump of sugar in tea. It stopped being a house and became, for a moment, something breathing. Mary blinked and the walls regained their sharpness.

She unlocked the gate, set the camera case down in the garden and locked the door behind her. After that artist had found his way inside the garden, Mary knew she

had to be more careful. Being caught out in the gardens at night would get her in enough trouble with Father (never mind what he would do if he found out she had stolen his key), but Mary shuddered to think what Her Ladyship would do were she to find out not only that the gardener's daughter was in the gardens at night but that there was a second key. Her father had never told her particularly to keep the key a secret; in fact, Mary did not think he knew that she was aware it even existed. But what head gardener doesn't have a key to every locked gate within his domain?

Once safely inside the enclosed garden, Mary set up the camera and lit the lantern. She knew anyone looking down into the garden would see the lamp's glow, but, being careful to keep to the side of the garden closest to the Hall, Mary knew no one could see her. And, she knew, Her Ladyship would be busy with the guests until long after Mary had packed up and left the garden. She was safe for a while.

Quickly, Mary set up the washes and plates, then dimmed the lamp and set to work. Tonight she was going to try something new. She turned the lamp up a bit, fiddled with the lens to get the focus right, and replaced the lens cap. Once the prepared glass plate was set into the camera, she removed the lens cap, counted to ten, turned the lamp down all the way, and continued to count. Five minutes later, Mary replaced the lens cap and set to work developing the negative. She would make an albumen copy the following day, but she wanted the plate ready. Father's demands on her time didn't give Mary much freedom to sneak off.

"What good will it do you, to know how to use that contraption?" he had asked one night, not long after the camera had arrived. "You'll not go traipsing around the country like that old crow."

Mary knew better than to argue. She also knew better than to flaunt her activities under Father's nose. So she kept her camera work to herself, only hanging a photograph or two of flowers and trees in the front room of the house. He didn't seem to mind, as long as Mary wrote the Latin name of each specimen on the print. That way, it was work and not useless play.

After doing a five-minute exposure, Mary tried a ten-minute one, only using the lamp for twenty seconds. The sounds of cutlery being set for breakfast the next morning came to her, very faintly, through a dining-room window. It must be the tall dark-haired footman, George, who liked to air the room out at night. Mary hopped up on a bench placed along the garden wall and peeked over. The lights in the conservatory blazed, drawing moths from all over the grounds. Her Ladyship would be a while yet, giving

Mary time for one final try. She set about to do a thirty-minute exposure, with a sixty-second light at the beginning and halfway through.

Mary gathered thirty pebbles from the path into her apron and dropped one for each minute counted. The grass smelled cold and wet, like the grotto, which got her thinking about Madeline again. Twenty-five pebbles. They had never tried night photography together. C. Henry didn't mention it, and Mary had read the book twice, to be sure. Twenty pebbles. A barn cat appeared at the top of the wall, its inky silhouette backlit by the dining-room lamps. Mary unfolded herself and ran towards him. "Shoo," she said. "If I find out tomorrow you walked through my photo, I'll flatten you with a broom." It was difficult to sound menacing when whispering, but the cat hopped away and Mary returned to her wait, guessing where she was in the count.

Mary almost dropped the twenty-eighth pebble too early when voices, rather loud ones, called out. Had the artist got lost again? She was safe this time, though. The gate was locked. But if they wandered too far and Father or another gardener heard it, Mary might be found out.

She dropped the rest of the pebbles and kept up her count, listening for the voices again. As quickly as she could with no light—for to turn up the lamp would be to draw attention to her—Mary poured developer across the plate and waited as long as she dared before washing it in the water left in the pan she kept hidden in the garden for this purpose. She immersed it in the last bath and then washed it with water again. The voices rose again, and Mary guessed they were near the Japanese garden, which gave her enough time to get back to the kitchen garden before they could block her path. She didn't have enough time to wait for the plate to dry, and didn't dare pack it with the others. One-handed, Mary packed up what she could, closed the camera case, and hurried to the gate, balancing all of her kit.

She dropped the plate.

"Damn." *Ladies do not speak in that manner,* she could hear Aunt Madeline say.

I'm not a lady, Aunt, she replied.

Mary turned the lamp up the tiniest bit, enough that she could see the broken plate in the glow. Luckily, it hadn't shattered. She didn't know how she would have arranged to steal Father's key in the daytime to clean up tiny shards of glass. Mary stashed each of the three pieces in a different pocket so they wouldn't clank against one another.

She didn't see the curtain move in the window on the second story of the house as she rushed away.

#

It rained for a week. Steady, cold, flooding November rain. Mary wished for snow. At least if it snowed the world would be bright even without sun, giving her enough light to make prints. Making prints wasn't necessary for her to "see" what the camera had captured, but it was easier to believe when the images were closer to life rather than the backward way they were on the negatives. But the clouds hung low and dark, and so she waited.

She was tired of waiting. She felt she'd been waiting her whole life for something. For her mother to reappear. For Father to listen to her. For something to happen beyond the seasons changing and the gardeners doing the same things in the same order since she was born—and as they would do until she died. When Aunt Madeline arrived with her camera, she had fired up the hope in Mary that there was more. And there was more: more learning, more discovery of her own abilities. And then Madeline left. And Mary was left waiting again.

The rain fell so heavily against the glasshouse roof that water ran off by the bucketful. Treetops were black skeletons towering overhead, their leafless branches reaching out to tap on the glass and scare her into moving. One under-gardener passed by, unrecognisable in the downpour with his coat pulled over his head. She turned back to the small table Father had allowed Madeline to set up in the corner all those years ago.

Everything in Mary's life happened on the garden's time. It went in circles, but she could feel herself like an arrow, going straight, no curving back on herself. She was tired of being. She wanted to start doing.

"That's it." Her voice was hollow in the greenhouse, which was empty but for dusty rows of pots and dried leaves that had drifted into corners and avoided the broom. A spider dropped down on a whisper-thin thread of silk and dangled in Mary's line of sight. "It's time to stop waiting," she said to the spider as it set about building its web.

The next morning dawned bright and dry, and Mary was in the glasshouse before Father could give her a list of chores. The cleaning and cooking could wait, and there were cold pies for his breakfast. She had work of her own to do.

The chickens had given up eggs easily, and there were plenty left that no one would notice Mary's theft of three. She mixed the albumen solution and prepared her paper, impatient at waiting for it to dry. As soon as the sheets lost the wet shine, she

grabbed them from the line and ran to the darkest shed, dipped them in silver nitrate poured in a tray, and pinned them up to dry again. She paced in the dark until returning to the glasshouse to develop her prints. Making a negative was exciting, but making the prints was always Mary's favourite part of the process. It wasn't anything to her until it was on paper.

The first of the three plates turned out a dark negative. The print was all shadow and no clear lines. The second plate was better. She could just make out bits of frostburned flowers and a pair of bright eyes, low under an evergreen shrub's branches. As she watched the two prints dry on the line where she'd pinned them, Mary unwrapped the pieces of the third plate from the bit of cloth she had stored them in. She laid them on the table and pieced them together. It wasn't as clean a break as she had thought, and slivers of glass were missing. But there was still enough there to see. She almost wished she could close her eyes and unsee the negative and then open them again when the print was done. She wanted the thrill of the unveiling, the shock of going from nothing to something in half a breath.

Mary's hands shook as she placed the paper beneath the glass. To distract herself, she puttered about and tidied the shelves, sweeping up the last of the leaves. The spider's web was her clock, ticking off the minutes until she could open her eyes and see what she'd captured. Her mind, however, was too full of images for these quiet moments to be empty.

"See this line here." Aunt Madeline's thin finger had followed the edge of the Madonna lily. "It's crisp, a true reckoning of life." It was the fifth plate Mary had taken of the lily. Madeline had showed her some tricks of focus and distance, how to look at the composition in pieces rather than as a whole. The first four plates had resulted in failures.

"They are not failures," Madeline had insisted. "It's called learning."

And then, on the fifth, the lily took on the shape and presence of a flower. Mary wanted to lean close and smell its sweet scent. She longed to step into the photograph and touch its soft petals, rub the pollen on her fingers. It was right here, but far away. "A dream lily," Mary whispered.

Aunt Madeline had turned then and taken Mary's face in her hands, much like that first day she had arrived in Mary's life. "And that, dear girl, is it. A photograph is real life, and it is a dream. And your task as a photographer is to give people the reality they say they want and the make-believe they don't know they long for."

It was that word: your. *Your task as a photographer,* Madeline had said. Before that moment, Mary had never thought learning to use the camera was anything more than another item on Madeline's list of Mary's education. Reading, arithmetic, history, photography. Something any girl with an aunt who owned a camera would learn, and something she would take with her into a marriage and maybe one day teach to her own children. But then Madeline connected your and task and photographer. In that very moment, Mary became more than a gardener's girl.

The spider had finished its web and was sitting dead centre, waiting on an unsuspecting fly. Mary opened the glasshouse door to let in any insect that might still be alive. "Good luck. To both of us." She crossed the room, lifted the plate pieces, and inspected the print to ascertain whether it was dark enough before dipping it in the tray of sodium thiosulfate to fix it.

The door behind her opened and a gust of cold wind came in and sent a tremor through the spider. Mary dropped the print on the table and spun around. The artist stood in the doorway, water dripping from his hair and onto the tiled floor.

"If you're looking for my father, he is in the main potting shed most likely."

The artist wandered along the planting tables, picking up and putting down pots, sticking his finger into soil. "This one is dry," he said and peered at the glasshouse roof. "You could just crank those windows open to water everything."

"What do you want?" Several tables stood between them, but he moved with purpose. He wasn't visiting.

"I've been watching you."

Outside, two journeymen pushed their wheelbarrows past the glasshouse in a hurry to get to the sheds. Although the year was winding down and winter was on their heels, there was never any lack of work. Word was that guests were suddenly expected at the house within the week, delaying the family's departure to London, so rooms were being opened and cleaned. The news that His Lordship was preparing a hunting expedition with a possible future son-in-law had sent all the housemaids wondering what the young gentleman looked like. Mary, however, was only curious about where the couple would start their new life together and whether she had enough time left in the walled garden. Ignorant of her worry, the gardeners went about their work and didn't glance her way and, if they had, they wouldn't have seen anything but Mary up to her strange solitary pursuits and one of the guests visiting. She didn't dare call out and let him see she was afraid. And she didn't dare rush out and leave the photos and plates behind.

Mary laughed, the sound as weak as a frost-burned seedling. “I’m the gardener’s girl, with dirty nails and the smell of manure about me. There are plenty of other girls here to attract attention.”

“But none that are out in the garden. The walled garden. At night.” He kept moving along the tables, slowly but with her as a goal. Mary positioned herself in front of her work, leaned back against the table, and crossed her arms as Aunt Madeline would do when disarming Jonah. Mary couldn’t go anywhere, but she could put up a defence just the same.

“Of course I’m out in the gardens at all hours. Before dawn, after dusk. Whenever there is work to be done.”

He stopped across from her and put his hands in his pockets. One long table stood between them. “Work with a camera?” He smiled. *Like the cat who ate the cream,* Mary thought. He was close enough to see what was on the prints pinned up near her head. “They don’t look like much.”

Mary returned his stare. “You are a painter. What do you know of photography?”

“I know art.”

She resisted the urge to shrug. “We could argue the definition of art.”

He gripped the edge of the table and leaned forward, and she could hear water drip from him onto the flagstones. “And what do you know of art, gardener’s daughter?”

Oh, Aunt Madeline, that you were here now. She clenched her hands into fists beneath her arms to still the shaking, from fear or anger she wasn’t sure. “You have the advantage as I have never seen your work, sir,” she said. “Tell me, what makes your paintings art? Is it that you say they are, or that others do?”

Before Mary could move, John was around the last table and in front of her. He smelled of alcohol and a heavy, sweet scent reminiscent of pudding that she recognised from Aunt Madeline’s habit of a nightly dose of Gee’s Linctus for her lungs. He also smelled of wet wool and unwashed male, but a closed-in sort of body smell, unlike the smells of Father and the other men who spent their days outside, sweating through honest labor. A scabbed cut beneath the stubble on his jawline showed where he’d cut himself when last he shaved.

“What happened that night in the garden?” He held her gaze with his. She rarely looked into a man’s eyes and was surprised to find herself studying his. They were

somewhere between blue and green with small flecks of amber, the middle an impossibly tiny black circle. How difficult would it be to photograph an eye?

"What happened that night?" he repeated, drawing her back into the moment.

"Nothing."

He held his hand out to her and opened his fingers. "Then explain this."

When she reached out to touch the jewel he pulled his hand back. "I woke up in the dirt, you pushed me out of the gate, and when I was at supper I found this in one pocket. In the other was a rose that doesn't grow anywhere in the garden." "What species?" Mary asked.

"What does it matter?"

"If you can tell me which species I can tell you whether the rose came from the garden. Who told you it didn't?"

He snorted and gnawed on his bottom lip. "Her Ladyship. So how did I end up with it? I wake up from some sort of spell in a supposedly locked garden and you're there."

"I didn't put those things in your pockets."

"Then who did? I can't remember anything that happened that night. I can't get back in that garden. But you can," he said. "I've been watching you. I know you go in there after dark. You are going to take me in there. I need to remember."

John's eyes darted beyond her shoulder. "Who is this?" He picked up the print from the table.

"My father." It was so very easy to lie and tell the truth at the same time.

He studied the print. "I've seen your father, and this is him. But unless you got that camera when you were an infant, there is no way you took this photograph."

And, once again, Mary wished Madeline was there. Her aunt would have known how to distract the man, convince him with explanations about shadows and light that what he saw in the photograph wasn't what he thought it was. But, Mary wondered, would Madeline have used that same logic to talk her niece out of her flights of imagination? Mary believed what she saw. She wanted someone else to believe it, too, to prove to herself that what she had done was real, and not some parlour trick like she'd heard about from the parties in the Hall.

He rolled the jewel in his hand, its blue the most vivid colour in the grey day. Looking away from it even for a second was like shutting a door on a final sunset.

"One moment." She rummaged in a box beneath the table before coming back up holding a small sheaf of prints.

The first thing John saw was a dark blur, a man in evening clothes, his features fuzzy. The next photo was of himself, wearing his best suit, eyes wide, face frozen in shock. Around him, around the shadow he cast, the garden glowed with a strange light. "I look—" he whispered, "I look like I have seen a ghost."

"Ghosts." It came out as a sigh. "You were too scared to speak."

He shuffled through the other photographs, half a dozen in all. In each, he stood, arms at his sides, facing into the camera. No comfortable pose. No interaction with his surroundings. Not even a look of quiet dignity. Just fear.

He shook his head. "I don't understand."

She took the prints from him, set them down on the table and spread them out. "Don't look at yourself."

He leaned close to the photos and studied them, one by one, much as Mary imagined he studied paintings in a gallery, to see how the artist had laid down colours and created textures on a flat surface. As he pulled away from the table, she knew the images in the photographs were becoming as clear as the blue of the jewel.

Behind him in the first photo a woman kneeled in the dirt beneath the wall. She was no more than an outline, faint and transparent. In another, a man with dark hair stood with a second man, this one with white hair, possibly wearing a wig—the edges of his head glowed like a halo. Their features weren't clear, but they seemed to be speaking. Every photo showed John standing near—and sometimes in—another figure.

"Show me the plates." His words were all hiss and spit.

Mary took each glass plate from its wrapping and laid them out on the table next to their respective prints. "See here," she pointed to the shadowy figures in the first one. "The figures all match. I haven't altered the photographs."

He picked up a plate and turned it every which way, studying it in the dim light while the rain continued to drum on the glasshouse. "You could have altered the plate."

"How? I'm no painter."

He shrugged and set the plate down, his eyes moving from plate to photograph and back. He spoke without looking at her. "Did they hurt me? Is that why I fainted?" Mary shook her head. "I don't know what happened to you. But I've never seen this many at any one time."

He turned to her then, more shocked by what she said than by what he had just seen in the photos. "This is what you do in that garden every night? Take photographs of ghosts?" He whispered the final word, too, as if afraid of being overheard.

She nodded her head, afraid of admitting aloud that there was one ghost she specifically wanted. One that hadn't yet appeared.

#

There was nothing for it. She had to go to the garden. She'd promised.

Mary pulled on stockings beneath her shift, careful not to tread too loudly. Father was a light sleeper, especially when he was worried about the garden. And this week one of the glasshouses—not the one she used for printing, thank goodness—had sustained some damage due to freezing temperatures, and dozens of Her Ladyship's prized orchids had died. Talk among the gardeners was of a train track coming right to the house. Mary shook her head at the folly of people who believed all it took to trick nature was more and more money. But Father's—and her—life depended on such silliness.

Stop dilly-dallying, she told herself, shivering in the dark. *It's only winter.* It was past midnight but still several hours from dawn. Her dress was cold when she pulled it over her shift, but it soon warmed to her body heat. Mittens, cloak, scarf. She piled on the clothes, knowing how cold it would be in the garden. She prayed it wasn't too cold for the chemicals. The painter was expecting to be gone before Christmas, so this may be their final chance.

Downstairs, the hook near the front door was empty. The key was missing. Mary checked Father's boots and found the key inside one, his hiding place for when he was distracted. As silently as possible she lifted the door latch and let herself outside. The cold was like falling into a frozen lake. Her lungs burned with it. Her nose filled with frost. There was no way the chemicals would work under such conditions, but she had to try at least.

The bothy and sheds were all dark, but Mary didn't need a candle or lantern. She felt her way through the potting shed by memory and found the camera case. Then into the gardens and along the paths. The grass crunched underfoot and would leave tracks, but she didn't dare step on the gravel where the snap of her boots on the surface would echo in such cold, waking up anyone within shouting distance.

Being so used to going to the garden alone, she almost screamed when John appeared out of the shadows and at her side as she approached the locked gate.

"I've been waiting out here for an age. What took so long?"

Mary took a deep breath to still the shivering in her torso, but then her teeth started to chatter. She clamped her lips shut for a moment and willed herself to be still and get used to the cold. “You didn’t have to sneak out of your father’s house.”

“You should try to get out of there without anyone hearing.” He pointed at the Hall. “The place is crawling with servants.” “You

make them sound like insects.”

He had the good sense not to respond.

She unlocked the garden gate and they were inside. In a few moments, Mary had set up the camera and prepped a glass plate. Not knowing what to expect, she’d brought all the plates that remained in the box.

“What do you want me to do?” he asked, unused to being the subject of someone else’s focus.

“I want you to remember.” She turned up the lamp, enough to throw the edges of the garden into shadow and illuminate both herself and John in a circle of light. She placed the camera near the sundial and faced it towards the back wall. “This was what it was like, that night.”

John shrugged, a gesture all but lost because of how much he was bouncing from foot to foot to keep warm. “I remember waking up in the dirt, nothing else.”

“Go,” she said. “Out of the gate, I mean. Come back in as if it were that night. Try to remember.” She unlocked the gate for him and went back to the camera.

He closed it behind him and tried to put himself back in that night. He closed his eyes and saw the glowworms, felt the soft breeze. He’d been painting that day and had scrubbed his hands so much they were raw. When he opened his eyes, the lamp light glowed above the wall, as it had weeks before. It beckoned him inside.

John pushed the black-red gate open and stepped into the walled garden.

The girl stood behind a camera, her arm stretched around to the front, grasping the lens cap.

Behind her a woman kneeled in the dirt, her hair hidden beneath an oldfashioned linen hair covering and a wide-brimmed hat atop that, her eyes on him.
“Edmund,” a voice said. “Edmund Vale.” The woman’s mouth moved but the voice, faint and far away, lagged a second behind. Another figure, this one reminiscent of the portraits in the Hall, paced around the kneeling woman. She whooshed back and forth, her edges bright but blurry. John couldn’t get out of the way fast enough, and she moved through him. His teeth chattered harder, from the cold or from being inhabited, he wasn’t sure.

"Stay with me." Mary's voice hard and present. He could barely see her, but she was solid still, unlike the figures that surrounded them. "What are you remembering?"

"Don't you see this? Watch out, there's one right behind you."

Mary shook her head. "I can't see them." She replaced the glass plate in the camera with another, removed the lens cap again, and bent to finish setting the plate she'd removed.

"I remember hearing them. One said her name was Joan." He paused. "Do you know who she is?" He didn't wait for an answer, but instead looked around. There were more figures, layered atop one another in some spots. A girl with short hair in trousers and tall boots. A woman in a tall white wig. A man in a long coat with his hair pulled back. A pair of little girls in simple, short dresses, grasping hands and spinning in a circle. Two men fighting while a pregnant woman watched. And among them, the garden grew and died back, white vines sprouted and wound their way up the walls and crept and spread out on the brick. Rose bushes made of light bloomed, and dropped petals that mounded on the grass like drifts of snowflakes. Ghost trees strained their skeleton branches to the sky. It all whirled around him and he stood, still as the statues in the great hall, mute with fear and amazement.

"Tell me what you're seeing," Mary called to him.

But he didn't answer, because he was on the ground, a dark lump like an upturned grave. Mary turned him over, and the jewel rolled out of his gloved hand. His eyes were open. "Tell me. What did you see?"

"You tell me," a voice said. Mary spun round to find Her Ladyship and the young Lady, her stepdaughter, standing at the gate.

#

John Alexander Seawell's name was on everyone's lips for a season. Her Ladyship took full responsibility, explaining she had inspired him by denying him access to her favourite garden. "People will do anything to discover a secret," she said.

"What was the secret?" her friends asked.

A sly smile would cross her lips. "I'll never say."

His exhibit of "Garden Gothics," as Archer Brant dubbed them, drew mobs. When asked what inspired him, he had a speech about shadow and light and the new art of photography, placed against the dreams of the past. And his models? His muse? "The garden and its workers, bringing life out of decay and death."

Some papers found the paintings too disturbing for public consumption and only described them in vague language, which just brought more people to see them and gasp at the painted flowers with eyes and faces nearly hidden in the shrubbery's dark recesses. The papers obsessed over one subject, a young woman named Lily, who was in every painting. Here a climbing rose had caught her up in its branches, the thorns pulling at her skin while she tried to escape; in another, she reached out to a figure in white, pleading for love or forgiveness or mercy, none could decide.

The following season, John produced a set of paintings for the academy that were never exhibited after being judged too obscene. The season after, he produced one while in a sanatorium for his health. Brant bought it, sight unseen, "to help a friend" he wrote in a letter to John. He hung the piece in the darkest corner of his house behind a black drape with a red cord and was asked about it often. On nights when he entertained, at least one young lady would end up laid out on the sofa, limp from shock at what she saw. Years later the painting was sold to pay debts and, some say, it ended up in an opium den, and from there no one knows.

She never saw the Garden Gothics. As quickly as she could the following day, after John was taken into the house and the doctor called, Lily Marie—once called Mary—made as many prints as she could before Her Ladyship had the plates destroyed. Lily sent one set of prints to John and locked one set away.

When she left to follow Aunt Madeline's list of addresses, she hitched the portable darkroom on her back, packed very little aside from the camera and a change of clothes, and took only one print with her: John lies on the grass, Lily Marie a blur above him as she moves to roll him over; behind them, a younger Aunt Madeline stands in the garden with a woman of similar features who is shorter and softer than Madeline and holds a bundle in her arms.

When Mary asked Jonah one final time about her mother, he shrugged and shook his head. "I lost her in the garden," is all he would say.

March 1941

Irene Beamer strode across the field, a shovel in her hand. She had digging to do. Her job was important—nay, vital. *The country depends on you,* the voice over the wireless implored when asking for volunteers for the Women's Land Army. This army's troops were necessary to bring the country through this dark time. With her fellow soldiers, she was part of the homefront's front lines. A force of good. A force of right. A force of plenty. She was a Land Girl.

“That’s good. Right there,” the director called out. “Stop! Now lift the shovel and put it over yer shoulder. Yer *other* shoulder, the right one. Yeah, like one a our boys. Now face into the sun, I want your face all golden. Beautiful. Okaaaaaaay, cut!”

Irene slumped, wanting to drop the shovel. It was her fourth take, and she knew by now not to move until the director said to. Being yelled at once—for walking out of camera range and sitting down on the tractor runner—had been one time too many. She wanted to climb into the truck cab to warm up. Her face might have been golden, but her lips were blue and her fingers burned. Out in the open fields it felt more like winter than early spring.

“Whatcha waitin’ for, Christmas?” His voice was hoarse with yelling, all the time yelling. “Yer done! Go to hair and makeup with the other girls and we’ll set up the next shots. Hustle, girl!”

Her rubber gumboots were stiff, making it difficult to jog across the bumpy field to the makeup chairs. Maybe suffering in them today would leave them more comfortable for the next day of filming. She rubbed her hands together and jigged on the spot to warm up while waiting her turn. They were lucky it wasn’t raining. It had been a miserably cold and wet few months.

Once she was in the chair, the director came over to supervise. “Smudge her up a bit,” he said to the makeup girl. He peered at Irene’s skin, his face inches from hers. “Didn’t notice these before.” He laid his finger along her hairline, first on one scar and then another.

Irene froze. Her bag had shielded her face from the worst of the glass, and she’d used every cream and lotion her mother and friends knew about as the cuts healed. “My hair covers them.”

He cupped her chin, displacing the makeup girl. “You still got the look.” He tilted her face this way and that. “A true English Rose, perfect for the folks at home. We’ll do close-ups from the other side.”

He stepped back, allowing the makeup girl to rub dirt along Irene’s cheek and touch up her mascara.

“How many other farms will we go to?” Irene asked.

“None. We’re on to the next assignment tomorrow.”

She sat up straighter and pushed her shoulders back a bit. “And what’ll we be doing?”

“Don’t you worry about that, doll. You just look pretty for the camera and do your duty to your country, eh?” He returned to where the camera was being set up.

Irene sat back and made a little noise to tell the makeup girl she was ready. After everything she'd been through, she deserved this break. After all of the auditions and call-backs, only to be told she was pretty but not right, her voice wasn't posh enough, she wasn't tall enough, was too tall, too heavy too thin too blonde too pale. Who would have guessed leaving London was all it took? That signing up for the Women's Land Army would land her in front of the cameras and, soon, on cinema screens everywhere?

"Please don't smile until your mascara dries," the girl said.

Irene relaxed her face and stared off into the distance. On the other side of the field, a man strode out of the forest, walked over the bumps and ruts that the frost had left behind on the field, and then disappeared back into the shadows beneath the trees.

"Who was that?"

"Didn't see anyone," the makeup girl said as she brushed powder across Irene's forehead. "Maybe another farm hand?"

"Hmm. Much cleaner than this lot." Irene pointed her chin towards the barn. "Dressed in a long coat. Maybe a soldier? Thought the troops were all gone from here."

The girl shrugged. "Might be they're billeted at another house nearby. Maybe he heard about us and thought he'd try out as an extra. Everyone wants to be a star." She laughed while brushing a few loose strands of Irene's hair back into place. "You're finished."

As Irene walked around the truck, a voice called out, "How about you pitch in, find out what a real Land Girl does, eh?"

"I *am* a real Land Girl," Irene called back over her shoulder with a smile, catching a glimpse of a grubby and sweaty girl, her dark hair tied up in a dirty yellow scarf.

The girl dropped the wheelbarrow she'd been pushing and stood, fists on hips. "You? Ha! You wouldn't last a minute, and your hair even less. See these?" She pulled off her muddy gloves and shoved her chipped nails at Irene, who couldn't help but wrinkle her nose at the smell rising from the girl's solid body. "These are the hands of someone working for the cause. The hands of a *real* Land Girl. Not some beauty queen made up to play Farmer in the Dell."

"Places!" The director's shout gave Irene a chance to escape. But she felt that girl's eyes on her the rest of the shoot and used it to her advantage to practice knowing when someone was watching her. She'd started working on developing the skill after reading an interview with one of her favourite actresses. *Real actresses are always on stage,* she had explained. *Real actresses know how to smile when they are sad, or cry on*

demand. They know how to be whatever the director needs them to be, even when the cameras are turned off. It's how an actress becomes a star.

Irene really was a Land Girl, but beyond her training, which had given her an overview of various farm chores and some hands-on practice, she'd barely had the chance to do more than walk back and forth across this muddy field. The same war that had killed her chances of getting to Hollywood had brought Hollywood to her.

As the day wore on, the director made Irene and the other five Land Girls he'd chosen from the agricultural college stand on their shovels and pretend to dig up the earth, put on gloves and pretend to fix the not-broken tractor, feed the draught horse, tend the pigs and chickens, and move in a line to herd a half dozen brushed and cloudwhite sheep towards a picturesque barn in the distance. Meanwhile, the Land Girls who actually worked this farm were busy off-camera milking cows, hauling manure, ploughing fields, and tending the animals.

Before the sun set, Irene and the other actresses were put in dairy aprons and gloves, given pails of milk, and directed to walk in a line towards the camera, smiles in place.

"I'm glad we're not milking the cows," Irene said under her breath to the girl next to her.

The brunette, with liquid eyes and lashes longer than Irene had ever seen on a girl—they must be fake, she decided—shot Irene a cold glance. "You should be glad you're not dying in a field in France somewhere, city girl."

Irene almost dropped the bucket. Any witty response dried up with the image of Alice lying in the street with the red-orange shimmer of flames reflected in her broken spectacles.

"Hey!" the director yelled. "Keep up with the others."

Irene took a hop-step and caught up with the line. The dark-eyed girl sniffed, turned away from Irene, and laughed with the blonde girl on the other side. Irene wanted to explain, to tell her about Alice and the Underground station and the blood running down her own face as she sat in the street and held Alice's hand. But the camera was running. And an actress only begged when the role called for it.

When the director called "Cut!" for the final time, Irene joined the other actresses at the main crew truck where they got to put their coats back on and the hairand-makeup girl had tea ready for them. Before Irene knew it, the crew had loaded the equipment and everyone had paired off or been ushered into a truck except for her.

The Women's Land Army local representative who chaperoned the girls on the shoot pulled Irene aside.

"Looks like your assignment has come in," she explained.

Irene wondered for a moment why the director wasn't giving her the news, but perhaps he didn't want to make the other girls jealous. "Don't keep me in suspense. Is it another Land Girl reel? A war film? Oh! A romance?" *Something more fitting with my English Rose look.*

The representative shook her head, grabbed a sheaf of papers out of her bag, took one from the pile and thrust it at Irene. "Even better. You've been assigned to work here. Turns out they're short a girl as of a couple of days ago night. She left a scribbled note and just disappeared."

Nearby the crew laughed together as they finished their tea. Beyond them, the girl who had heckled her earlier had been joined by two others. They stood in a line, arms folded, a phalanx hip-to-hip in mud-caked boots.

"Wait, what about filming?"

"You won't be needed anymore."

"But I heard the other girls talking about a city shoot, back in London, to show off the allotments?"

"You signed up to work the land," the representative said. "Here's some land, and they're short a girl. Good thing you brought your bags with you. I'll have one of the men take them out of the truck before we go. Good luck."

She could feel the dirty Land Girls' smugness behind her and wondered whether her mother had already rented out her room at home. "Wait," Irene said, trying to keep from whingeing. The representative had turned away. "Where am I being billeted? And you're supposed to tell me my pay and about overtime and all of that."

The director yelled again for everyone to hurry up, and the representative, several feet away, sighed and fidgeted with the clasp on her bag. "You'll have board and lodging here, at the estate, and you'll get twenty-five shillings a week plus half-day Saturday and Sundays off. You're very lucky. You could be scraping by with a cottager with no hot water and a privy out back. There's a war on. We take what we can get."

And with that, the woman left Irene standing at the side of a dirt track with an old satchel and two beat-up suitcases containing the rest of her official Land Girl uniform as well as the other items she'd been directed to bring: underwear, toiletries, frocks for evenings. The last seemed so stupid. Where would she need a dress out here in the sticks? She missed London more than ever and she'd only been here for a couple

of hours. The filming trucks rumbled away, leaving Irene to the farm, the chickens and cows, the dirt and crops, but, most frightening of all, to the Land Girls.

The sun was nearly set and the sky was clear, which meant it would be an even colder night. Everyone was gone from sight, likely back to their lodging. There was no one to watch as Irene hoisted her bags and walked through a side door in the closest building, a rather tumble-down barn.

"Hello?" she called as she set down her luggage, almost dropping it.

The two men inside the barn stopped what they were doing and watched Irene, much the same as the Land Girls had earlier, except the men didn't look like they wanted to hit her. Instead, they looked like they wanted to eat her.

"Seems you lost your ride," the oldest of the two said, setting his pitchfork against the wall. "Come on over here and your man Jack'll give you one."

Irene put her shoulders back. She was from London. She knew how to handle men, and two farmers in dirty dungarees weren't going to scare her.

"That won't be necessary. I'm the new Land Girl."

He limped across the barn floor towards her, his eyes everywhere but on her face. "We've got plenty of girls. You look more like a woman to me."

When he reached out a hand, she slapped at him. "Where am I to go?" She kept her voice loud and steady.

The man folded his arms. "Straight back to London, girlie, is the best place for you."

The other man, of a similar build and colouring—brothers? Irene wondered—sniggered at this display of wit.

"To whom do I report?" She crossed her fingers that correct grammar and a reminder of authority would derail the man.

"You had better get up to the Hall," he said and tilted his chin back to point behind him. Framed by the giant barn doors, she could see a mansion at the end of a long drive and up a slight rise. She had peeked at it earlier in the day as the film crew rumbled up the road before turning to make for the barns and fields. She'd assumed she'd never see this place again. But now it was home, of a sort. "Her Ladyship will be wanting to take the measure of you before you're let loose in that weed trap she calls a garden."

"Hmmmph," was all she said in response. "My bags?" She lifted her chin and looked at him.

He smiled, looking more like a wolf every minute. *Well, I'm no Red Riding Hood,* she thought.

"You're in for a lesson come haying time," his younger partner said and stepped closer. Irene held her ground while the two of them blocked her exit.

The older one loomed over her. He smelled worse than the angry Land Girl. The hair sticking out beneath the edges of his cap was greasy and his neckerchief splattered with mud, motor oil, and a dark rusty stain she knew from experience with washing her smalls was blood. She took a deep breath and readied herself to scream in case he made a move to touch her again.

"I give you a week, ten days tops." He took a deep breath, filling his lungs.

Is he smelling me? Irene bit her lip enough to hold in a shudder of repulsion but not enough to give him any ideas.

He kept talking. "Little Doris took off, couldn't handle it. And she was tough as a sow, that one."

Irene silently scolded herself for expecting any help. She was here to help, not to be cosseted, she knew. So she tucked the satchel beneath her arm, hoisted a bag in each hand, and stepped around the men, praying she wouldn't trip on a rock. As she walked out the large doors and up the path she kept her eyes straight ahead, ignoring the wolf whistles and sniggers that she knew they knew she heard. She held it together long enough so they couldn't hear her cry. And then she was angry for crying like a stupid girl, and that made her cry more. She was alone. She didn't know where she was or who was waiting to talk to her in the Hall. And the house—the house was huge. Like something out of a fairy tale. Or a movie.

She knew from watching movies that the help was supposed to go to the back entrance of a house like this, but Irene wanted to know what it felt like to walk in the door of such a grand place. She pulled the door bell and figured she could feign ignorance.

A maid, complete in black and white uniform, showed her in without comment on her use of the front door. "Wait here. Her Ladyship will be with you in a moment." Irene smiled to herself at her cheek. She was here to do farm work, to help with the cause, and here she was in a room almost as big as her mother's house, surrounded by gleaming everything—vases, marble floors, chandeliers, mirrors. For a moment while she was alone, it was her house, her vases and chandeliers. But the longer she waited, the more Irene was able to look beyond the show of it all and see small drifts of dirt pushed along the edges of the baseboards, the cobwebs hanging from the crystal drops

of the chandeliers, the smudges in the corners of the mirrors. Irene's own mother kept her small house with four rented rooms cleaner than this, and she kept it alone now, with no children to help.

A spaniel bounded in, followed by two more. They jumped on Irene, their claws scratching furrows in her skin beneath her corduroy breeches. She knew she'd find long red marks on her thighs when she undressed for bed later. "Boys!" a voice yelled from the hallway. Irene jumped to attention. The dogs did not. "Down. Get down, I say!"

Her Ladyship was tall and thin but not beautiful. The woman had probably never been pretty with her too-close-together eyes and her crooked nose, hair that had once tended more towards a dirty blond than shining gold. But what she lacked in beauty she made up for with an energy that Irene would later say, if bottled, could have powered an aircraft carrier across the Atlantic.

"Ah, the new girl." She took Irene's hands and inspected her from top to toe.

After the man in the barn minutes before, she began to feel raw from the attention. *You're an actress,* she reminded herself. So she inspected the Lady right back, surprised a Lady would be dressed in wrinkled wool trousers and stained cardigan.

"Yes, you'll do. I've been so upset since Doris had to leave us."

Irene thought to ask something about the scribbled note, the girl leaving without a good-bye, but didn't have a chance. Her Ladyship continued. "Morris!" The maid appeared. "Morris, please show…"

"I—Irene," she stuttered. Damn. "Irene Beamer."

"Of course. Irene will share the green room with Sylvia."

"Here?" It was out of her mouth before Irene could stop it. She'd been expecting to bunk in a croft, a barn, a cosy cottage if she was lucky. But in this castle?

Her Ladyship gave Irene a look showing she took her stewardship seriously. The Queen and princesses may smile on camera when touring bombed-out houses and damaged hospitals, but Irene suspected they had spent as many hours as she had in front of the mirror practicing a look of friendly condescension and grace.
Someone like Her Ladyship was an actress of a sort, too.

"Breakfast is at seven sharp in the kitchen, but you will take your lunch break where you are working on any given day. Supper is at half-six and biscuits and tea or milk at nine. Curfew is at ten, unless special arrangements are made. But they aren't, very often. The countryside is big, and even bigger after dark. I don't like the idea of my girls out wandering around late at night." Irene took special notice of the emphasis on

“my” as if Land Girls were Her Ladyship’s particular possession. “You have Saturday afternoons and Sundays off unless you’re especially needed for certain tasks.”

Morris hadn’t moved during any of Her Ladyship’s instructions. The difference in the comportment between the house servant and the farm workers was striking. Irene felt very far indeed from her mother’s boarding house and then the small hotel where she’d been a maid with other girls like her, girls waiting for their lives to begin, girls who giggled amongst themselves behind the hotelier’s back. She couldn’t imagine Morris ever doing anything as common as giggling. Or even smiling much.

After Her Ladyship dismissed Irene, Morris led her up a flight of stairs and along a silent hallway. Like in the movies, this stairway was hung with portraits of ancestors in wigs and elaborate costumes. Irene felt them watching her, knowing her as an outsider. She pulled her neck up straighter, tucked her chin back, arched one eyebrow like Vivien Leigh, and allowed the maid to show her to her boudoir.

As they walked, Morris spoke to identify a few of the rooms they passed, but didn’t open any of the doors. Near the end of the hallway she stopped and opened a plain door. “You will share this room with Sylvia.” Morris revealed a room with two beds covered in identical green blankets, two bureaus, two wardrobes and two small desks. The green wallpaper gave the room a sickly air.

Morris then opened a door inside the room to a bathroom tiled in blue and white. A door on the opposite side of the bathroom opened to a room identical to the green bedroom, only it was decorated in yellow. Instead of being what her mother would call sunny, the yellow reminded Irene of old grease. “Nancy and Phyllis sleep in here.”

The maid went on to show Irene where towels could be found and to explain more rules of the house, including mentioning that there was a cook in the kitchen and a kitchen girl, as well as another girl who helped with the cleaning, but no male house servants. When Irene shivered, Morris said, “The fire in the bedroom is lit in the evenings, but never in the morning. You’re all up too early and out to work to waste the fuel.” Morris didn’t ask whether Irene had any questions. Before Irene could think of any or even mutter a thank you, the maid was gone.

Irene unpacked and waited for something to happen that would tell her what to do. It felt like years had gone by since she’d been tramping around in the mud, playing at being a farmer. And now here she was, playing at being the lady of the manor.

Half an hour later, the door to her room opened and the angry girl with the cracked fingernails walked in. She took one look at Irene, let out a long sigh, and said,

“Jesus Christ.” Before Irene could come up with a response, the girl had slammed the bathroom door shut behind her.

Two heads poked around the corner of the open bedroom door. “Hiya, I’m Nancy,” the taller girl said. “Don’t mind Syl. She’s been pinin’ all day for Doris.”

The other girl, short and round but one of the most beautiful girls Irene had ever seen with deep red hair and eyes like a doe, smirked and poked Nancy in the side. Nancy bugged her eyes at the girl, and they laughed quietly. The second girl then held out her hand to Irene. “Phyllis. Call me Phyl. You from London?”

Irene nodded and shook her hand, wondering what the joke was.

“Aye, I reckoned. You look citified, posh even. We’re from York, Syl’s folk are from Brighton.”

Irene bristled at being called posh. She could almost hear her mother—a woman who grew up on a farm and landed in London after the Great War—laugh at that.

Sylvia stomped out of the bathroom wrapped in a dressing gown, grabbed some clothes, and ducked back in again. Nancy drifted away, saying she’d use the wash room down the hallway. Before going to get herself cleaned up, Phyl explained Her Ladyship liked the girls to look like girls when they came down to dinner. The frocks Irene had earlier thought she’d never get a chance to wear now seemed too shabby for the current situation.

They ate a three-course meal of rations plumped up with wintered-over veg from the garden: an onion soup starter with only the barest amount of cheese on top; Lancashire hot-pot containing meat she found rather tough, but she was happy to have meat at all; and tinned fruit for pudding. “From our extensive pantry,” Her Ladyship explained. Irene didn’t care if they were from the last war, she hadn’t had peaches in over a year. And they all had milk from the dairy to drink.

Irene had seen how these sorts of places did supper in the films. She wondered how many servants there used to be, whether there had been footmen to serve the guests rather than Morris and a kitchen girl. Her Ladyship insisted they were dining informally. “When my daughters were small,” Her Ladyship explained, “I liked to take tea with them in the nursery, no footmen standing behind your chair, and only one fork to contend with. All that fuss interferes with the digestion, I believe.” As if to disprove Her Ladyship’s point, Irene’s stomach did back flips while Sylvia sat, stony and silent.

“So,” Sylvia said finally to the table, and Irene’s insides clenched again. “Doris spent a few months in Kent before coming here. I’ve been here for five, Nancy and Phyl

for three. What about you, Irene?" She put a nasty whine on the last syllable. "Where were you before today's fashion show?"

"Oh, Syl, don't be a brat," Nancy said.

Irene chewed, grateful to have a few seconds to think of an answer.

"I spent some time in Nottingham." It wasn't a lie, exactly. The Midland Agricultural College where she had trained was in Nottingham.

Sylvia nodded. "Mmm hum. And your specialty? I worked in a dairy in Devon for a while."

"I'm a middlin' hand with horses," Nancy offered. "And Phyl drives a tractor as good as the men."

Irene stuffed another forkful of food into her mouth and wondered whether Sylvia had been practicing her sneer—and her nosiness. Irene's best subject while in training had been with the fruit trees and the market gardens. Fruit and vegetables made the most sense to her. A peach in London was the same as a peach in the country, she was sure. But a side of beef was much different from a cow in the field.

"Horticulture," she said.

Her Ladyship beamed. "Splendid! I've been speaking with Mr. Hill about expanding the kitchen gardens. Doris was helping him before she was called away." Called away? At that Sylvia's eyebrows shot up.

Her Ladyship continued, "We already have wheat and barley and potatoes out in the fields and a small kitchen garden to add to the rations and feed us here in the house—and to distribute to the workers' families—but it needs expanding. I'd like to put in more market garden crops to sell in town. I'll send you down to Hill tomorrow." She waved at the other three and said, "You girls seem to have everything else under control."

As far as Her Ladyship was concerned, that was that. But Irene knew as she followed the other girls back upstairs that it wasn't going to be so easy.

#

Later that night, Irene figured she might as well try, seeing as how they were going to be sharing a room for a while.

A few minutes after lights out, she cleared her throat.

When there was no response, she said "Sylvia?" in a half whisper, just in case Sylvia was a fast sleeper.

"What?" the girl asked, irritated but still awake.

"I'm sorry. About Doris leaving I mean."

"Yeah, I'm sorry, too."

"Maybe she can come back."

Sylvia snorted. "Not likely. You know how the Land Army works. A girl having to leave is like desertion in a war zone. I don't even know why she left."

"She didn't tell you?" Too late Irene realised she had questioned the bond between the two girls. "Maybe she was really homesick."

They lay in silence for a few seconds. Outside the wind shifted, rattling the windows.

"I sent a letter today," Sylvia offered. "Anyway, it's too late now."

Irene stopped herself before saying *But it's not too late.* She knew about it being too late. No matter how many times she grabbed Alice's hand and ran away from the Underground station instead of towards, no matter how many times she did what she could to shield the girl's body from the falling debris, it was always too late because she always did those things only in her dreams.

Sylvia was still muttering. "You're here and we all have to carry on, isn't that right?"

"Yes." Irene's voice was small in the dark room.

Sylvia harumphed and rolled over, her bedsprings squeaking, leaving Irene to lie awake and stare at the ceiling, hoping to come up with ideas of what she could do the next day to prove to the other girls she wasn't only an actress, that Doris's disappearance wasn't her fault, and that she could do the work.

But instead she lay there for hours, going over the *shouldofs* and *couldofs*, missing home but afraid of having to go back, missing her mother but dreading letters to come—or that were sure not to come—missing even the safety of the agricultural college where she'd decided being a Land Girl was the next role to perfect, but terrified she would fail. Most of all, though, she wondered when the film crew would come back for her. Maybe if she did a smashing job here on the farm the WLA rep would contact the director and remind him about her. She lay there listening to the wind blow through the trees outside and, later, rain pelt the roof while the house creaked around her, and she imagined herself in front of the camera again. This time instead of green boots and fawn trousers, she was in a long evening gown, dining beneath a sparkling chandelier. That image flowed into another, of Irene dressed in an even more beautiful gown at an awards ceremony. She flirted with Clark Gable, gossiped with

Greer Garson. Irene floated through the party, forgetting the farm and Sylvia and Her Ladyship, and soon she was asleep.

#

After a night of broken sleep, Irene ate porridge with the other girls in a dark, silent, cold kitchen while the cook fussed over Her Ladyship's breakfast. Later, after the other three girls had gone to help the farm hands, Irene was sent to the morning room where she found Her Ladyship feeding toast crumbs her dogs, which were draped over her on the sofa. The sweet smell of jam made Irene's stomach grumble. The sound echoed in the quiet room.

"Did you not have breakfast?"

"Yes," Irene said, distracted by the porcelain cups and saucers on the table. The edges of several pieces were chipped, and Irene noticed tarnish in the deeper recesses of the silver on the sideboard.

Her Ladyship sipped her tea, either unaware of Irene's inspection or unapologetic.

"Thank you," Irene added.

"Here." The woman held out a piece of paper with a map drawn in pencil. "The paths can be tricky if you're not used to them, especially near the enclosed garden. You're to find Mr. Hill. He'll help you get your bearings, find your way around the kitchen garden, etcetera. Hill has been here forever and knows everything there is to know about my gardens."

Irene waited for more, but all Her Ladyship added was, "Don't forget, supper at six-thirty sharp. Be sure to give yourself plenty of time to get cleaned up and dressed, but don't leave the garden until Hill dismisses you."

Irene left the house, a packed lunch stored in a pocket of her mac and gumboots forced onto her feet. She made a note to look in her Land Girl Guide to find out what to do to make her boots slip on and off easily as she splashed through puddles on the gravel drive and along muddy paths. As she walked through the neglect and chaos of the gardens, Irene couldn't help but think of the warnings to Little Red Riding Hood to stay on the path.

Overgrown topiaries loomed over cracked statues and weed-choked walks. Vines covered stone walls, glasshouses, and flower beds alike. Shrubs had formed impenetrable masses, and the loops and swirls of the parterres had lost all definition,

leaving Irene with the nagging feeling she was forgetting something. Leafless branches shone a deep, wet brown in the rain with patches of lichen worn like badges. Cracked snail shells and phlegmy lumps of smashed slugs littered the path. Here and there old blooms clung to rose bushes, the petals curled and burned from cold. A few, though, held the secret of blush pink interiors, somehow surviving the winter. Rain dripped from every surface, giving the gardens an odd sheen, as if viewed through old window glass. She even found an abandoned bicycle thrust into an overgrown yew, its chain rusting. The gardens rippled and changed around her. She ducked through an archway from one garden to the next, and out of the corner of her eye she thought she saw the crisp, clipped hedges and the clean lines of tended grounds only to find, when glancing back, that she was mistaken.

Walking through the gardens, she questioned just it was she would be doing, and what it would have to do with the war effort. The rules stated that Land Girls were not domestic help: no dishwashing, no child minding, no housekeeping. They also were not supposed to be personal gardeners. They were recruited to help grow food—not flowers—for the public.

As she walked through the grounds, different smells wafted on the air: manure, then motor oil, then a heady combination of cows and chickens and pigs. The pungent smell of fox cut through all of it she stepped into a courtyard in front of a brick house built into a wall, the other sides bordered with stone outbuildings. The white door of the largest shed was a beacon in the grey morning.

Inside, dozens of hoes, shovels, picks, assorted hand tools, and even gloves and boots were organised in tidy rows, hung on pegs on the wall, or piled in large baskets. The tools outnumbered the population of the house and farm Irene had counted so far. It looked like the place had been made ready for an army—a real Army—and not just a handful of women looking for adventure during the war.

"Mr. Hill?" A man stood with his back to the door.

Mr. Hill. The name conjured up the image of a small mound of dirt. The man himself, when he turned to greet Irene, was like a mushroom, his body stuffed into tweed neither brown nor grey. Or was he more like a rodent, she wondered, with crinkly white whiskers framing a round face populated with features both oversize (the nose) and tiny (the dark eyes and mouth).

"So," he said.

Irene waited for him to continue. But when it seemed as if that was all he was going to say, she stuck her hand out. "I'm Irene Beamer, from the Women's Land

Army."

He looked over her uniform, his gaze settling on the arm badge. "M'Lady said as much. Hope you're more loyal than the last one."

Again Irene waited for more. The longer she stood, the more uncomfortable she became. Mr. Hill wasn't bothered. He turned and dug through the papers on a table. Irene guessed it was a desk by the cup of gnawed-on pencils sitting in its centre, surrounded by stacks of newspapers, plant catalogues yellowed with age, and a dusty telephone beneath a torn potato sack. A telephone in a garden shed? Her mother had always said the rich were different from ordinary people.

He scribbled a few figures on the back cover of one of the catalogues and gestured at Irene to follow him. They walked across the courtyard and through an open archway next to the brick house. Irene had the unmistakable feeling of being watched and thought she saw the curtain in the house's window move as they walked by. She tried to imagine a Mrs. Hill, as squat and grey as her husband.

Mr. Hill had hurried ahead. "The kitchen garden," he said by way of explanation. Except for one quadrant sporting a few rows of well-kept greens, what looked to be purple cabbage, and some bean frames, the garden was empty. A few small herbs grew alone here and there, islands of green in a sea of dirt. There weren't even any weeds in any of the beds, indicating that Mr. Hill—or Doris?—had been at work prepping the beds for planting. Irene sympathised with the fruit trees splayed against the brick wall, their limbs outstretched as if frightened.

He kept walking, his short legs giving his gait a sway, like a boat rocking in the waves. He crossed the width of the garden and disappeared through another arch in the far wall. Irene jogged in her stiff gum boots to catch up with him. More trees stood pinned against the outside wall of the kitchen garden, and several yards away a hedgerow extended for yards in each direction, disappearing down a hill on one side and around a corner on the other.

"Here," he said and pointed at the field on the other side of the hedgerow.

"Here?"

"Here is where we plant."

"Plant?" The day before she had marched across fields, shovel in hand, sure of herself and hopeful about her contribution. Now she stood, mouth open and unable to do more than repeat whatever this man said.

"Her Ladyship wants a market garden. Runner beans and aubergines, parsnips and onions and the like. And strawberries, she said, for morale." He shook his head at

that. “The old kitchen garden, such as it is, is fit for herbs and veg for the house. Need to repair the cold frames, too. And glass is needed for the greenhouses. But we need room—a few acres—for the bulk of it. This field’s been left for years. Had the boys up the farm plough it afore the first frost to get it ready and now it needs raked over, limed, and it’ll be ready to sort.”

It was one of the longest speeches Mr. Hill was to make during Irene’s stay at the Hall.

“Do we have seeds?”

Mr. Hill looked back towards the Hall and its gardens. “Some. To cast here. Others’ll be started from seed and planted out later. Think there’ll be a late frost, but Her Ladyship’s in a hurry. And there’s berry seedlings for M’Lady’s idea hid in nook and cranny all about these gardens. Shame to waste ’em. Those you’ll transplant.”

He showed her to the tools and lime in the shed, and then set her free for the rest of the day to break up any big clumps in the field and rake it all smooth. It had been mostly dry for the past few weeks, so the drizzle didn’t make much difference. While turning the soil, she kept her eyes peeled for harmful insects. At first, centipedes scurrying out of the soil made her jump, but she soon learned to ignore them and look closely for wireworms. The best way to kill the nasty yellow grubs was to pull them apart, and she silently thanked the old gardener for the gloves each time she had to pinch their little bodies in half.

After a lunch of soggy, pink beetroot sandwiches and weak tea (how she missed strong tea!), Irene returned to raking and liming while Mr. Hill busied himself elsewhere.

As the hours wore on, her back ached and her toes cramped inside her boots. But she kept going, determined to finish as much as she could, denying to herself the idea that she fantasised receiving some sort of commendation for working so hard on her first day.

Over the low patter of the drizzle, she heard someone walking up behind her, of boots treading on the earth. Expecting Mr. Hill, Irene called out a hello but got no response. She wanted to rake the last bit she could reach before stopping to greet the gardener, but when she turned a man was already walking away from her. He definitely wasn’t the squat Mr. Hill. Perhaps one of the farm hands? But they had short hair and this man’s hair was long and tied up in a black ribbon, not a style to be found on a farm.

“Hey! Come back here!”

He kept going, keeping the same pace as if determined to get somewhere but in no great haste to do so.

"I saw you yesterday!"

He continued on, his dark coat flapping behind him. She noticed his dark gloves. The WLA handbook didn't give any advice for what to do when German soldiers were suspected in the area.

Irene dropped her rake and it hit the dirt with little thump, but she was already running across the field, each step splashing dirt and mud up her legs. Then she tripped on a rock unearthed by the plough. She stepped down awkwardly, twisting her ankle, but she wasn't going to let a *spy* get away. Imagine! How proud Her Ladyship would be, and the newsreel crew would be sure to come back to do a story on her.

After the explosion and losing Alice, she'd hardly left the house, even though none of them were safe from the bombs. She'd lost her job at the hotel, never saw her friends, and moved through her days without speaking and barely eating. Her mother had thrust the Land Girl booklet at her and all but packed her bags for her. At the thought of Alice and her mother, Irene ran faster. Her life had happened to her so far. Even being selected for the film reel hadn't been her doing: she'd been chosen for it as if lifted out of a box of free puppies in the market. Here, though, was a choice she could make. She wanted to know who the man was, where he was from, why he was in *her* field.

When he was only a few feet away, she reached out, calling for him to stop. He took two more steps, his dark green coattails flapping behind him, and disappeared at the edge of the forest bordering the field. Not *into* the forest, but right at its edge. Irene froze, one arm still held out to grab the man's arm, her hand closing on air. The rain fell harder, the constant drumming of it on her hat and coat drowning out any sound. There was no path, no track, just a giant wall of green where the forest began.

Later, Irene waited for Mr. Hill to inspect her work and release her for the evening. It was too dark to work at half-four, but she kept on going. Five o'clock passed, then half-five. At a quarter to six, she returned to the shed, sure he would be there. When she found the shed empty, she cleaned and stored her tools and headed up to the Hall, more afraid of Her Ladyship than the old gardener. She saw a trail of smoke rise into the sky from the chimney of the brick cottage set into the kitchen garden's wall. As Irene crossed the small courtyard, she felt a cold trickle along the back of her neck—one that wasn't from rain finding its way under her collar. She stopped herself from turning to look back at the cottage's window and pretended the director was

behind her, filming the final scene of a tragic love story as she walked away from a bad decision. As soon as she turned the corner, however, Irene broke into a wobbly jog, her ankle the only physical evidence of what had happened in the field earlier that afternoon. She hurried past the darkening garden where the unkempt shapes reached out to grab her.

Inside a makeshift mudroom at the back of the Hall—once possibly some sort of a store room as it had no windows and only led to a passageway and stairs down to the kitchen—she scraped what mud she could from her clothes, hung her coat and pullover, and left her boots on a mat of sacking and old blankets. Hers were the only boots there, so she wobbled up the back staircase as quickly as her ankle allowed to be first in line for the wash room. A quick scrub while squatting and shivering in the tub and she was as clean as she would get without a full soak.

While she dressed in her warmest non-Land Girl clothes, Sylvia came in, grunted a greeting, and headed to get cleaned up before Irene could say "Hello." Once again, Irene appeared before Sylvia as a city girl: clean, smelling of the bath, and dressed in a pressed frock, a relatively new cardigan, and her best stockings (they had one ladder, which Irene was sure to wear towards the inside). She made a note not to rush to the back door the following day, to arrive tired and filthy and wait her turn for the sink. She also made a promise to herself to keep the man in the green coat to herself for now.

#

The following day, she and Mr. Hill marked off three main sections in the field, one for root vegetables, the second for brassicas, and a third for peas and beans. If the war lasted longer than a year—"They thought the Great War would be over in months, and look how wrong they were," Hill said—they'd be able to rotate the crops. Then they marked off several rows in each section: early carrots, turnips, and parsnips for the first one; early Brussels sprouts, cabbage, and spinach in the second; and broad beans in the third. No potatoes here, for there was a big field on the other side of the farm for just that veg that the other girls were busy mixing manure into, and the smell had lingered around each of them when they came home the night before. Extra rows at the end closest to the house were marked for berries, and those at the far end for shallots, leeks, and onions. The rest of the space in each of the three sections was marked for rows to be planted in later, once the threat of frost was past: radishes, beet root, swede, cauliflower, broccoli, sweet corn, leeks, beets, and cabbages.

“It’ll be summer before we get this all planted,” Irene said. The old gardener just grunted.

Though he grunted and hummed more than he planted, Irene would rather listen for his silences than have to deal with the farm hands. Maybe they were why Doris skipped out. Irene bent over to pull the dirt up along the string they’d laid, making a long but straight and tidy row, and thought perhaps Doris had just gotten tired of the work. Once she got into the rhythm, Irene’s mind wandered and her thoughts returned to the girl who had run away, and the girls who had not. She was so caught up in speculating on what had happened before she had arrived that she stopped noticing the constant light rain and even her dripping nose and frozen fingers for minutes at a time.

That afternoon, she started planting what seeds Mr. Hill had given her, careful not to drop them too close together. Once she sneezed, dropping several tiny dark seeds in the furrow between rows. They were impossible to see against the dark soil, so Irene gathered a few small stones and piled them on the spot, hoping to be able to pull up any seedlings later to hide her mistake.

Working in a garden was hypnotising. Irene settled herself between rows and planted as far as she could reach. Poke, seed, cover, pat. Over and over until she had to slide forward on her knees to the next section. Mr. Hill had given her a piece of sacking to use as a kneeler to keep the mud from caking on her trousers. It only worked so well, but she appreciated the thought and planned to find some string so she could tie wads of sacking to each shin the next day to make it easier to crawl along the rows.

But always, she kept a small part of her attention on the edges of the field, waiting to see if the man in the green coat returned.

#

Once all of the seeds for early varieties were planted in the market garden, Irene was set to the task of transplanting what could be found on the grounds while Mr. Hill planned repairs of the greenhouses and cold frames. “‘Make do’ is my motto,” Mr. Hill explained. It seemed to Irene that Mr. Hill’s motto was the estate’s motto, with its chipped china and a much reduced staff.

The first to be searched for, like a pirate after hidden treasure, were wild strawberry plants. Her Ladyship had heard that strawberries, though not an essential crop, were still in demand, and the estate had always had the best berries, she claimed. Mr. Hill sent Irene out with a pencil sketch of the gardens and grounds with crosses

where she could find the plants. She anchored the map in the wheelbarrow with a rock and started the hunt, fervently trying to recall what a strawberry plant without a strawberry or its little white flowers even looked like. Asking the old gardener was out of the question, and he had ensconced himself in the main shed, meaning the gardening catalogues were off limits for the time being. If she couldn't find a strawberry plant, she had no place being in the Land Army.

You've bought punnets of berries at the market plenty of times, she told herself, *and remember the cotton Mother used to make Alice that dress when she was ten, the one with the strawberries on it.* How Alice would love this place with its secret nooks and crannies. It was better to think of her sister in the garden with a book than where she was. Irene's throat thickened and her eyes burned. She picked up the map and studied it again, waiting for the penciled lines to come back into focus.

Most of the crosses were marked around the outside edges of the formal gardens, close to the fields and woodlands, where the covered walkway led from Mr. Hill's cottage and along the back of the sunken garden. A few were on the far side of the grounds behind the garage and around the back of the stables, but one was in the middle of the formal gardens. The map showed a square to the east of the Hall with a cross inside one corner. Irene decided this would be the easiest to find, and, once identified, would make finding the other plants along the edge of the woods easier. Mr. Hill had not written a name or any other description, so Irene followed the paths to a stone wall covered in tangled vines that barely hid signs of neglect where stones were missing or loose.

The handle on the brown gate took some wiggling to unlatch, and because the day was so grey Irene grabbed the top edge of gate and rode it as it swung open. Though it had begun to drizzle, Irene smiled to herself as she pushed the wheelbarrow into the enclosed garden. She shoved the map in her pocket and before pulling her hat down on her head more snugly and buttoning up her overcoat. It may be raining—again—but it was quiet. And safe.

The walled garden was laid out similarly to the old kitchen garden, but much smaller, with its stone walls lined inside with brick. Beds lined the walls with a path along the border; the middle was split into four parts by paths that met in the centre where a sundial stood, dripping in the rain. It was all much more elaborate than the simple square on the map had led Irene to imagine. Purple crocuses had poked up through the grass, vibrant in the dim light, and daffodils trumpeted the coming of

spring. A pink rose—protected by the wind, Irene guessed, to be blooming so early—beckoned from the base of the sundial, its rain-spattered blooms bright in the grey day. A small plaque peeked out from beneath it bearing the dates 1897–1917.

Irene left the wheelbarrow next to the sundial and walked along the outside border to a niche behind overgrown vines, sure to be a shady, cool spot in the heat of summer. A wooden bench, green with moss, sat beneath a clogged fountain set in the wall. She ran her gloved fingers along the fountain. Was it an angel? A woman? She wasn't sure, it was so weather worn.

In the grey light of the day, the white gravel paths glowed, giving the garden the semblance of being awake, ready. The beds were overgrown, the flowers and weeds gone to seed and left to die and rot over the winter. Peony stalks bent and laid low to the ground, their leaves brown-green with slime. Iris leaves poked up out of the mess, sharp along the lower edges, but showing frost burn at the dry, brown tips. In the back corner, Irene found the strawberry plants, identifiable by a few tiny berries somehow left from the previous summer, shriveled and inedible but still red as blood among the flat yellow and green leaves.

What gave them away were the trowel and gloves she found left on the path. They were too close to the strawberry plants to belong to anyone but the now-absent Doris. But the hand shovel was coated in a thick layer of rust and its wood handle almost rotted away, unlike the ones kept in the big shed. The gloves, similar to the ones Irene now wore, which Mr. Hill had dug out of a drawer for her, were threadbare, no real protection from the cold or dirt. They looked as if they had been left

behind for years rather than a few days. Irene pocketed the gloves and stowed the trowel in the wheelbarrow to show Mr. Hill and perhaps coax some information out of the man.

After trying to lift the first young berry plant, Irene took off the gloves. They were too cumbersome for such a delicate job. While she gently pried up the plants and followed their runners to newer plants, Irene's mind wandered again. She poked at the memory of running towards the station with Alice, but no matter how many times she went over and over it, she never pulled Alice in the other direction. Irene was so tired of reliving it, of seeing her mother's face in the hospital. Instead, she concentrated on digging beneath the little plants to pull them out of the dirt, their tiny pink-white roots naked and so vulnerable looking.

Birdsong trailed off and then was no more. A truck backfired somewhere on the farm, making her jump, then its chugging engine noise moved farther away until it

disappeared. There was no sound of horses whinnying, or cows lowing, or chickens clucking or crowing. Even the sound of the rain on the leaves disappeared, and soon Irene even lost the soft scrape of her hand shovel in the mud.

She worked slowly, creeping her way along the wall, reaching beneath shrubs and around other plants, unrecognisable to her untrained eye.

The weeds grew thick at the back of the beds, and she fought an urge to dig beneath their stalks and take them out at the root. She was here to get strawberry plants, not pull dandelions and groundsel, thistle and nettle. Grow food, not garden for pleasure. Plus, the trowel in her hand was too heavy, not the familiar weight of the small knife she usually used when weeding.

Irene froze, one hand wrapped round the trowel's handle. Until joining the Land Army, she had never gardened in earnest in her life. She surely had never pulled weeds with a knife. Yet she knew the weight of that curved blade, the silky feel of the wood handle, smooth from years of use. It fit her hand perfectly.

Must be the acting. This must be what being a natural feels like. So easy to fall into character.

She shook her head. "What character?" The walled garden was open to the sky and her voice was small.

Irene bent back to what she was doing, the wheelbarrow squeaking as she moved it along the path, her ankles sore inside her boots. Cold seeped up from the ground and through the knees of her trousers, making her long for summer. The brown and dull green of the frost-burned plants made her yearn for her mother's back garden with its sun-warmed brick wall covered in wild tangles of the white morning glories her father had so loved. How she wished the war was over and she and Alice were home, and that her mother…. "Oh, enough already. If wishes were horses, as Mother would say." She shifted and moved another foot along the bed.

The familiar smell of wet earth was like a perfume, and she breathed deeply to take as much summer as she could into her lungs. The white flowers of the sheepbine, open in the warm sun, were beautiful, but the vine was so knotted it hid the wall behind it, ruining the order there. She hunched over more, hiding her movement, and popped a tiny berry into her mouth. The sweetness of it filled her head and she smiled to herself, then frowned knowing the larder was bare and Will would complain at another stew of parsnips and carrots.

She pulled up a small strawberry plant, working to keep the roots intact, and sat back on her haunches before placing the plant in the wheelbarrow and wiping her

fingers on her apron. If she didn't take care of the weeds back here, the flowers were going to be choked and Her Ladyship would make her displeasure known upon her next visit to the walled garden. Fearing Hitchens's temper if he heard about any laxity, she bent to her work.

Irene returned to the large shed to have lunch and check in with Mr. Hill.

"What have you done, girl?" he bellowed when he looked in the wheelbarrow.

"I got strawberries from the walled garden."

Mr. Hill plunged his hands into the wheelbarrow, lifting out fistfuls of limp, wet, dead plants. "Weeds? You've spent all morning working and you've brought up nought but weeds! Daft girl."

The curtain in the brick cottage's window flicked aside, whoever inside alerted by the volume of Mr. Hill's anger. Irene shrunk back, her hands behind her back, Doris's gloves and trowel forgotten. As he turned away and strode back into the shed, Mr. Hill mumbled something about how things were in his day, addlebrained girls, and lost boys.

Irene called after him. "Wait! I did find strawberries." She knew they were there. For a moment she could still feel the feathery tickle of the young shoots in her hands as she lifted them out of the mud. At the very bottom of the barrow, beneath the mound of weeds, she found a small collection of berry plants, barely enough to fill in a third of a row in the new market garden.

After a silent lunch of beetroot sandwiches that stained her fingertips pink, Irene took the map and the wheelbarrow—now empty of weeds but still cradling the strawberry plants—and went back out into the gardens. The rain hadn't stopped and a constant tiny waterfall of drips flowed from her hat brim and down her arms and back as she bent over the dirt. Shouts from the barn and stables carried across the gardens, alerting Irene to activity elsewhere and making the calm state of the morning unobtainable. Once she had filled the wheelbarrow with seedlings, she planted them in a corner of the market garden and then stowed the barrow for the next day. She had more crosses on the map yet to find, and Mr. Hill seemed pleased with her afternoon's labour after the mistakes of the morning. But she was an actress in a new place far from home. It was to be expected.

#

What wasn't to be expected were the dreams.

She was dancing at a party in the garden. Not really dancing, more like swinging back and forth from strings holding up her arms. And maybe it wasn't so much a party as a crowd of people, but they were all in different costumes, some with masks and red capes. Irene was in costume, too, a long evening dress with intricate beading that shone in the torchlight, like a dress from a movie about swashbuckling heroes and evil queens. And then Irene wasn't dancing anymore but running along the garden paths, their white gravel raked and new, glowing in the torchlight. She ran away from a man in light breeches and a coat and waistcoat that flashed yellow and green in the firelight, like a beetle's wings. His hair was white, and the woman who ran with him had hair the same, but higher, and she carried a knife, its blade curved like a tusk.

The paths forked into two and three and four other paths as Irene ran along, giving her little time to make the right choice. Thick hedges blocked her progress, forcing her to change direction and run across lawns and up and down rises. But leaving the path was bad. With every step her feet and legs became more and more clogged with mud, her steps coming slower and slower. The woman's knife laughed at her, screaming in the chase. Other dream people in costume danced in twos and threes, thick vines twining up their arms, joining their hands together, the leaves shaking as the dancers spun faster and faster.

Everyone was silent. Irene could hear her breath coming out in gasps and pants, but no one spoke or laughed, and they all danced to music she couldn't hear.

As she ran, a man in a dark coat walked out of the woods towards her and lifted his arms to help, then turned away and disappeared back into the trees. Finally she was stuck fast in the mud, and when she bent to pull herself free she saw not delicate dancing slippers on her feet but her gumboots, and on her hands she wore Doris's threadbare gloves, and Alice lay at her feet, the torchlight flickering on her cracked spectacles. Then Alice turned into a baby, naked and crying in the grass, a rose clutched in one hand, its thorns stabbing his fingers.

A door opened. A door in a brick wall. Mr. Hill walked out followed by a woman in a long ragged skirt and blood-stained apron. The woman's hair was covered in a stained cloth, and when she opened her mouth to speak dandelions spilled from her lips. Irene tugged at her feet one last time to get free of the boots.

She woke drenched in sweat, her nightgown sticking to her back and neck. Sylvia snored softly in the bed across the room.

Irene tried to hold onto the dream, to match the images to words so she could remember them later. But it left her with an overwhelming feeling of being herself—Irene Beamer from London, daughter of Betty from Dorset and Fred from Somerset, older sister to Alice—and being someone else at the same time. Someone she had never met, someone she knew she would not recognise as part of her world, as if the person spoke another language.

#

"Be ready at seven a.m.," Her Ladyship said to the girls on Saturday night. She turned to Irene. "I expect my people to accompany me to church. My mother and father took their people, and I take mine."

Later over weak tea and dry biscuits, Irene asked who Her Ladyship's people were.

"Everyone," Phyllis answered. "HL thinks everyone who works or lives here belongs to her. Even us. We walk to church like we're in an Easter parade, with M'Lady leading the way in her hat like the Queen."

"Everyone?"

The girls all nodded their heads. The image of a blood-spattered apron rose in her mind and she shivered in spite of the warm mug in her hands.

"Who lives in the brick cottage?" she asked.

Nancy set down her teacup. "Just Mr. Hill."

"Alone?"

"Aye. I've seen nowt but the gardener there," said Phyl.

Sylvia just shrugged.

Later, after lights out, Sylvia sniffed. Irene ignored it. They'd all taken turns with a slight spring cold.

Sylvia sniffed again, this time with purpose.

"Yes?" Irene took the bait. She did wish her roommate would treat her as if she weren't the enemy, but Irene decided if Sylvia extended an olive branch she'd take it.

"It's his mother."

Irene rolled over towards the other bed in the dark room. "Whose mother?"

"The gardener's mother, in the house." Sylvia huffed, as if an hour hadn't passed since the question had been asked.

"She must be a hundred!" Irene forgot to whisper. "Hill is old, probably eighty?"

"Dunno. But Doris told me all about her."

Irene sat up in bed. "I found her gloves today."

Sylvia sat up, too, her form silhouetted against the dim moonlight coming through the window. "What?"

"Her gloves. In the walled garden." Irene explained about the strawberry plants and the market garden, about finding gloves and a trowel. She left out the part about the weeds and feeling as if she'd become someone else. "What happened? Why did she leave, do you think?"

"She told me she didn't like that garden," Sylvia said. "Maybe she quarreled with the old man."

"What would they fight about? He barely speaks."

"I don't know him. I'm out working in the farm all day, aren't I?"

"There is something else…" Irene said.

She took the silence as an invitation to trust her roommate.

"I saw a man. In the field."

Sylvia snorted. "There are lots of men in the fields."

"Not one of the hands. A tall man in a long dark coat—"

"—like a military coat? A German? Jesus Christ, Irene. We have to tell Her Ladyship. Why didn't you report it to the Home Guard immediately?"

"No," Irene said, her voice all but lost beneath Sylvia's vehemence. "He wasn't a spy."

"How do you know?" Sylvia's voice rose in the dark room. "Did he take your hand and say, 'Oh no, of course I'm not a spy. I'm just taking a stroll through your field right next to where troops have been billeted'?"

"I didn't talk to him. Plus, I saw him that first day, while I was in the makeup chair—"

Sylvia sighed. "Where did he go? You at least kept track of him, didn't you?"

Irene felt as if she were fighting a bramble bush and didn't know where she'd lost control of the conversation. "I followed him. He walked across the field and into the woods."

"We have to let the authorities know."

"No."

"You stupid girl."

Irene was glad of the dark so she wouldn't have to see Sylvia's face when she told her the rest of it. She grabbed the coverlet, took a deep breath and said it all in one

go. “He wasn’t a farm hand. And he wasn’t a soldier. He had on a long dark green coat, and he had long hair, pulled back like Tyrone Power’s in *Marie Antoinette*. And he disappeared when he went into the trees.”

“The forest is thick there,” Sylvia said, matter of fact.

“He didn’t walk into it!” Irene insisted. “He was there, and I reached out to grab him, and then he was gone.”

“So you’re telling me Count Whatshisname—yeah, I saw that film, too—was in one of our fields and just, poof, disappeared? Like a ghost?”

Irene stopped picking at the coverlet. “Yes.”

“You watch too bloody many movies.” Sylvia sighed. “He walked into the woods and you lost sight of him. We have to tell Her Ladyship tomorrow, first thing, before church. Now get some sleep.”

“Good night,” Irene said, and Sylvia mumbled in response.

Irene couldn’t sleep for a long time, annoyed with herself for forgetting to ask what Doris had said about Mr. Hill, and Mr. Hill’s mother.

Irene woke from a dead sleep. “Incoming!”

She had to get to Alice. Mother was going to be so cross. She wasn’t supposed to take Alice out with her, not this late at night.

“Take shelter! Now!” She ran through the shared bathroom. Her hands shook so much they rattled the doorknob to the yellow bedroom.

“What the hell?” Sylvia yelled behind her.

“Alice! Alice, c’mon. Hurry!” Irene yanked Nancy’s arm. Nancy yelped and slapped at Irene.

“Wha’samatter? Who’s Alice?” Phyllis sat up in her bed and blinked at Irene.

Irene, still yelling at the room to seek safety, pulled Nancy out of bed. Sylvia took hold of Irene’s shoulders and spoke into her face. “Irene,” she said, her voice calm but clear and loud. “Irene, wake up.”

Nancy, halfway out of bed and now wide awake, spoke. “No! Listen!”

“To wha?” Phyllis asked, still half-asleep. Nancy just shushed her.

“Run. Run run run,” Irene chanted. Sylvia slapped a hand over Irene’s mouth, muffling the girl’s warnings. The thump of doors opening and closing travelled through the walls.

“Now you’ve done it,” Sylvia whispered.

Irene pulled her head back, losing contact with Sylvia's hand. "We've gotta—"

"HUSH!" Nancy said.

They all froze. And there, just beneath the sound of footsteps coming down the hallway was the steady drone of an aeroplane.

"Shit!" Sylvia said.

Phyllis clucked at her. "If HL hears you talk like that—"

"Shut it, Phyllis. We've got to get downstairs. Now."

Sylvia, pulling Irene behind her, opened the door, and almost collided with Her Ladyship.

Irene rubbed a hand across her jaw, rubbing tears from her cheek. "Bombs! Find shelter! Oh, please hurry!"

Her Ladyship, in dressing gown and her hair tied up in a scarf, ushered the girls into the hallway. "Downstairs. Come along," she said as if herding her dogs.

At one point, Morris joined them, and all six women descended the main staircase and found their way to the kitchen. By then, the sound of the plane's engine had disappeared, and Irene had gone quiet. Her Ladyship ordered warm milk for everyone. Morris, yawning, got out the milk and a pot.

"I only heard the plane, no bombs or gunfire," Her Ladyship said. "It may well have been one of ours." The other girls nodded.

"We're not in the middle of a city," Nancy said. "We're safe here."

Sylvia sniffed. "It's not bombers that are dangerous here, so far from London."

"Doom 'n' gloom, Sylvia," Phyllis said and took a sip of her milk.

"I'm serious," Sylvia said, and Irene sunk down in her chair as her roommate leaned towards Her Ladyship. "The English Rose here says she saw a man. A strange man. In the field. Twice."

Her Ladyship, hair wrapped in a silk scarf that reminded Irene of her mother (though her mother's scarf would be rayon) got right to the point. "What did he look like?"

Irene shrugged. "I never saw him from the front."

"Sounds suspicious," Sylvia started.

Her Ladyship nodded. "We shall see."

"We need to report it to the guard!"

Her Ladyship turned to Sylvia and held up a finger. "You pay attention to your work, all of you. I will deal with this situation."

Afterwards, talk returned to the events of the night. While the others shared stories of hearing bombers and sighting planes on clear days, Irene sat in silence and sipped her milk, embarrassed at being caught sleepwalking. Waking up with Sylvia's hand on her arm had been a shock, but not as much as the nights she woke with her mother slapping her awake, or one night before leaving for Land Girl training when she found herself in her nightgown down the street from home. Luckily she'd been able to slip back into the house without anyone—especially the lodgers—finding out. After that, she piled books in front of her bedroom door, hoping if she tried to get out in the middle of the night she would trip and wake herself up.

Irene watched Sylvia, who sat across the table as far away from her as possible. Sylvia picked at her nails and talked to the other girls, even joked with Her Ladyship, but she never even looked at Irene. The spot on Irene's arm where Sylvia had grabbed her was sore, sure to be bruised.

When they all returned to bed, Irene tried to thank Sylvia, but the other girl just climbed into bed without saying a word. Irene stopped herself over and over again from saying anything aloud. She needed a reason, an opening, and there wasn't one. To speak in the quiet room would be to draw more attention to what had happened, and she didn't know if she could answer any questions. Soon, Sylvia was snoring softly, and the unsaid think you didn't matter as much anymore.

For the rest of the night, Irene dreamed of fire.

#

The chatter during the walk to church was all about the plane, some even claiming to have seen it. Irene avoided the clusters of gossip to study the parishioners. Mr. Hill sat with the farm hands, who looked cramped and uncomfortable in a sea of women, children, and old men.

Without the obligation of reporting to Mr. Hill, Irene didn't know what to do with herself on her first full day off. The bus to the closest cinema had left earlier, and none of the girls had money to take a train. They were stuck together for the day. Irene and Sylvia moved around one another in their shared room. Irene was exhausted from the week, yet didn't want to sleep or even lie down and stare at the walls. And Sylvia's sighs, loud with an edge of bother and irritation, had her on pins and needles. Irene knew it was only a matter of time before Sylvia asked a question she didn't want to answer.

Irene put on her best actress face. “I’m going for a walk,” she announced to the room, knowing Sylvia would never offer to come along. Irene was down the hall and nearly at the stairs when Nancy and Phyl called behind her.

“Going out for a walk,” she said and turned away.

“Wait up!” Nancy called.

“Did you draw the short straw then?” Irene asked as she and Nancy grabbed their coats. Though it was sunny, the breeze was cold.

Nancy didn’t take the bait. “Feels grand to be in normal gear and not pushing a wheelbarrow anywhere.”

They were already outside when Irene remembered the map Mr. Hill had drawn of the gardens. But it was in the pocket of her trousers, crumpled and smeared with mud.

“Where to?” Nancy asked.

“The woods.”

Nancy stopped on the path. “We shouldn’t.”

“Don’t be a ninny. It’s not on Her Ladyship’s forbidden list. Anyway, I promised myself an adventure,” Irene explained. “Sometimes at home I’d get off the bus at a different stop and walk home along new streets before I had to get home and do the same old thing.”

It had been fun before the war, when she would find new shops or secret little gardens tucked away behind iron railings. After the bombing began, those walks became tours in tragedy. Bombed-out houses open to the elements, pavements blocked by piles of crushed bricks and broken glass, blasted-apart furniture and window frames, and even, sometimes, the unmistakable form of a body beneath a sheet, the neighbours clumped around in whispering groups. The war shrunk everyone’s world to home and work and food queues with occasional moments of normality interrupted by air raid sirens to remind everyone of what was really going on. And then it was her turn to be the object of whispering.

They left the Hall and turned down a path Irene hadn’t taken before. Even though she was outside, the twists and turns of the path, the walls and hedges, made the space claustrophobic and cramped, especially as so much of it was unkempt. Here and there a flower bed was cleared of weeds, letting the dark soil show. Mr. Hill must have made a stab at tidying up, or perhaps it was Her Ladyship. For who else would attempt to bring all of this under some sort of control?

Irene brought her attention back to Nancy, who chattered on about their work on the farm. She had to listen close and fill in the H's. "…and then Sylvia tripped and stabbed the ground with the pitchfork, right next to his hand! He was right boggled, but she warned him."

"What is Sylvia's story?"

Nancy turned to Irene. "Story?"

"Don't be daft." They skirted around the field and soon found themselves at the edge of the woods. "She hated me the second she saw me."

There was no fence to keep animals out, or to keep them in. Irene took a quick glance back at the Hall but could only see chimneypots. No one was about. She ducked into the darkness under the trees, Nancy right behind her.

"She doesn't *hate* you. She gets her dander up over the hands, but she's yet to take a pitchfork to you. She's just not fond of people right off." Nancy, still following Irene, pushed her way through thickets beneath the trees.

"She's cold to everyone."

"Well, not Doris."

"They were good chums, weren't they?"

"Oh, you could say that."

Irene turned, alerted by Nancy's tone. "You and Phyl are chums, roommates. Same as Sylvia and Doris."

"Ah, don't be gawby. There's chums and then there's *chums*. I had an aunt like that once." She shrugged. "I never met her, the aunt, but I overheard my mum and dad go on about her one night when I was young. How she had a companion she took everywhere. That sort of thing."

"Are you sure?" Irene wasn't paying attention to where she was going and tripped over a tree root. "Damn!"

"You okay?"

Irene leaned against the tree, balancing on one leg. "Give me a sec. I tripped in the field the other day and got a sore ankle, and now I've gone and done it again. What an oaf!" She laughed, avoiding explaining again about the man in the coat. No use bringing him up, even if this hike in the woods was to find any evidence of him.

"Well, your shoes are flippin' wrong for a hike."

"Too late now." Irene rubbed at her ankle. "And anyway, I'm tired of wearing those sweaty gumboots."

"Tell me about it. I miss my best bib and tucker, miss smelling nice."

"And walking on pavement," Irene added. "Not that I ever had very nice anything, with money always being so tight. No silk stockings, anyway." "No?" Nancy asked.

Irene rolled her eyes. "Mother runs a boarding house, not The Ritz."

"I'd love to go to London when the war's over." Nancy sighed and held on to Irene's elbow as Irene put her weight back on her foot.

"If it's still there," Irene said. "I miss the cinema and the lights at night and boys. Well, the lights from before the war, before rules and blackout curtains. But the boys now that they're always in uniform." London was two places to her now, a place full of excitement and terror, a place of light and dark. Home and not-home.

"How's the hoof?"

Irene wiggled her foot a bit. "Fine."

They continued at a slower pace, trading stories about boys they knew from before the war. Irene wasn't sure how to return to the gossip about Sylvia. She was an actress, from London; she had to know these things without being told. But she had to share a room with the girl, after all.

Irene stopped. "Where are we?"

Nancy put up her hands. "I'm no Girl Guide. I can't recall if moss grows on the north or south side of trees. Or is it east or west?" She turned in one spot. "Where's the Hall?"

"If I knew that, I'd know where we were. Let's backtrack." "I think it's this way." Nancy pointed off to the side.

"You just asked me where the house was. If we go back the way we came…."

"I've lived here longer. Plus, we've likely been walking in circles. I reckon it's over there."

Irene looked around for something familiar, but every tree and rock looked like every other. "I'm going this way. You go that way." She pointed off to their right. "See that big tree top? The scary one?" In the distance she could just see the top branches of a tree, still leafless. "Head in a half circle, towards the tree. Shout my name every now and then, and I'll do the same. We'll meet as near to that tree as we can." "Were you a Girl Guide?" Nancy asked.

"Nope," Irene said. "Saw it at the pictures."

Irene turned back the way she thought they'd come, paying close attention to each shrub and tree trunk, sure she had seen this tree with the broken limb, this particular clump of leaves and sticks. And that boulder, yes that one was the one she had passed. Or was it the one over there, off in the distance to her left?

"Nance!"

"Irene!" Nancy's voice came through the trees from the right.

They yelled back and forth, Nancy's voice fading with every turn. It wasn't long before Irene called and there was no response. "Nance! Nancy?" Nothing.

She arrived at the tree and waited. She called again. Still no response. And no sound of a person walking on broken branches or scuffing up pebbles on the forest floor.

"We're lost," Irene said to herself. They hadn't told anyone where they were going. It would be dark before anyone would think to look for them. And knowing Sylvia, Irene might be out here past curfew before the alarm was raised. Not a good way to finish off her first week for sure. Panicked, she started jogging—more of a shuffle on her sore ankle—stepping high over roots and fallen limbs.

Something dark move through the trees to one side of her.

"Nancy!" She ran with relief towards the figure.

It was the man in the long dark coat.

She hid behind a tree, her heart hammering in her chest from the shock rather than from the run. Her ankle had even stopped hurting. She peeked around and saw him walking away from her. How did he not hear her?

The coat didn't look like anything the boys now wore. It was green, not drab military green but the deep green of moss growing thick and soft on slick stones along a river, and it shimmered in the light as he moved. She wanted to run her hands over it, to feel its softness, something lost in the new world of gumboots and rough callouses.

She followed him.

If he was going back to the Hall, he would lead her home. If not, he would lead her somewhere she might recognise. He walked with purpose, and in a hurry. She had nothing to lose. Unless he's a German, she reminded herself. A German in velvet? She shrugged to herself. The only Germans she had seen were in films, black and white ones at that. Who knew what a German spy wore?

Then she thought about Nancy. Had he seen the other girl? Maybe Nancy was hurt. Maybe he'd done it! To keep his secret. To keep anyone else from finding his hiding place.

She kept tree trunks between the man and herself in case he should hear her and turn around, but he never did. He kept on, his long strides forcing Irene to keep up at a jog. She had to work hard to watch him and watch the ground at the same time—twisting her ankle again would be just her luck.

Closer, Irene saw he wore high, black boots and that his dark hair was gathered back in a plait, the black ribbon bouncing down his back. She imagined it was velvet, the way it didn't shine at all but instead seemed to absorb all the light into it. She wished he would turn around, so she could see if his face matched the fantasy she had begun to create. Him in his velvet coat and her in … in the dress from the dream she remembered, its embroidery and beadwork shining in the firelight from the torches. Maybe there was a film being made nearby. It would make sense, why he'd shown up when they were filming and why the director hadn't said anything to her. The director didn't want her showing up, so close to where she was billeted. People were sick of the war already, they wanted stories of people in beautiful clothes, and weren't places like the estate the right place for filming?

The man walked more and more quickly, his form appearing and disappearing behind trees and the undergrowth. Irene didn't have to keep up the ruse of hiding in case he turned but had to speed up even more to keep him in sight. He didn't so much move forward as side to side, one stride on the right of whatever path he followed, two strides later far to the left. She ran faster, opening her eyes wide to keep him in sight.

And then he disappeared.

She was in a full-out run now, going as fast as her ankle, shoes, and the uneven ground would allow. She had to find him, to find her way out of the woods.

He was standing still, his back to her, but his posture had changed. His head was cocked to one side as if listening. Irene stopped, tried to quiet her breathing. But he didn't seem to be listening for her.

She approached, wary of him now. They were alone in the woods, far from anyone. And Nancy was still missing.

He walked forward again, Irene still following, and soon the trees thinned and a field opened before them, the Hall in the distance.

Irene came even with the man and tried to get a good look at him.

He turned, keeping his back to her, and she never saw his face.

"Wait."

He didn't slow.

"Who are you?"

He took a few more steps and then was gone, just like that, just like in a magic trick.

"Irene!"

There, a few feet behind her, stood the other Land Girl. Her face was scratched and she had mud on her shoes, but otherwise seemed all right.

"Did you see him?" Irene pointed at the spot where he had been.

"See who?"

It didn't take long for Nancy's face to change as she remembered, her mouth forming a perfect O. "Him?" she stage whispered. "The man you told HL about?"

Irene nodded, wishing she had something—a dropped glove, the ribbon from his hair, even a scrap of fabric—to prove she saw what she saw. Instead, all she had was an empty path and the singing of the birds high above.

#

Irene replayed the time in the woods over and over again. A spy? A deserter? Not likely, from his costume. Well, what she'd seen of it anyway. No man in the forces wore his hair long. Perhaps he was an actor. Or lost. Or both.

Irene and the other girls met in the hallway outside the dining room for their early Sunday supper. Her Ladyship arrived, Morris in tow, and the five of them sat. After Morris left to fetch their plates, Her Ladyship mentioned a book she had meant to bring Irene on horticulture. "It's an old thing, but I don't suppose books like that go out of style much, do they?" she said. "I've left it in the library. It's just down the hallway at the end. Would you mind? It's on a side table."

Irene excused herself. In the library, a stuffy room with the heavy curtains drawn against the sun, she found the book where Her Ladyship had said it would be. *All About Gardening,* a thick book with advertisements inside the front covers, bound in green with gold lettering on the spine. A painting above the table caught her attention.

A man stood, one arm cradling a rifle, the other hand on a hunting dog's head. Seated next to him was a lady, her dress the colour of clotted cream and covered in embroidery. The flowers on the dress were an echo of those on her hat. She sat, demure, a folded fan in her hands, a small dog at her feet. They were a handsome couple, the man's long sandy hair pulled back against his scalp to show off his thin, sharp face, the lady's softer face framed by blonde curls that lay along her jaw and neck. But it was the background that pulled Irene closer. The painting's subjects stood on a rise, and behind them, beyond a valley and on another rise, stood the house with its gardens spread around it. She recognised the brick walls of the kitchen garden in the distance and the high stone walls of the enclosed garden where she had found the first strawberries—and

Doris's gloves, which were still in her mackintosh's pockets. If she imagined herself floating above the chaos outside, she thought she could see where other gardens were in relation to each other in the painting, but some parts were gone or altered.

And then she noticed the figures of people working in the garden.

Irene turned on the overhead light to banish the shadows and get a better look.

Walking away from the painter, away from the tall man with the rifle and his fan-holding wife, away from the garden, was a man in a dark green coat with his hair gathered in a black ribbon.

Irene sat down at the dining table with a small thump.

"Didn't you find the book?" Her Ladyship asked.

"I think I found a ghost," Irene answered.

"Oh, splendid!" said Her Ladyship. "I did wonder when one of you would see them."

#

The weather turned, reminding everyone that spring—and all of the work that came with it on a farm—was truly inevitable. Once the market fields were planted and protected against pests, Irene was given the kitchen garden to sort. On this, Her Ladyship had many opinions.

"Again, I want as many vegetables and fruits as can fit," she explained. They stood together with Mr. Hill at the entrance to the kitchen garden, looking over recent progress. Her Ladyship had sent Mr. Hill and Irene rummaging through the attics and storage spaces for whatever old windows or other bits of glass that could be found to replace the larger busted panes in the glasshouse. Then they had salvaged the cracked panes and cut them down to replace those missing in the cold frames. Make do and mend, and all that. Irene and the old gardener had also nailed together broken frames, climbed ladders to oil hinges in the glasshouse roof and clean the panes, patched up mouse holes, and discussed how to resuscitate the old grape vine that wound throughout one room with a slanted glass roof.

All of that work, however, and still so much more to do.

It had stopped raining moments before, but water dripped from the arch and down Irene's collar. She unfolded her hat and shoved it down over her ears. Her Ladyship's voice, now muffled, didn't stop.

"No sense wasting space now the cold frames and greenhouses are repaired. Perfect for tomatoes." Her orders, however, came without any offer of help. Mr. Hill took up where Her Ladyship left off, and Irene was given a list, a broom, a bucket, a sponge, and a quick nod before being left to the overcast sky. She spent the day sweeping up what was left of the broken glass in the glasshouses and cleaning them from top to bottom before moving in a pile of pots from the shed she'd spent hours cleaning.

Later that night, she studied the green horticulture book to learn how to use a cold frame and what to do with the fruit trees that were trained along the brick walls. She was afraid to ask Mr. Hill any questions about gardening. Having been trained as a Land Girl, she should know these things.

She searched through the library again, always feeling the portrait behind her, like a camera watching her every move. Her movements became constrained, mannered, her fingers more articulate, the tilt of her head more thoughtful. But there was no one to act against, no other actor to recite his lines, cueing her to respond.

Irene found some old texts on animal husbandry and a slim volume on roses. She left the former but kept the latter, thinking she might identify the rose in the enclosed garden one day. The image of the gardens cleaned up and in bloom, like they were in the painting, was one Irene couldn't let go of. She'd never gardened in her life. The boarding house had a small back garden with a table where guests went to smoke pipes or cigars—which weren't allowed in the house—and a few scraggly geraniums in pots her mother tended. Her father's morning glory vine came back each year, all but hiding the back wall of the house. Her mother threatened it each summer but never seemed to have the heart—or the energy—to pull it out. Irene had only enjoyed the sort of abundance these gardens promised when on walks through Regent's Park or Kensington Gardens before the war. But she found herself thinking about the garden all the time now. The giddy feeling she got when waking up, when she knew she was going to get to go out and dig and plant there, was like the intoxication of being fancied and knowing she would spy him—whoever he was—at the shop or on his delivery rounds or at the corner garage.

Mr. Hill gave her a few old catalogues, not that they were much help, but at least their drawings and photographs gave her an idea of what some of the plants would look like once grown. Through it all, Irene was alone. She worked in the garden all day and spent much of her free time in the house, when not writing letters or washing clothes or

talking with the girls, reading about soils and pesticides, last frosts and the thinning of seedlings.

"Mr. Hill?" Irene asked. Their luck hadn't held and a storm that had started before dawn was still going strong at lunch time. Irene and the old gardener had spent the morning oiling tools and cleaning out more old pots to ready them for planting before sitting on a pile of sacking to eat.

"Hmmmph." It was a friendly sound, a welcoming one.

"What do you know about the people who used to live here? I mean, a long time ago. Do gardeners … well, do they leave anything, one generation to the next? Like diaries or journals?"

Mr. Hill chewed. Unlike Irene's beetroot sandwich, his lunch had been made with some thought. A small pasty, filled mostly with veg but with some meat, and an apple slightly wrinkled from long storage. Irene still wondered about his supposed mother, but she was afraid of wasting her questions.

He lifted his head then and looked at her, and Irene felt as though he was just noticing her for the first time although they'd been working together for weeks.

"Gardeners ain't all much for writing down things," he said. "Not formal like."

She thought of the piles of scribbled notes and old seed catalogues and could see his point.

"But I've seen gardening books. In the library in the house. Some gardener surely wrote those?"

He nodded. "To be sure, some have lots of book learning, to rise above being just an apprentice. Had to know their Latin and the like. But here the ways have been passed down. Better to learn by doing, not reading about doing."

"I hope they come back."

"Who?"

"The other gardeners. I bet you'll be glad when they come back from the forces."

Mr. Hill studied his boots. "They didn't come back from the Great War."

Irene did the maths in her head. "Oh." With everyone's attention on this war, she had forgotten about the other one that ended before she was even born.

"Those what came back didn't want their old jobs anymore. Only one who did left again not long after. Said he couldn't stand the quiet. Said it gave him too much room to think and remember on the quiet in the trenches while waiting for the noise to

start up again. So I've been tending the gardens M'Lady directs me to tend with help now and again from the farmhands or local boys when there's extra needing done."

"Well, I'm here to help now."

Mr. Hill said nothing, and the silence weighed on Irene.

When the sandwich was gone, she rubbed her hands together and watched the crumbs fall to the ground. "I suppose I can expect a demerit from the Ministry of Food for being wasteful and not feeding those to the chickens," she joked. Mr. Hill didn't laugh.

#

One night after dinner, Irene asked about the gardeners.

"We had a dozen or more at one time, not as many as in my mother's days here," Her Ladyship said. "Then there were enough to run all of the gardens, keep the glasshouses stocked and warm at all hours, farm the close acres. There was even a gardener who travelled, brought back specimens from Europe or from other gardens here that had collected them from as far away as India and South America."

"Do you think there'll be a big crew again, after this war is over?"

Her Ladyship sipped her tea and set the cup down in its saucer before answering. "That all depends. You will all go home and marry, the boys and men will come back to the village, all will return to normal, and the house and gardens will be brought back up to snuff. And my daughters…."

"Are they away at school?"

Her Ladyship picked at the bobbin lace cover on the arm chair. "They've been sent away. I miss them very much, but we are too close to London for their safety."

"Did they go up North?"

Phyllis and Nancy, on one of the sofas, gave each other a look. The corner of Sylvia's mouth lifted.

Her Ladyship stared at Irene. "That is quite enough for tonight. It's late and there is much to do tomorrow." She stood and called a goodnight to them without turning around.

Once she was sure the door was closed, Irene looked to the other Land Girls. "Am I imagining things, or is she hiding something?" "It's

a great big secret," Nancy said.

"The woman said she believed in ghosts, and no one thinks she's potty," Irene said. "But her daughters are a secret? I've seen photos that must be them."

Phyllis covered her mouth with her hand. “I was sure she was about to smash her saucer on the hearth and slice you open!”

Sylvia hushed them. “It’s no secret. Thousands of kids have been sent into the countryside.”

“But we’re *in* the countryside,” Irene said. “There are kids from London at the next farm. I’ve seen them. So why aren’t HL’s girls here? She acts like it’s confidential.”

“The less we know about the specifics of HL’s life, the better for us,” Sylvia said. “This is the best assignment we could have landed, and I’m not giving up my warm bed and nighttime milk—and butter and cream from the dairy—because some people are too nosy for their own good.”

“Unless it’s something that could get her in trouble with the Land Army, and then where would we be?” Irene asked. “I’d rather know what’s coming.”

“And I’d rather go to bed than listen to your suspicions. Good night,” Sylvia said.

“I told you she hated me,” Irene whispered to Nancy once Sylvia had gone.

Nancy brushed it off with a flick of her fingers. “She doesn’t.”

“Aye, she does,” Phyl said. “There’s only one of us she was fond of.”

Nancy finished her tea and set the cup down. “With Doris gone, her secret is safe.”

Irene asked, “Why would Doris leave and not say anything if they were such good mates?”

Irene caught the wink Phyllis gave Nancy. “I found Doris’s gloves. Well, they had to be hers. They were where she’d been working before I came, anyway. In the enclosed garden.”

“That place gives me gooseflesh,” Phyllis said.

Irene had the feeling again, of kneeling on the path in the garden, pulling weeds, and wondering about apples.

“Doesn’t matter,” Nancy said. “Doris skedaddled. Give her gloves to Syl!”

“I wasn’t—” Irene started. She decided to let it drop. “When have you been in the walled garden, Phyl?”

Phyllis shrugged, but her face betrayed her uneasiness. “Once or twice early on. Doris took me.”

“And?”

"And nothing. It felt like an empty house. And I heard a bird that sounded like a baby crying."

"Did you see ghosts?"

Phyllis shook her head. "No, you're the one seeing the dead and gone."

Irene's chest felt numb. Dead. Ghosts. Somehow, it hadn't dawned on her until now that HL's ghost, the man in the green coat, was dead. Why would Irene keep on seeing him when she didn't know him in real life? Was it the place? Would she have to go back to London, to the rubble near the Underground station, to see Alice again?

#

Even the smell of the coming storm couldn't cut through the thick scent of dust, old potting soil, and neglect that hung in the disused conservatory. The dogs sniffed along the edges of the walls and followed the girls as they rearranged the room. Her Ladyship directed the Land Girls and Morris to shove the wicker chairs and side tables against the walls to make room for a sturdy round table and six heavy kitchen chairs from the servants' quarters. They covered the table top with an old tablecloth and a fringed piano scarf decorated in purple and green swirls. "Might as well make it look the part," Her Ladyship said. Irene appreciated her theatrical sensibilities.

The medium arrived at seven o'clock, in time to have biscuits and tea. Her Ladyship had arranged for the séance to be held after dusk but still early enough on a Friday night that the girls wouldn't be too tired the next morning. However, she directed Morris to serve breakfast late the following morning and told the girls they could have an extra half hour lie-in. "Just this once," she said, as if the girls had asked for a special favour rather than being told they were expected to attend.

Irene couldn't wait to see the medium. Likely she'd be gaunt and old— or smoulderingly gorgeous—dressed like a gypsy, covered in jewellry made of gold and silver coins. She was disappointed when Morris ushered in a middle-aged housewife wearing a cunningly mended coat and a hat that had seen several seasons and accessory changes. Morris took the woman's coat but the medium kept firm hold of her handbag.

Once Morris had been sent out, and the dogs with her, Her Ladyship introduced the medium to each girl. Irene held back, wanting to be last so Mrs. Furst had time to say something special and profound to her. She'd scrubbed her hands extra hard after work to be sure they were clean and the lines easy to read. But the medium only touched fingers with Irene and shook them as if testing the weight of fabric at the shop.

"I saw him," Irene blurted out.

"So you keep telling us," Sylvia added.

Her Ladyship distracted Mrs. Furst by handing her a cup of tea. "There have always been ghosts here."

Mrs. Furst shoved a biscuit into her mouth and smacked her lips while she chewed. Phyllis made a face at Irene and Nancy. Sylvia just scowled. "Who do you want to contact?" Mrs. Furst asked between biscuits.

"One of the ghosts," Her Ladyship said.

"Well of course one o' the ghosts. But who specially? Who've you lost?"

That stumped Her Ladyship. "No—no one. Not recently."

"I been called all over the countryside to contact sons and husbands lost in the war. Easier if the widows come to me, petrol rations being what they are." "I've your payment, just here." Her Ladyship patted her pocket.

Mrs. Furst ate another biscuit and held out her cup for more tea. "Lots of milk and two lumps this time, if you can spare it." Irene watched as their sugar rations disappeared down Mrs. Furst's gullet.

"So, ma'am," the medium said between gulps, "who is it I need to call?" She looked up from her teacup when the rain started in earnest, hammering against the conservatory roof. "I hope this glass is strong enough. Looks to be a devil of a storm." "Girls, I hate to ask," Her Ladyship said.

Nancy, Phyllis and Sylvia shook their heads. None had lost anyone in the war.

"Irene?" Her Ladyship asked.

"I—" Irene started. She saw Alice's face, slack in the firelight, her cracked glasses thankfully reflecting the flames so Irene couldn't see her dead eyes. "It didn't happen here in the house," she explained. "I don't know his name. I saw him in the fields and the woods."

Mrs. Furst flapped a hand in dismissal and took another bite of biscuit. "Doesn't matter," she said, crumbs falling to her dress. "I can bring them through if they were close to you, a loved one. Or if they died in the place where we call them."

"He was likely a gardener," Her Ladyship added. "Which is why I thought the conservatory the perfect setting. Halfway between worlds, so to speak." "Why you want to talk to him?" Mrs. Furst asked.

Irene was startled when Her Ladyship took her hand. Phyl and Nancy looked at her with pity while Sylvia just picked at a loose thread on her dress.

"When Irene told me she'd seen a ghost and described him, I knew it was time. I saw the very same man, years ago, during the Great War. I want to know why he's returned now."

Irene tried not to move her fingers. No one had touched her with tenderness in so long that her breath hitched. After Alice, a sort of bubble had formed around Irene, and another around her mother. They spent weeks bumping against each other, but not inhabiting the same space.

Don't cry, she told herself. *Don'tcrydon'tcrydon'tcry.* She took a deep breath and dug her fingernails into the palm of her free hand, focusing on the pain so she wouldn't feel anything else.

"Any of you see this man?" Mrs. Furst looked around the table.

The other three shook their heads.

"Nope," Sylvia said. "Too busy ploughing to chase after ghosts."

"Pity," Mrs. Furst said. "For this to work, though, you got to believe. Even if it's just tonight. Or it won't work. Got it?" The question hung there, a threat made stronger by Her Ladyship's single, business-like nod.

Lightning lit up the sky off to one side and a tree branch scratched against the glass roof. Mrs. Furst ordered the girls to sit in certain places around the table, putting Irene to her right and Her Ladyship to her left, as they were the only two who had seen the ghost. "To make a stronger bond," she explained. Nancy, Phyl, and Sylvia sat together, Nancy at Irene's side and Phyl at Her Ladyship's, leaving Sylvia to sit across from the medium.

Lights turned down and a candelabra lit in the centre of the table, the six held hands. "Now," Mrs. Furst said to Irene, "I want you to concentrate on this man, the ghost you saw. Picture him. Picture him right here in the room with us. You too, M'Lady."

Irene bought to mind his coat and hair. If only she'd seen his face. But faces are easy to forget, she knew. Every time she looked at Alice's picture she was surprised how different it was from her memories. At the thought of Alice, Irene began to tear up. *You're just overtired,* she told herself. *Now, think of the man. Watch him walk away from you again, in the field and the woods.* And then she was in the field again, raking the rows. That thought brought her back to the garden when she pulled strawberry plants. And that thought brought her back to the strawberry print fabric of Alice's dress and her sister's birthday party. *Stop it! Concentrate!*

Mrs. Furst's voice interrupted Irene's inner dialog, and she wondered how much of it she'd missed. "Spirits of this house, hear me." Her voice filled the room to its high glass ceiling.

One of the candles went out. Nancy and Phyl gasped. Mrs. Furst shushed them. "The spirits are close."

"Or it's draughty," Sylvia said under her breath.

Her Ladyship hissed.

"Your man, describe him."

"Tall. Dark hair pulled back in a ribbon. In a dark coat—a green coat. Like velvet. And high boots," Irene said.

"His face?" the medium asked.

"Don't know," Irene had to admit.

The girls gaped at her. "What?" Sylvia asked.

Irene lifted her shoulders. "He was always walking away."

"So how do you know he's not real?" Phyllis asked.

"Story of your life," Sylvia said.

"Hey," Irene said. "I didn't know an interrogation was part of the deal."

Mrs. Furst put an end to the bickering. "Those on the spiritual plane show us as much as we need. His face isn't important. Ma'am?"

Her Ladyship spoke. "I was much younger when I saw him. But he hasn't changed. He came to me in the walled garden on the day I got the telegram saying His Lordship was in hospital. He'd gone to New York City on business."

"Tell me," the medium demanded. Irene caught looks from the other girls. Who dared tell Her Ladyship what to do?

"It was raining," Her Ladyship said, her voice softening as she sank into the memory. "And I'd gone out without my hat or coat, not even an umbrella. I was expecting our first child—that would be Katherine. I stood in the garden, hiding from the house while I cried, my tears mixing with the rain, sure I was destined to be a widow. I thought I heard something behind me, although later it didn't makes sense because the rain was so loud. Just pouring. In any case, I turned and in the shadows in the corner stood a man. At first I thought it was one of the footmen, come to bring me back inside. But he couldn't have got into that corner without walking past me. I wasn't scared. His Lordship was gone, perhaps dying. There was nothing more terrifying, I thought. Since then, of course, I've lived enough to realise there is always something

else—something worse—to face once you get over the sadness of the first thing. He blended in with the garden in his green coat." She nodded at Irene in agreement.

"His face?" Nancy asked, forgetting to address her employer.

"It was raining too hard, the sky was too dark. I couldn't bring myself to walk towards him, and he didn't move. Just stood there, a witness. And then he faded away." "That's it?" Mrs. Furst asked.

Her Ladyship smiled, and Irene saw a younger woman, one with fewer troubles, shine through. "The next day, Hill reported a lily—one he'd not planted—had bloomed in the garden. I made him show me, and he took me to the exact spot where I'd seen the ghost. It was later that I noticed the same man in a painting in the library. When Irene saw him, too, I decided it was important to find out why. My younger daughters are away, where I cannot look after them. I need to know why this man has appeared again. I need to know if they are in danger."

"Let's try again," Mrs. Furst said, motioning for everyone to hold hands again. "Concentrate." She leaned forward and blew out a candle, throwing even more shadows on the walls. Lightning flashed again, and thunder rolled in from far off. Irene respected the woman's flair for drama.

The medium closed her eyes and swayed in her seat. "Spirits of this house, hear us. We wish to speak with a man who walks among the living. Are you here, spirits?" The question was met by silence.

"I feel you here, spirits. I feel you floating next to me. Will you speak? It is safe here."

Irene closed her eyes, too, and tried to see the man again, tried to see him as a person, right in front of her, and not as a figure walking on a cinema screen. She was in the mud, planting in the rain, and he walked into her line of sight and then back out again. She ran after him, her hand out to touch him, but he slipped away. He was close, so close. Just as close as Alice had been when they'd run for the station and safety. And then the world exploded in fire and Alice slammed back against her, and Irene was kneeling in the street again, broken bricks and tiles digging into her knees and shins, blood dripping off of her jaw and onto her hands and Alice's face from the cuts she didn't even feel.

"Irene?" Mrs. Furst said in a voice so much smaller than the one she'd used earlier.

Irene jumped and would have pulled clenched her hands together, but Mrs. Furst's grip couldn't be broken, and Nancy squeezed tighter in surprise.

“Irene?” she asked again.

“Yes,” Irene said. Her voice came out in a croak.

“You said to run for the station, Reeny.”

Irene’s throat closed. Only Alice ever called her that.

“But the station disappeared.”

“What is happening?” Her Ladyship asked.

“Alice,” Irene whispered. To hell with the man in the green coat with no face. She wanted to talk to her sister again. If only Mother were there. “I’m sorry, Alice,” Irene said. “It was supposed to be safe.” Something brushed against her leg. One of the dogs must have got in.

“You said we’d be okay. You said not to worry, that Mummy wouldn’t know.”

“I did. I was wrong. I’m sorry. I didn’t know.” The dog must have been sitting on her foot, its paws around her ankle. She couldn’t move her leg.

“Is Mummy going to be cross? I think my glasses are broken. And my dress is torn.”

“No, sweetie, Mummy won’t be cross,” Irene said. “She won’t be cross with you.”

Irene hiccupped and sniffed, wishing for a hankie and some privacy. She didn’t dare look up and see the stares from the other girls. The dog pushed against her thighs, but it was smooth and cold, not furry and warm.

And then Alice spoke again, but it was drowned out in the hammering from the rain hitting the glass roof. The candlelight flickered, throwing soft shadows on the old pots and furniture piled in the corners.

“What did you say?” Irene asked her sister. Before Mrs. Furst could answer, the wind gushed and a tree branch crashed through a windowpane behind Irene, sending shards of glass and rainwater down the wall behind her. She jumped up, breaking the circle. No dog came out from under the table. In the melee, with Her Ladyship pulling the table away from danger of getting wet and the girls each grabbing chairs, Irene saw something slither along the floor and into the shadows. Another flash of lightning, and she was sure it was green. A vine, covered in leaves and orange blooms. And then the remaining candles went out and everything was dark.

“Girls,” Her Ladyship called.

Each of them, including Irene, answered.

“Mrs. Furst, I must apologise. The war, you know. Makes it hard to keep gardeners.”

There was no answer.

The rain continued to pound against the glass, the sound loud and sharp where water poured in through the hole and splashed on the tile floor.

"Mrs. Furst," Her Ladyship said, her voice rising.

Mrs. Furst didn't answer. Irene grabbed at the air to her left, hoping to catch hold of the woman's hand.

Another flash followed by an immediate boom of thunder. The storm was right on them. And in the half-second of light, Irene saw her. Not Mrs. Furst, but another woman, wearing a long skirt, her hair piled on her head. Her back was to the room as she stood and seemed to watch the storm. Irene closed her eyes against the thunder, it was so close. And a blue-yellow image burned on the inside of her eyelids: the woman, surrounded by other figures. When Irene opened her eyes again, Mrs. Furst was standing in front of her with a lit candle. In her other hand she held a lighter, its flame hissing.

"Tea?" she asked.

Her Ladyship urged the medium out the door as quickly as possible. When Her Ladyship argued that the medium hadn't brought the man to them, Mrs. Furst said, "Calling the dead isn't like picking up the telephone and giving the operator an exact number. It's a party line. I called, and that little girl came through. That's a success in my book."

Her Ladyship held out a sheaf of rations.

"We agreed on petrol, butter, and meat," Mrs. Furst said.

"And you agreed to call my ghost. Now I've got a broken window, a flooded conservatory, and a very upset girl. I'll have some milk and butter sent from my dairy straight to your address early next week. But no meat." Knowing she was beaten, Mrs. Furst retreated.

Irene watched the exchange from the couch. The other girls sat together on the opposite side of the room.

"Irene," Her Ladyship said in her most commanding voice.

Irene jumped. "Ma'am," she said, expecting to be told that the cost of the broken glass would come out of her pay and that she'd be cleaning the conservatory before bed.

In a voice that was not unkind but expected to be answered, the woman asked, "What happened to Alice?"

Irene tensed, giving herself a moment, unsure how to act. Nancy and Phyllis leaned forward, nibbling on biscuits. Sylvia sat, arms crossed, her face neutral, doing

everything she could to show the opposite of interest. Irene gave up, admitting to herself she couldn't think of the right role to play and that keeping the secret didn't do anyone—especially not Alice—any good.

"She died."

"Tell us." Her Ladyship moved to sit closer to Irene, her presence backing up the order.

So Irene told them about sneaking out one night, and about Alice sneaking out behind her. "I told her to go back, but when she said Mother would hear, and I'd get in trouble for sneaking out, I knew she was right. So I took her with me. To a dance. She was only fourteen."

Nancy pushed a cup of tea—more milk than tea, to be honest—into Irene's hand.

"On our way home, the sirens started. I pushed her towards a station and told her to run. We were half a block away when the bomb hit, smack-dab on top of the station." Irene took a sip to hide the catch in her voice. "And that's it, really. Mother was too angry to keep me at home." *And my looks are ruined and the director didn't want me.*

The clock chimed ten, and Her Ladyship ordered them all to bed.

Later, in the dark, when Irene heard Sylvia take a breath to speak, she prepared herself for a snide comment or yet another question about Alice. But when she asked, "Who did you see in the conservatory?" Irene was too shocked to answer right away.

"Because I saw someone," Sylvia confessed. "I saw Doris. Standing there in her work clothes, her hair tied up, dirt on her cheek."

"How? She isn't dead."

"No idea," Sylvia said. "No one saw her go. She hasn't written. But she took her things. Ghosts don't pack suitcases."

"No, they don't," Irene said. *They leave them behind. Full of what they can't take with them. And then we're left to carry them.*

The woman she had seen in the lightning flash never turned around. Irene was sure, without knowing anything about séances beyond what she'd seen in films, that the woman's appearance had had nothing to do with Mrs. Furst's power to call the dead. The woman was a part of the house, like the man in the green coat was part of the gardens. Whether they were ghosts, echoes, or just history, Irene wasn't sure. But their presence made Irene feel safer somehow, as if everyone who ever was would always be here, somewhere. She still hadn't decided how to feel about the contact with Alice, and she was tempted to write Mother about it. There had been no letter from home, and Irene hadn't written any.

Irene turned it all over in her mind, the work of it similar to turning the soil before sowing seeds. She quickly fell asleep.

So exhausted from working outside and the visit from the Alice, Irene didn't wake up when the bomber first flew overhead. The droning engine invaded her dreams, where she and Alice were running towards the station. Irene felt a jolt and grabbed for Alice, hoping to catch her this time.

"Alice! Your hand!"

But Alice was out of reach. Always out of reach. Irene needed to save her this time. She called out again, and a blast pushed her off her feet. Alice's hand disappeared into the dark.

A groan and a thud woke her up. She lay on top of Alice, both of them halfway under the bed. Screaming came from the other bedroom, and the dogs all barked somewhere far down the hallway. Outside, the world was lit up.

"Alice!" Irene finally reached her sister, was finally going to be allowed to save her.

Another crash and windows exploded above their heads.

Irene pulled her silent sister out from under the bed. Alice's bright hair had gone dark, and she wasn't wearing her glasses, but it was probably a trick of the light. Irene didn't care—as long as she kept tight hold this time they'd make it home together. She pulled the girl into the hallway and down the stairs, through the kitchen and down into the old coal cellar where they'd be safe.

"Saved you," she said.

"It'll fall in on us," Sylvia said, finding her voice.

Irene took notice of the boxes and bins stacked around them, and of the solid young woman in front of her. The ground shuddered and the house above them shook. Sylvia grabbed Irene's hand.

#

The bomb took out the wing of the house where their rooms had been. It took a day of digging to find Nancy and Phyllis. Her Ladyship, surrounded by her dogs, stood near the damaged walled garden all day in the rain with Irene and Sylvia, waiting for news. She wilted when word came that the bodies had been found.

For the remainder of the war, the east wing of the house was off limits, kept waiting for repairs that never happened. The WLA sent more girls to replace the ones

lost, Her Ladyship had some of the older, closed-up rooms cleaned out to house the new workers, and everyone carried on. The séance was forgotten, but Irene still caught glimpses of a man in the garden and fields, just out of the corner of her eye. She never saw him clearly enough to see his face.

After the war, Irene returned to London, and a local boy she'd met at a country dance followed her to the city, found her on the playbill to a short-run play as "Third girl" and brought her back home as his wife. Her mother sold the boarding house and moved to the countryside to be closer to her daughter, who taught her how to garden in earnest. Their tomatoes and leeks won ribbons.

Irene often passed by the entrance to the estate and wondered after Her Ladyship, who was the subject of gossip in the town. "Sent her girls to America, she did." "The Queen kept her daughters here, where they belonged, so why Lady High and Mighty had to send her darlings to the States is beyond me." "Heard she's gone across the pond to keep her children where it's safe, she says." The Hall seemed to close in on itself, not that Irene and her husband travelled in the same circles. As the years passed, news of Her Ladyship disappeared, much like the Hall behind the thick vines on the estate's entrance.

One day, years after her own husband was dead and her children moved to London for work, a reporter rang Irene. A girl reporter, asking her about the war. It got Irene thinking about Sylvia, about Mr. Hill and Her Ladyship. About Phyllis and Nancy. About Doris. And about Alice. She felt a bit ashamed for not thinking of little Alice in a long time, but life is long and she had a lot of ghosts.

And that led her to thinking about the gardens for the first time in years.

Petrol rations had ended decades—a lifetime—before, but the thrill of going out whenever she wanted in Harry's old Citroen never got old. She slowed down as she neared the estate. Word of the sale of some of the fields had reached her, so the construction trucks weren't a big surprise. Houses were going up where the grain and potato fields had been. The gossip also had it that the house was empty much of the time with only a caretaker to keep after the place.

A horn behind her woke her from indecision and she pulled in and drove up the approach. If she got cited for trespassing she could always explain her Land Girl years. Her age was a currency she wasn't ashamed to use.

As the car bounded over potholes in the drive she noticed the old barn's roof was falling in. Here and there were spots where someone—the caretaker? the owner?— had tried to keep the place up: clipped hedges on one side of the drive, a pot of geraniums on either side of the front door, the steps swept and clean. But overall the place felt

empty. No one came out to find out who she was. Not one curtain in any window shifted to show someone was watching.

She parked to one side, not bothering to hide the car. Irene didn't know what to expect. Her children would bring up moving in with one of them again if they knew, while the grandkids would say she was cool for trespassing on some old house's land. But she didn't want to go far, just to the walled garden, which was close to the house.

The gate hung open, no use now that the opposite wall was gone.

Inside it was much as she remembered it, except for the wreckage of a plane, its tail sticking up towards the sky where the sundial used to be. It was grander, and more terrible, than any brass trinket that the earl or duke who had built the house could have imagined. Its body was a sleeping hump beneath a tangled mess of a rose. Thick with thorns, Irene noted, but her days of caring about English roses were far behind her.

Beneath neglected fruit tress splayed against the brick wall, wild strawberry plants had spread. She pushed aside straggly peonies sporting wilted blooms and worked quickly.

The trowel was an old one, the gloves, too. But they worked fine and within minutes Irene had a small paper bag containing a few plants, enough to fill in a spot in her own back garden and remind her of Alice's birthday dress. And of her mother.

She turned and the plane was gone.

She wasn't surprised. Not anymore.

The man in the green coat stood where the sundial had been. The sun was behind him, putting his face in shadow.

"I won't tell, if you won't," Irene said, a fitting last line before the credits. He seemed to nod, but it could have been a trick of the light.

Monday, June 14, 2010, 3:28 pm

I was in my office when the gallery phone rang.

It was Kevin's job to get the phone and log calls, so I let it ring. I only ever answer my cell, and even then I'd rather email or text. It's easier that way, to be sure all the facts are spelled out and everyone's on the same page.

I heard Kevin's voice out in the gallery but I ignored him and kept going over the plans for the Tyler exhibition, digging through my contacts to compile a guest list of people who still had funds to indulge their love of collecting.

As if I had a chance in hell of saving the gallery.

Kevin poked his head around the corner. "It's for you. A lawyer. English, I think."

I jumped when he said lawyer. It was only a matter of time, but a lawyer?

"Says it's about your family."

That word really got my attention. Family. I don't have much of a family.

"Miss Hammond?" Although Kevin had told me the man was English, his accent was still a surprise. The gallery is popular with tourists, but I don't deal with British art buyers too often.

What he had to say was so outlandish I didn't need to write down the details in the log book.

"You can come in," I called out after hanging up the phone.

Kevin appeared in the doorway. "I—"

"Please." I held up a hand. "You've worked for me long enough for me to know when you're eavesdropping."

"Are you okay?" He had the sense to look concerned.

I shook my head. "He's got to have the wrong person."

"Do lawyers tend to do that?"

"He was calling from London, telling me I'd inherited an estate, of all things."

Kevin laughed. "Right. And I'm a Nigerian prince. Send me two thousand dollars and I'll split my millions with you."

I couldn't help but laugh. Kevin might not be the best assistant, but at least he was entertaining. "But he knew all about my family, about my grandmother. I don't know." I toyed with my rings, one of which had belonged my grandmother. A ruby set with tiny diamonds; inside the band was a rather faint set of initials and a date, 1889. A

family heirloom, I'd been told, along with bits of a long, convoluted story about a box of jewels buried in the ground and a sundial in the garden of a castle in England.

Thinking about my grandmother always took me back to when she told her stories, usually over a card table covered in a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle, cicadas buzzing loudly in the background.

Kevin's voice interrupted the daydream. "You can't think it's for real?" His fingers were poised over his mobile.

"You text or tweet this and I'll break your fingers. Before I fire you," I added. But soon I was going to have to do just that. I liked Kevin, but I liked food in my own fridge more.

He pocketed his phone. "You need coffee."

"I don't need anything," I lied while picturing my bank balance. "But I'd like some coffee, thank you."

After he left for the kitchenette, I turned to my laptop and typed *Hartfordshire* into the search engine, only to discover I'd spelled it wrong. *You've got a lot to learn,* I thought, before ignoring the exhibition outline and losing myself in the past.

#

I know nothing about gardens.

I grew up in the desert, where those with green thumbs have to fight water shortages and crappy soil, spending hours on their knees praying that any plants foreign to the place will survive. After a season or two, new arrivals give up the ghost on having the lush green jungle that grew so easily back home. Locals from the desert know better, but they still dream of shady coves beneath tall trees. Front and back yards are only green for those who can afford installed sprinkler systems and the required chemicals. When I was a kid we had a rock garden in the front yard. Not so much a "garden" as a swoopy design of coloured rocks with a cactus here and there, while most of the back yard was covered in a raised wooden deck except for a small square plot of yellowing grass off to one side where the dog did his business. Most of my friends' yards were filled with spiky desert plants or succulents, their leaves full and shiny, gorged on water. When I was a kid, I hated the thought of touching them, afraid they would burst open and spill green pus on my skin. They still freak me out.

My mother hated plants; my grandmother, too. We never had live houseplants. I can only recall one time when my father brought a bouquet of flowers into the house.

The next day, the Valentine's roses screamed a warning from the kitchen trashcan: Poison! Danger! Don't touch! What few plants were allowed in the house were fake. My grandmother was especially fond of plastic blue roses and unnaturally pink lilies made of painted fabric.

And now I had, somehow, inherited a garden along with a house. That's what the lawyer—well, solicitor—said on the phone. "You are the sole inheritor of a piece of land upon which sits the remains of a house and garden." The remains?

I sat in my living room later that night and flipped channels on the TV, ate some leftovers, and wondered how the hell my life had suddenly gone all sideways. Who inherits an old house and garden in England and doesn't even know it exists? Who has relatives who are Lord this and Lady that but doesn't know? Who is barely holding on to her business in the middle of a stinking awful recession, with no idea what to do next, and has a several-hundred-year history drop on top of her like Dorothy's house dropped on top of the Wicked Witch?

I obviously do, that's who.

Half a bottle of wine later—and I make it a rule never to drink alone, but that day was a rule-breaker all around—and I was still sitting on the couch, staring at a rerun of *Law & Order Something or Other*. So I did what I always do when I don't know where to start: I made a list.

- Bills (which ones are immediate? Which ones can I ignore for a while longer? Make a list!)
- Find box of family records (grandma's birth certificate?)
- Ask lawyer about money (is there any?)
- Cheap ticket to London (Kevin can do)
- Pay Kevin
- Cancel cable
- Cancel paper
- Cancel hair appointment
- Figure out what else to cancel
- Finish invites to Tyler exhibit
- Find passport (safety deposit box?)

It was the first list of dozens that I was to make in the coming months. In spite of the confusion I felt then, it turned out to be the simplest and most straight-forward.

#

Monday, June 28, 2010, 11:37 am

The cab rolled through suburban neighbourhoods, past one set of shops after another. It was my first trip to the UK, and I didn't know what to expect, but clumps of corner shops with shelves of fruits and vegetable out front next door to Chinese and Indian take-out wasn't it. I guess I expected everyone to be in bowler hats and tweed, carrying umbrellas and riding in shiny black cabs or big red buses everywhere. I liked to think I lived in a culturally diverse city, but Santa Fe has nothing on London. On every street, veiled women with amazing eye makeup pushed strollers (prams!) past Hasidic Jews in tall hats and temple curls, and people called out to each other in languages I couldn't identify. It was familiar yet completely foreign and strange all at the same time. I was a tourist, yes, but felt as if I could blend in, with so many people here from somewhere else.

I'd flown in on Saturday and had spent much of the previous day passed out in a jet-lag coma, waking up this morning feeling like a human for the first time since landing. I'd taken the train from Kings Cross to a station north of the city and then called a cab to take me to the house, following the directions the solicitor had given me. It had been a frantic couple of weeks since the first phone call. Paperwork had to be scanned, signed, scanned, sent back. Phone calls with the solicitor did nothing to help me make sense of things. I'd never heard of an entailment before. Hell, my own grandmother hadn't even made a will before she died.

Through it all that word "remains" echoed through my mind. What I imagined and the photos the solicitor sent didn't match up. Remains meant stacks of stones and bricks, broken 2x4s, a couch upside down in the front yard, like something after a tornado. The photo he sent, a grainy black and white, was of a mansion from one of those shows on PBS or BBC America. Make-believe places. Places that don't exist where I grew up. The solicitor explained the photo itself was old, and the house had sustained damage in the war.

"War?" I wracked my brain to make sense of it.

"The Second World War," he said, as if it were perfectly clear.

"Oh, Jesus. That's right." I actually slapped my own forehead. The war had happened *there*.

When the solicitor suggested contacting Country Legacy to see whether they would perhaps be interested in the house, I nearly cried with relief, even though I had no idea what Country Legacy even was. Just the fact someone out there might want to

save me was enough for now. I wondered if they'd want a gallery in Santa Fe, going cheap.

It took three days of transfers from this person to that, plus an official appointment, to get to talk to a man from the Country Legacy offices. I can't remember his name. It's written down somewhere. "There's no way I can take care of the place," I explained. "But it's old. Really old."

The Legacy man laughed from across the ocean. "Old is relative."

I rummaged through the papers the solicitor had scanned and emailed. "This says it's from before the Dissolution. So that's what…?" I tried to recall college history lectures. "At least 400-ish years old? Santa Fe has the oldest house and oldest church in America. They're three and four-hundred years old, so I know what you mean by old."

"A hundred years isn't old here. Three hundred years isn't even that old." "It's got to count for something, though," I said. Pleaded, more like.

"Perhaps."

The sale was slipping through my fingers, an all-too-familiar feeling.

"Look, I'm coming to London. Perhaps we can arrange a meeting? Someone to come look at the place, figure out if it's worth saving. I can be there for as long as you need." That was a lie. I had enough on my credit card to cover the plane fare and about a week in a hotel. Maybe. I had no idea what the exchange rate was. Perhaps I could pretend to be a college student again and stay at a hostel. They had hostels for older people, didn't they? I seemed to remember seeing something about it on that travel guy's show on public television, back when I dreamed about real vacations.

If I could get this deal to go through, I'd be able to unload the mess, hightail it back to New Mexico, and maybe save the gallery. Otherwise I'd be homeless. Well, not homeless-homeless, I guess, but the last thing I wanted to do was move to the English countryside and camp out in The Remains. I imagined myself in a shabby fur coat, playing at Grey Gardens.

The cab turned off the main road and onto a side road, and then another smaller side road only one-car wide, where trees cast cool green shadows over the car.

"Here?" the driver asked.

I jumped when he spoke. For most of the drive, he'd chatted on his phone headset in a language I couldn't understand. I'd blocked it out, grateful I didn't have to explain what I was doing in a cab going to a place he insisted wasn't even on his GPS.

I shrugged and then remembered to speak. "I don't know. I think so."

He kept driving.

I clutched my bag, which contained a slim box of papers. I had memorized the picture of the house. Above the treetops, I caught glimpses of a roofline matching the one in the photo, but the house's bricks were a rusty red and not the grey I'd imagined. Thick shrubbery to each side of the drive blocked my view of the grounds and made the place feel like a jungle.

Although I was intrigued and still overwhelmed by the fantastic turn of events, I decided right then it was a good thing I'd called the Legacy. This wasn't my house. This wasn't the way my life was supposed to happen. There was no way I could take this project on, not with my life across the ocean. But the idea that this place, regardless of its state, was a solution to my problems—rather than fixing my failing art gallery and filling my empty bank account—nagged at me.

The car left the green alley behind and we were in the sunshine of a late-June day, the sky like something out of a postcard. When I was a child, I had dreamed about visiting England's great homes and palaces, usually fresh on the heels of reading about King Arthur. Now I owned one. I even had keys, a little brass one and a big silver skeleton-like key for the house—another indication I was living in someone else's costume drama—and a few other assorted keys for "outbuildings," as the solicitor had put it, and a storage unit. The house had suffered bomb damage, he explained, never repaired, and its surrounding hundreds of acres had been sold off piece by piece until all that remained were a dozen or so containing the old gardens, themselves in a state of extreme disrepair. I hadn't inherited a fairy tale but a nightmare.

When was I going to wake up?

A woman stood in front of the house, her back to the car, a camera in one hand. She turned at the sound of the car's tires crunching over what was left of the gravel. For some inexplicable reason, I had expected the woman to be familiar, so I was surprised when she was a stranger. Perhaps it had to do with the fact that the house was so familiar. I'd looked at the photo of it a thousand times in the previous week.

The driver gave me his card before he drove away so I could call for a pick-up later. Once he was gone, I was left in silence for the first time since arriving in London. It reminded me of my childhood in a desert thousands of miles away, except without the constant drone of cicadas. The only sound was the singing of birds in the treetops. I looked up and found a green parakeet, like the kind a childhood friend had once.

"Yes, there are flocks of them. You most often see them in the city," the woman said. She was shorter than me, pretty, younger by a few years.

"You mean it really is a parakeet?"

"The story is, the flocks are descendants of pets that escaped or were set free. They're all over in Lewisham."

My blank stare clued her in.

"Ah, that's in the south east, a suburb of London. One afternoon at dusk I walked to the station and counted thirteen flocks as they flew overhead from one bit of greenspace to another. I'd believe the number was an omen if I was superstitious." She put her hand out. "Lauren Ellis, Country Legacy."

"Toni—Antoinette—Hammond. Long-lost heir."

I watched Lauren's reaction. I had learned in my few days in the UK that being an American meant the natives expected me to be loud and brash. Which I can be. But I'd found myself holding back, shy in a country teeming with strangers. On my best behavior, as my mother would have put it. Yet no matter the topic, I couldn't help but say things that came across almost rude, or at least funny in that "I wouldn't dare say it so I'm glad you did" way. I wondered whether a place like this would smooth my rough edges, or just bring out the worst in me. I'd always liked to shock my more timid friends.

Lauren didn't laugh at the joke. But she didn't frown, either.

"Like to see what it is you've got?" she asked.

"You mean see what I have for a while? It's all a bit bizarre, but I'm definitely not keeping it." I followed Lauren through the high grass toward the house. In a put-on accent, I asked, unable to stop myself, "What does one do with a castle nowadays?"

"It's hardly a castle." Lauren's tone made me imagine I was wearing an invisible Union Jack hat and a shirt with "I heart London" written across the front of it. I opened my mouth to counter, but thought better of it, knowing I'd end up in more trouble.

"I've been taking photos of the gardens and taking down some measurements and notes, but I'll have some questions."

I held up the slim box. "I brought what records we had. There isn't much here, though. Just some old receipts, a few order forms and lists, letters, and some old drawings. More like scribbles, really. Of a garden. Not this garden."

I surveyed the immediate area, a sunken space with crumbling stone steps and half-fallen down balustrade. The roses were so overgrown there was no indication of committed flower beds along the walls, and the paths were muddy tracks. "Well, maybe this garden, under all this mess." Weeds choked most everything low to the ground.

Even without a gardening background, I recognized dandelions and smiled to think that the weeds in the UK were the same as at home.

"It's more likely that the garden in the drawings is gone. Too many changes in what was fashionable over the centuries. There isn't an extant Tudor garden in existence, actually. What we have here is mostly Victorian, made up in some ways to look like an older garden. The house—or parts of it—date before that."

"How far back?"

"Oh, definitely before 1600. Didn't the paperwork say it was called abbey something? But you never know what we may find."

"Isn't the house more important anyway?"

"I like to think of them as a package deal. They were often altered simultaneously, so we can read the garden like we read the house."

"Well, whatever. Seems a shame to tear down such a grand old place, especially since my family's had it for so long. We've got to keep history alive, eh?"

I read in Lauren's tiny nod a rebuke about how well the family had taken care of its history. And then my phone rang. Kevin had insisted on setting things up so my phone worked in the UK, but so far he was the only one who'd called. It was him again, probably in a panic about the upcoming exhibit. I was tempted to ignore it and explore more of the grounds with Lauren, but I had to remember this place wasn't mine forever. My real life was far across the ocean. I excused myself to take the call, leaving her to continue her measurements.

"See you later," I called back over my shoulder.

#

Lauren wasn't sure what to think about the American. Tall, thin, rather tanned, the woman was all angles and edges in a long grey skirt and an asymmetrical grey and black top, one of those outfits that looks too plain, boring even, but up close smells of money. Lauren recalled something about her coming from New Mexico. She looked like one of those Americans Lauren sometimes saw on TV, trying to be European in severe clothes and perfectly straight hair. But her glasses gave her away: plain plastic frames, cheap, like something from a Boots rack of readers.

She was sure what to think about the house and its gardens, however: they needed her. Working for the Country Legacy for so many years had given Lauren a feel for houses and gardens. She could arrive at a site and know right away whether the

place would be right, would have *it.* Not ghosts so much as a sort of soul from the people who had once lived there. Sometimes positive, sometimes negative, these feelings to Lauren were as strong as the scent she discovered when walking into someone else's home for the first time. She instantly felt a house's happiness or disdain at the Legacy's arrival, almost as if the generations of the family were still there, talking to her.

This house had been waiting.

Nettles and burdock had grown thick around the walls, and Lauren was glad for her boots so she could stamp them down and get up close for detailed photos. Three stories across the front with two wings leading back from each end—well, one and a half wings as a result of a mis-targeted bomb. It was a large house, with several alterations done over the centuries, some red brick and others original stone.

Lauren still wasn't sure what part of it had originally been an abbey. Peeling back the layers of these buildings was one of the best parts of her job, making her feel like an architectural Sherlock Holmes. The American—Toni—had taken the records with her. Lauren needed to see what was in the box so she could start to piece together more of the house's history.

How in the world had this woman end up inheriting? Lauren knew the ins and outs of the entail, as much as she needed to know. Bloodlines win out in the end, but having the right grandmother doesn't make a house talk to you, take you in, belong to you.

Lauren went back to taking photos, writing down measurements, and making a list of tasks to be done, people to call, small details to remember. She didn't have much hope of the house being important enough for the Legacy to take on. Truth be told, though she felt a kinship with the house, Lauren didn't expect a positive outcome. So many Legacy acquisitions were more about the families that owned the houses than the buildings themselves. If Earl Whosit's name could be attached to a small garden temple, that became more important than any grand house built with new money where people had actually lived relatable lives. Lauren loved the houses-and-gardens aspect of her job, but was tired of the ancestry, tired of the Xth Lord of Blahshire's portrait, tired of the Oxbridge set, tired of the veneer. With the great majority of the country's ancestors having been in service once upon a time rather than having servants, she wanted more of a focus on the real people who'd built and tended these places.

The overgrowth was so thick it hid the conservatory roof from ten feet away; shards of glass glittered up through the dirt and weeds; ponds had shrunk to puddles,

clogged with decades' worth of fallen leaves; large bowl-shaped depressions in the parterres promised to become mud pits after heavy rains; and almost every piece of stone work was damaged, some missing corners and others smashed to dust.

She worked her way around the house from west, where the wing that spread back from the front was still intact, to east, where the bomb damage had taken out the back end of the wing. Not far from the east wing a walled garden blocked her view of the rest of the remaining acres. The vibrant pinky-purple of bombweed filled the space between the house and the walled garden, putting truth to the information that the site had been bombed during the war. From this side, the garden still seemed whole, its unusual stone walls covered in vines, its green gate closed against intruders.

Then sunlight flashed in her eyes, and Lauren took a few steps back, a hand to her forehead.

An aeroplane's tail poked above the top edge of the garden wall.

And then everything written on the to-do list so far fell away to be replaced by one big chore: Do something about the plane.

Lauren pushed open the gate on dry, scraping hinges and found the plane—or part of it—embedded into the middle of the garden where a fountain or sundial should be. Covering it, like a flower blanket draped over the winner at the races, was a mass of pink roses. The vibration of bees at their work in the blooms filled Lauren's ears. She stood, mouth open, one hand on the garden door, the other clutching her camera.

A Second World War fighter plane, no matter how historic, didn't belong in a Tudor-era enclosed garden.

Lauren had seen a few cases of extreme negligence in her years with the Legacy. Open roofs, rotted out floors, ceilings covered in mould. Mice, owls, and all manner of animals nesting in cupboards and even, once, a feral cat and her kittens sleeping away in the remnants of an eighteenth-century window seat.

Opposite the garden's gate was a pile of stones and bricks where the plane had taken out the wall, opening it to what was left of the grounds, a few acres of land clogged with weeds and overgrowth, the far boundary marked with a line of trees. Where the trees had thinned out or fallen, she spied rubbish that had been dumped over the walls backing a suburban neighbourhood, making the place look not just abandoned but refused any respect for what it had once been. Regardless, she didn't understand how the plane was still there, over half a century after the end of the war. Wouldn't taking it away have been part of the war effort? Or at least the post-war cleanup?

Maybe so far out in the country, no one cared.

Lauren snapped pictures of the crash site from all sides, walking in a spiral, moving farther out from the centre with each circuit. Then she turned her lens on the mansion to get wider shots of the damage.

The house loomed over the site, its brickwork dull and faded where it wasn't completely smothered by ivy and a wisteria covering windows, likely filling rooms with lavender shadows in the spring. Lauren wondered whether the plane behind her had escorted the bomber to the wrong site, or if it had got lost on its own. It made sense to her the house would still be in disrepair. With so many of the great houses lost to the wars, the families left without heirs and their fortunes gone, the houses were often abandoned or sold off in parts. To take on such a large building and restore it, bring it into the twenty-first century, wasn't only daunting and expensive but, in some cases, a practice in insanity. The question, of course, was who was more insane: the Legacy, or the American?

#

"Kevin, relax. Please, just chill out. It's going to be fine." I used my best mother voice, relieved he couldn't see the lie on my face. I should have been there, trying to salvage what was left of my dying business, but I had to be here to pawn off what was left of my dead legacy. Not for the first time did I wish cloning were possible.

"He called after closing Saturday and left a voicemail on the damn phone and I only just now checked it. He's pulling out of the show," Kevin said.

"Wait, what time is it there? It's noon here."

"Five. Late night. Don't ask," he said before I had the chance to. "I was gonna wait to call later after I opened the shop, but I'm awake. That Claire woman, the one with the you-know-whats covered in glitter, wants a show. Maybe. I saw her last night at Flex. Brian begged me to save him from her, but he was such a bitch to me last weekend. And anyway, you know what a pain in the ass she is. She says she has this idea, something to do with elephants and raindrops. She kept on going on about Buddhism while she was standing there pushing her boobs all over my arm! And we got another collection notice from—"

Before he could build up to a full-blown rant, I cut him off. "Kevin, get some sleep. You have to be up in a few hours and sell some art." Before I forgot, I added, "And try to move some of those damn dog sculptures."

He groaned and I could see his eyes roll from thousands of miles away.

I promised to make some calls when I got back to the hotel when the time difference meant I wouldn't be waking anyone up. I meant that promise. But not the one where I promised to sort everything out. There was no guarantee anything would be sorted any time soon.

When I hung up, I didn't see the Legacy woman anywhere and wondered whether she'd left. Which, at this point, would be just my luck. I started a mental list of who would take me in once I got evicted.

The sun beat down on the back of my neck. I was hot and queasy, probably from the last remnants of jet lag and the tea I'd made in my hotel room with one of those little plastic mini-buckets of "milk." When I'd gotten up that morning, the air was cool—I'd no idea of the temperature because I couldn't be bothered to deal with Celsius-toFahrenheit math—so I'd put on my warmest clothes. But now it was a proper summer day. Forget looking like a supposedly responsible business owner, I wished for shorts and flip-flops.

I also wanted something to drink and to sit down, not necessarily in that order. There were no benches, and I made a mental note to tell Lauren that benches and shade would be good ideas for when visitors came to the house. And then I made a mental note not to make so many mental notes, especially ones that had to do with a house that wasn't going to be mine for much longer.

I tried to walk through the weeds and overgrown shrubs, back to the house and Lauren, annoyed at Kevin, annoyed at the gallery, annoyed at the plants in my way and The Remains looming in the distance. This whole mess was so ridiculous I didn't know where to start with taking care of things. I clomped along what I thought was a path and ended up twisting my ankle on a piece of broken brick and went down, right into a dusty pile of dead and scratchy plants. And then my phone rang, deep in my bag. The bag I was lying on top of.

"Shit!" I didn't care whether Lauren could hear me. I scrambled around on all fours, trying to stand back up with a tiny shred of dignity. By then the phone had stopped ringing, and I was covered in burrs and seedpods and plant crumbs. The grey skirt was like Velcro: everything stuck to it. I started picking them off, one by one, while limping down the path, looking for a bench, a large boulder, anything really to sit on that wasn't the ground. The Remains loomed out of the green jungle and I headed toward it. And then, in front of me was a garden door, painted green to blend in with the vines climbing up and over it.

The gate's handle, a sinuous Art Nouveau curve, felt cool and smooth in my hand. I stroked it, my mood starting to subside with the mindless but comforting action.

When I pushed the gate open Kevin's complaints, the mounting bills, my credit card balance, and even The Remains disappeared. I should walk here at twilight beneath lanterns hung in the trees by the servants, glowing softly, reflecting off of the blush pink of the roses, a colour so rich it matched the sunset. I should sit here in the mornings to drink my coffee from dainty porcelain, the plan of my day dependent on how slowly the shadows slid across the stone path and up the trunks of the fruit trees splayed against the wall. I should meet a lover here, behind the closed door, where no one will see us as the blossoms brush against our soft, naked skin. I should sleep here and dream about other places and times.

My footsteps were silent, lost in the soft, thick turf, amazingly weed-free, as I approached the sundial, a bronze disc on a stone plinth. The sticky-up part that made the shadow was the shape of a horse. Time, or a careless gardener, must have moved it for it read 3 pm. I looked up and behind me, wondering whether my ancestors had read it from the windows on the higher floors of the house. First and second storeys in Britspeak, I reminded myself. Around the top edge of the column ran a motto: *Ver non semper viret.* I was relieved, if that's the right word, to find a translation carved around the column's base. *Springtime does not last.* No kidding, mister.

I had to admit, though, that spring was at its fullest around me. I wasn't sure when different flowers were supposed to bloom, but who knew when things happened in gardens in England? Definitely not me, so I stood there and enjoyed what I was seeing.

The sundial's base was a riot of pink roses, and the beds surrounding the sundial, each a square with a rounded divot etched out of the corner facing the sundial, were in full bloom. Round flowers, spiky ones, little short ones, tall ones. Pink, blue, yellow, purple, red, all battled to be the brightest. And everywhere, green. The soft green of lavender, the bright green of box, the silvery green of lambs' ears.

And like that, the names slotted into space. Iris. Peony. Foxglove. Delphinium. Primrose. Violet.

I knew these flowers.

Knew them as if I'd been the one to plant them. Knew them as if I'd never killed every houseplant I'd ever bought or hadn't almost failed an art history exam when asked to describe and analyze the Dutch masters' flower-rich still lives.

How did I know these flowers?

The sound of trickling water drew me to a small half-circle basin set into a niche in one wall. A stone mermaid, softened with green lichen, topped the wall fountain, and the water poured from where she wrung her hair. It made me thirsty to see that water, and I cupped my hands beneath the mermaid and tasted it. It was cool and dark, the water, and I tasted the fountain it came from and the pipes that brought it to the fountain and deep underground where it flowed fast and dark. I tasted the years that the garden had been here. I tasted minerals and metals and stone and flesh and bone and hate and devastation and obsession and madness and love.

I slumped down onto the shaded bench hidden in the recess to the side of the fountain. I was placed just right to see all of the garden, but anyone peeking a head around the corner of the open gate couldn't see me. I needed a minute.

I slipped my shoes off and rubbed my ankle a bit. It smarted but nothing was broken. A few minutes' rest and I'd go find Lauren and ask her about The Remains. But I couldn't move right then. The house's chimneys loomed over the top of the wall and looked down at me. I felt pinned down on the bench, caught like bug specimen under glass. If I waited long enough, maybe she'd find me.

I checked my phone, but it didn't show any calls or texts. Perhaps I'd heard Lauren's phone out on the path. Perhaps it had been one of those green parakeets. Or maybe you're losing it, I thought. Tasting the years, indeed.

Pretty soon, I started to cool down but got bored. Yet I didn't get up to leave—the sunshine was so bright a few short inches from my feet, bright like the surface of the sun. I was sleepy and unable to move, so I sat and watched the garden, listened to the birds, wondered how I'd ended up here, so far from home. This place wasn't mine.

It belongs to you.

The voice sounded like my grandmother's, and I jumped. I'd talked to her in my head for years since she died, but I never expected her to answer. Sometimes I liked to imagine showing her all of the things in my life she never got to see and I often talked to her as I went about my day to say, "Look, this is what I do." The internet, my gallery, a TV show, silly things like a new pair of shoes. She'd have been tickled by all of it.

I imagined her responses, of course. This isn't something I ever admitted to anyone, not even the therapist I saw for a while several years ago. Little kids have imaginary friends, so why can't grown-ups talk to their dead relatives?

"So, what do you think of all of this?" I asked her, unafraid of being heard.

She didn't answer, but the sun shone brighter as if it had come out from behind a cloud. I shaded my eyes with a hand and considered another taste of the water but didn't want to move, afraid I'd miss something.

The edges of the flower petals sharpened, standing out against the leaves as if drawn rather than grown. Stamens and pistils, violently yellow with pollen, pulsed against the pinks, purples, and blues. The sun glinted so hard off of the sundial I could barely see its shape, only a blazing disc, throwing its reflection into the air above. Bees droned among the roses, their buzzing taking on the grating edge of a lawnmower. I could feel the catch and hitch of the butterflies as they rubbed their legs along their antennae.

And the smell.

At first the scent of the roses on the sundial and the honeysuckle trained along the garden's walls were a light tease, reaching me with each small puff of breeze. It mixed with the soapiness of the lavender and the heady spice of peonies. As I sat, hypnotized by the garden, the scent became overwhelming, like being trapped in an elevator with a woman drenched in cheap perfume.

The walls of the small garden closed in on me and my limbs weighed a ton each, keeping me on the bench. I was panting, trying to catch my breath. The tinkling of the fountain caught my attention again, and I turned away from the colors and light of the garden to rest my eyes again in the cool shade. The mermaid's smile was a growl, her sharp teeth biting into her bottom lip. Her hair, where she wrung it, was thick with sea creatures, scuttling crabs and writhing eels. The water below her wasn't clear as I'd thought, but full of dead leaves and insects and sludgy with moss. I peered closer and a bubble broke the surface as a fat orange fish slid through the dark water.

I jumped up, grabbed my shoes, and hurried down the path. As I passed the sundial, its shadow elongated, the horse grew and stretched as if following me. I ran then, bad ankle or no, resisting the urge to look behind me. That's how the girls in movies always got caught—by looking to see how close the monster or zombie or axewielding rapist was behind them. And then, boom, they were flat on their faces. Not me, though. I knew better and was out that door so fast I felt as if I'd barely escaped a wild animal and was locking it inside a cage.

The garden outside the wall was as I'd left it—was as everyone had left it for years: grey and brown and green, broken and messy. Nothing was recognizable: no flowers named themselves, and nothing mesmerized me. It looked like an empty lot on

the side of the freeway, and I expected to find broken bottles, plastic grocery bags, and even old tires in the underbrush.

This place wasn't for me. It was too overgrown, too big, too beautiful, too scary. Too much.

On the walk back to the house, I wondered how it was all still standing. The bomb damage was extensive and I nearly tripped again on a small pit, a scar several feet long, hidden by weeds. Part of the house was missing, the wall caved in from ground to roof at the end of one side of its squared-off U-shape. A stained piece of ancient curtain, still attached to a window, shifted in the breeze. I imagined my great-grandmother or great-aunt, whoever lived here then, had just closed the doors closest to this wing. The remaining parts still looked big enough to house a dozen families.

The roof of an old greenhouse jutted up in the distance. It wasn't anything more than some twisted rods of metal growing out of a pile of broken glass like some sort of a sick bouquet. Hedges that had once lined this part of the garden were stumps. What looked to me like a tennis court was recognizable by the two poles meant to hold the net. The surface was a rectangular bed of weeds, golden in the sunlight. I cringed to imagine what the pool next to it looked like up close—probably like the mermaid fountain, only larger.

When I saw Lauren on the other side of the front drive, I hurried over, glad to see another human in the wasteland. Hiking in the desert or mountains had always calmed me, but until now I hadn't realised it was because even with the trees and plants there it still felt empty because those plants grew there on their own. Being surrounded by vines and weeds and creepers, the descendants of the gardens that had been planted on purpose, left me feeling watched and suffocated.

#

Rather than call the cab back to pick me up, Lauren offered a ride. "You look like you could use lunch."

I had no desire to refuse.

She'd parked off one side of the drive, and we had a Keystone Kops moment when I stood at the driver's side door waiting for her to press the unlock button on her key ring. When she stopped and stood next to me I realised my mistake and slunk around to the other side of the car, resisting my first impulse to say something about "the wrong side."

The nearest shopping district was a ten-minute drive down suburban streets and soon we were in an air-conditioned coffee shop waiting for toasted sandwiches.

"So," I said as we found a seat, "what's the verdict?" I looked straight at her face, knowing the news wasn't good but hoping she'd take pity on me.

"In my official capacity as a Country Legacy rep, I have to say that any decision will be made after a full analysis of the site and a meeting of the acquisition team."

"How about in an unofficial capacity?"

She shook her head. "I'm not allowed to make any conjectures. There is a committee that decides these things after a full round of studies is made."

The barista arrived with our sandwiches, giving me a moment to consider my next tactic.

"There's got to be something we can do." I tried not to whine. I sounded like I was fifteen again, hoping to convince my mother to let me stay out until midnight.

"I can't—"

I put up a hand and smiled. "I understand. I know I'm not exactly the kind of people you usually deal with."

"Kind of people?"

"People with priceless threadbare rugs, pedigreed dogs, and dusty old titles."

"But you might have a title."

I gaped at her with a mouthful of half-chewed grilled cheese sandwich, looking charming and well-mannered. "Shit. In all of the rush of the past few weeks, that never truly dawned on me. So I may be Lady Antoinette?" It was so ridiculous I laughed, which made me cough. Alarmed stares from the coffee drinkers nearby made me laugh harder and I nearly choked. *Decorum,* I could hear my grandmother saying with her own brand of sarcasm.

"Not that it means much anymore."

"It's ridiculous!"

Lauren put her sandwich down on her plate. "Politically, you're out of your depth. A long time ago, a title would have meant something because there was money and land to go with it. Those three things together, or even only two of the three, gave families power. Now, though, the world is different. Money talks. A title is a piece of paper if you don't have anything to back it up."

"No kidding. But title or no, I can't keep the place."

"May I see what you brought?" She wiped her hands on a paper napkin and held them out to me. I pulled the box out of my bag and handed it over.

"See if you can figure out the handwriting. It makes my eyes cross."

The look on her face told me I was dealing with a professional. Of course she'd be able to read the spidery old handwriting.

Lauren took the papers out of the box one by one and made a pile on the table. Pages ripped from spiral-bound notebooks. A small book bound in blue leather. Drawings. Delicate letters folded inside torn envelopes, the addresses written in a scratchy hand in pencil. Older letters on thick paper intricately folded like origami, their wax seals long gone, leaving only a round pink smudge behind. "Here's a receipt for some furniture. An old ration book."

That interested me. When my grandfather talked about the Great Depression, my grandmother would often go on about how things would have been better if the government had given everyone ration books like in England during the war. On the cover I could barely make out the name because the paper had been handled so much: Doris Miller. I added it to the growing pile.

"Anything else interesting?" I asked. It looked more like the bottom of my kitchen junk drawer than historic records.

She nodded. "Some. There are sketches of the garden, like you said. Rather old ones, too. See these knots?" Lauren pointed out a series of squares with intricate squiggles inside them. "I bet these were plans for the garden in the sixteen-hundreds. Maybe even before the Civil War."

"But that was in the 1860s."

She cocked an eyebrow at me. "Our Civil War."

"Oh." I shook my head. "I obviously don't belong here."

She shrugged. "Don't worry about it. It's rather a lot of history to remember."

I barely knew the history of the family I'd grown up with. More than that was all too much.

"What can I do?" I asked. "I need to find a way out from under this whole thing, yes, but hate letting things happen to me. So tell me what I need to do."

Lauren put down the small leather-bound book she'd been inspecting. "A Blue Book," she whispered to herself before turning her attention back to me. "You need to sell it."

"I know that."

"What I mean is, you need to *sell* it. All the houses the Legacy takes on have one thing in common: history. An important family came from there, or an important event

happened there. They've got a story visitors will pay good money to hear. What story does your house tell?"

She might as well have asked me to start speaking in a language I'd never heard before for all the good it did me. "Family wasn't exactly my family's strong suit."

"Then look beyond the family. There has to be something, or the place wouldn't have kept on going for as long as it did. You need to sell it to us, or to whoever you decide you want to buy it."

I realised I did know how to sell. I'd spent years selling art to buyers, selling beautiful ideas to people with money to spare and lives that needed beautifying. I hadn't been great at it for a while, but I could regain the knack if I were desperate enough.

"Grand names are important, of course, but I'm rather sick of the grand names, myself. Lately, it seems the country is starting to rethink history a bit." I took another bite of my sandwich to keep her talking.

"People are very into genealogy, and rather than find out they're related to this or that lord, they are finding out about the majority of the population back then: servants, soldiers, regular old housewives."

"I loved *Upstairs, Downstairs* on PBS when I was younger," I added.

She nodded. "Exactly."

#

After lunch we returned to The Remains. Lauren had more notes to take, and I wanted a better look around before heading back to my hotel.

I followed what paths I found, cursing the shoes I'd worn. Had I known it was that bad, I'd have worn jeans and boots. But it was supposed to be England, land of cricket whites and tea on the lawn, not the scrubland around Albuquerque and the forests near Santa Fe. I spied another brick wall, with roofs peeking up above, and headed for it.

This garden looked more like the sort I remembered from visits to my aunt's when I was young. Aunt Tildy, my father's sister, was always so proud of the vegetables she grew out back of her house in California, and I'd helped her one summer weeding the beds and keeping the rabbits away from the tender plants.

It wasn't that the kitchen garden itself was in any worse shape than the rest of the gardens, only that the mess of it seemed an insult when I remembered how much time it took to keep my aunt's small plot tidy. The brickwork was falling apart all over

the place, and some of the trees trained against the walls like caught fugitives had lost their ties and wires. I spied the skins of rotted apples and pears and apricots piled in the dirt beneath their trunks. Otherwise, the garden beds were bare of anything resembling an edible harvest, unless one's appetite included dandelions and the bones of small rodents, presumably left by foxes, I guessed from the smell. I tried to imagine what it all looked like cleaned up, with tidy rows of purple cabbages and fiery tomatoes.

I headed left and walked beneath the arch back out of the kitchen garden and found a house built into the wall. It was like finding a magical cottage in a fairy tale. The door looked incredibly old, but it had been fitted with a much newer lock, probably to keep trespassers out. I tried to peer through the small window but it was boarded up from the inside. I dug through my bag to find my key ring and a sense of calm came over me when I palmed the glass bauble the colour and size of a robin's egg. I'd added the keys the solicitor had given me to my own key ring so I'd not lose them.

It took a few tries to find the correct key. "You're not breaking and entering," I muttered, feeling like an idiot with shaky hands. First sign of insanity: talking to yourself.

As I fumbled, I could have sworn I saw movement out of the corner of my eye, but when I looked the window was as still boarded up.

Second sign of insanity: paranoia?

I imagined how my grandmother would laugh at that as I unlocked the door and pushed it open.

Inside it was like a museum. An unkempt, poor museum, but a museum nonetheless.

Dust motes, disturbed by my entry, floated in the narrow shafts of light that speared in from between the boards covering the windows. The downstairs consisted of two rooms: a kitchen and dining area to the left, a front room to the right, with a staircase hidden behind the fireplace. An old farm table took up most of the kitchen, its surface pitted and scratched. Only one chair was still intact, the others gone or burned, from the evidence in the fireplace. An ancient sink and hand pump were attached to the sink beneath the window, and next to the fireplace squatted an old iron stove, which had been the height of technology once upon a time. Any time I got caught up in thinking about living "the simple life," one look at my microwave, washer, and dryer fixed that particular fever immediately. Before I realized it, I'd run my fingers along all of the flat surfaces in the room, leaving a trail in the dust and ash. My fingertips were black. I tried the water pump but my efforts were answered by a hollow groan rather than water.

The front room boasted torn wallpaper, the flower print reminiscent of the 1920s, and no furniture at all. Nailed to the wall above the fireplace was a photograph. I had to squint to see in the dim room. Around ten or so, a girl with dark hair stood in front of a tree in a Victorian dress and apron. I wondered who she was, whether she'd lived in the house, what her name was. She had a familiar look about her. Maybe she was a distant cousin? I shrugged, unsure what the protocol was for having photographs of an important family in what was, I was sure, a servant's house.

Upstairs was only two rooms, each with a naked, stained, narrow mattress on wooden beds. Calculating when people had last lived here seemed impossible. In a corner of one room, atop a pile of dust and rags, sat a plastic doll arm. In the other room, a cracked radio lay on its side half beneath the bed. I began to crouch down to grab it, but the shadows beneath the bed were too dark. I didn't want to know what was down there.

One room had a small door set into one wall. I opened it and found a strange little space with cobwebs, spiders, an assortment of old gardening catalogs, a few coverless paperbacks, a lady's black shoe, and a leather satchel. On a whim I grabbed the satchel and brought it along.

Just off the small upstairs landing was a narrow staircase.

The attic.

Each stair protested with a loud wooden squeak. I tried to be quiet before remembering I owned this place.

And then I had to be quiet because someone else was there.

#

Lauren crossed the garden twice before giving up. The American woman was gone. Likely high-tailed it back to the city as soon as possible—with the key to the house, of course. She thought they'd found common ground at lunch, but then again they were strangers. And this was business.

She had done what she could as far as taking recordings of the grounds, but the house was a vital part of the preliminaries for Country Legacy, and Lauren hated the idea of having to come out here again. Not that it was so far outside of London, but far enough that taking the tube and train and bus vs driving were a toss-up. And she had meetings the next afternoon.

The place had possibilities. Any house of this size with extant outbuildings had potential with the Legacy. But what made this one special enough to attract visitors? Lauren cursed again when she realised Toni had the box of papers as well as the key. This was all going to take longer than she'd hoped.

As she climbed into her car, she honked the horn, hoping to alert Toni. No answer. Nothing moved except a lone parakeet flying from tree to tree in the late afternoon light. The sun wouldn't go down for several more hours, so Lauren tried not to feel too guilty for abandoning the woman.

She stopped the car halfway down the drive when she remembered her phone.

She dialed but got no answer, so left a message. "Hi, Ms. Hammond? It's Lauren from the Country Legacy. I've finished up in the garden but can't find you and need the keys to get into the house. I'm guessing perhaps you've left? Please give me a ring when you get this and we can schedule another meeting, if you still want to sell."

Lauren had checked the house lock and windows, to be sure none of the boards were pulled away. She'd even double-checked the gardener's house and bothy, but both were locked. It was a shame because workers' living spaces were often more interesting than the main houses. Always curious about how historic people had lived, Lauren felt closer to the maids and smithies, groomsmen and cooks than to the lords and ladies. Lauren had argued with her supervisors about highlighting the labourers, and they did where it was possible, but so few records survived that the maids and butlers usually became a mere footnote.

None of this mattered now, however, as whatever records there were for this house were with the woman who now owned all of it. Lauren considered whether she should be more concerned. Perhaps the American was lost? But the grounds were only a few acres: walk for several minutes in any direction and you come up against a border of some sort rather than endless forest. Perhaps she'd been hurt? Unlikely. And anyway, Lauren would have found her.

No, the most logical answer was the woman had just left, and without even a good-bye.

"Americans," she mumbled to herself and drove away.

#

"Hello?" I craned my head back in hopes of seeing the top of the stairs and, possibly, into the attic, but no luck.

There was another thump, and I swear I didn't touch the steps but flew down the main staircase on thin air. I stood in the kitchen, hands clutched over my heart. I was Goldilocks, and the fourth bear, the one no one mentions in the story, was up in the attic. Doing attic-y things. Like sharpening an axe or torturing kittens.

Another thump came from above and I was at the door, ready to run all the way back to London.

Except the door wouldn't open.

My hands shook and I screamed in panic when I heard another footstep, far above, but the doorknob still wouldn't turn. Because there was no doorknob like on American doors. I frantically tried to figure out how to get out and then saw the latch. I scrabbled at it like a bird trying to escape a cage. It wouldn't turn.

I remembered the keys and dug through my bag but they weren't there. So I dumped the bag onto the floor. My phone, the box of papers, coins, cards, lipstick, all of it crashed to the floor and scattered. No keys.

I tore my way through the ground floor, looking for the keys on the floor, beneath the table, even inside the oven, always with an ear out for more footsteps from the attic.

Then I remembered the phone. I could call Lauren to come get me. I berated myself for being such an idiot.

The phone was dead. Not just no signal but dead-dead. Black screen dead.

In a panic I threw it on the table and started to cry.

All of it hit me then. Losing the gallery, losing the life I'd spent years building, inheriting this dump, being locked in an ancient house with no electricity but with a stranger upstairs. And jet-lag. I was suddenly so tired I wanted to die. Instead, I stood in the middle of that filthy, dark kitchen and sobbed for a full five minutes. Then I picked up my tissue from the floor, blew my nose, and listened for the footsteps.

Nothing.

Probably scared him off with all the boo-hooing. "Let's see how big and bad you are now," I yelled toward the ceiling.

I picked what looked like a chair leg out of the fireplace, ignoring the soot covering my hands and smeared across my skirt. The skirt still covered in seedpods. Whatever. At the top of the main staircase, I hollered again, but still no answer. I'd had about enough of the whole thing, was hungry and thirsty, and wanted to go back to my reasonably priced (for London) hotel, have a bath, and order room service.

"That's it, asshole. I'm coming up." I marched up the stairs, making as much noise as possible.

Holding the chair leg like a baseball bat, I leapt into the attic space and screamed as loud as I could.

And there was no one there.

The windows were high enough that no one had seen fit to cover them, so sunlight streamed in and illuminated all of the nooks and crannies of the space. There was nowhere for anyone to hide.

The thumping, it turns out, was coming from a loose window knocking back and forth in the breeze. I closed the window all the way, glancing down at the kitchen garden. From above, the neglect wasn't as obvious and the tidy edges of beds and paths were still visible. I crossed to the other side of the attic and looked out the opposite window. From there I could see one side of the house, the top edges of the walled garden, and, if I craned around, part of the drive. Just then, a red car drove away from the house. Lauren, the woman from the Country Legacy. Leaving.

"Hey!" I threw open the window and yelled, waving my arm. But there was no way she could see or hear me.

"I'm trapped," I said to no one in particular. "There is no way in hell this is happening. This is bullshit. Bullshit!" I slammed the window shut and ran down the stairs, going through rooms one at a time, looking for the key, a crowbar, an abandoned hammer, something—anything—I could use to pry a board off of a window so I could crawl out.

I was so angry I started crying again, which pissed me off even more. At one point I tried to pull a board off with my bare hands, adding scraped skin and blood to the soot marks from before.

When I'd tired myself out, I tried the water pump once more and got a thin stream of dirty water. I found a cracked bowl on a shelf, filled it with what water I could get, and left it to sit, hoping for the dirt to settle on the bottom and leave me with something to drink. Then I gathered up the stuff from the floor and crammed it all back into my bag, found the leather satchel where I'd dropped it, and took whatever I found up to the attic with me. If I was going to be stuck here for the night, I figured I might as well be up where I could see out and, possibly, someone could see me.

Luckily the attic had a bed. As narrow as the ones in the rooms below, it at least boasted a slightly less disgusting mattress. I didn't look too closely, deciding that what I chose not to see wouldn't crawl over me in the dark.

I tried the phone again, but no luck. So I settled onto the bed and dug through the satchel. Inside I found some small paper twists that, once opened, gave up dry, dusty

seeds. The paper didn't have any labeling or writing, so they may as well have been Jack's giant beanstalk seeds. I was careful not to spill them and end up wearing them along with every other bit of the garden. "You're going to the thrift shop when I get out of here," I promised the skirt.

I dug through my own bag and found a half-eaten granola bar and a few Jelly Babies in a rolled up yellow bag I'd bought at the airport. What a feast!

While I chewed on the candy, I took a look at the garden catalogs from the closet. At first I thought they were printed to look old, in that shabby country way that sells so well in gift shops, until I realized they were actually about eighty years old. The faded colour cover showed a beautiful woman watering a towering hollyhock inside a curlicue frame. The pages contained black and white illustrations for flower, fruit, and vegetable seeds along with paragraph descriptions of each item. Seeing things sold for a penny—things that didn't come out of gumball machines at the supermarket—was a trip.

When I finished reading the catalog, I fished the papers out of my bag and gave them another look. The sun was setting, so I dragged the bed over beneath the window to take advantage of the light that was left. I'd brought some papers with me from home, but most of them the solicitor had given me the day before. I'd skimmed through them but hadn't properly looked at them until earlier at lunch and had never read them. The handwriting was thin and scratchy on some pieces, almost invisible on others, and I wondered how people back then could recognize words when written in such a slanted hand. So often, without my glasses I can recognize the shape of a word and read that way, so did people do the same thing in the past? Were they able to skim over f's and s's, t's and h's, and know what they were reading?

Some records were inventories from the house: a list of bed hangings and curtains, ewers (ewers? Like a pitcher? Or a bowl? It was one of those words I'd never used in my life and I only had a faint idea of what one really was) and spoons, paintings and furniture. One listed outside stuff, like carriages, saddles, shovels, wheelbarrows and the like. On the back of that list I found part of a letter. I squinted, determined to read it.

October 12, 177- My

Dear Mr Ralston,

Please accept my Apologies for not replying to your Correspondence earlier. Recent events have made it nearly Impossible to settle into a Regular

schedule. Having found myself in Her Ladyship's Good Graces and, most surprisingly, found Myself thrust into the Position of Head Gardener above that of my Brother, Samuel, the very day after our Father passed on, I have discovered the Extent to which these Gardens were under threat of Destruction. While I greatly appreciate the Work which you have already carried out under His Lordship's direction, I must inform you that upon Her Ladyship's wishes I was given the Head Gardener's House, where my Mother whom you met Resides also, and she has Ordered me to keep the Gardens always in their current State. I bring you the news that there will be no further following of Mr Brown's Fashion and that in my new Position I have no Freedom to invite you to return and use those Tools which God so graciously gifted you. Yet I do fervently look forward to finding myself in Your amiable presence again in the Future, if that be His wish also.

The letter ended halfway down the page with *Thos. Hill* signed at the bottom.

My eyes hurt from trying to parse out handwriting, so I left the other letters for later and I entertained myself with looking at old sketches of the house and gardens, a Women's Land Army handbook, and a newspaper clipping from 1868 about an artist who ended up in a sanitarium.

Before it was too dark to see my way down the stairs, I skimmed water from the top of the bowl with my hand, too thirsty to care what disease I'd get from it, and ate the bit of granola bar. I tried not to think of what I would do if I woke up in the middle of the night having to pee.

I shifted around on the mattress, but there was no avoiding the hollow in the middle. I sunk in and tried not to breathe too deeply and inhale anything bad that floated up from the ancient padding while I replayed the day, from first arrival to falling over to the strangeness of the walled garden to now. The garden isn't out to get you, I told myself. Sure it's not, I replied as I absently picked at the burrs stuck in my skirt.

For a moment I wondered whether anyone at the hotel would notice I was missing, and then I reminded myself hotels don't care until your bill comes due or you overstay your reservation. The latter wasn't likely—I was getting out of here Friday, I promised myself. The former, however, was possible. I had no idea how much was left on my credit card and could easily be overdrawn. But there was nothing for it.

I asked my grandmother what she thought, but she didn't have an opinion. And soon after, I was asleep.

#

Lauren turned down the volume on the TV and checked the photos again.

She'd ended up with over a hundred, which wasn't unusual in a garden that size. She was still annoyed about Toni's disappearing act, but even more aggravated the woman hadn't answered any of her phone calls. Yet those paled in comparison to what she was seeing on her laptop screen.

The plane.

And then, a few photographs later, no plane.

Lauren clicked through them, backward and forward. Plane. No plane. No plane. Plane.

It made no sense.

The space where the aeroplane was supposed to be matched the rest of the garden. It wasn't like in the past, where the film got clouded or damaged in some way.

Lauren's hands trembled as she pressed the mousepad and toggled between seeing the plane and not seeing the plane.

She tried Toni's phone again, and left yet another voicemail message.

#

I woke up in the dark.

When I turned over in bed to look at the clock, no glowing red numbers greeted me.

I had no idea where I was. No idea where I was supposed to be, what day it was, any of it.

And then I realized I had to pee. And then I remembered. The garden. The Remains. The Country Legacy. Being locked in. "Damn."

I wished I still smoked so at least I'd have a lighter in my bag.

With eyes closed—because why bother trying to see? And don't they say your other senses get more acute when one is taken away?—I felt my way along the wall to the stairs and down to the kitchen. My choices were water bowl or sink. I'm not ashamed to say I used the sink. I'm sure I wasn't the first. Plus, I wanted to keep the water I had fresh. Let's just say I was more than happy it was pitch dark because even I

didn't want a mental picture of me climbing up to the sink. I didn't dare ask my grandmother what she thought of that shining moment in my history.

Back up in the attic, I looked out the window toward the kitchen garden. Not much to see, just some far-off lights from far-off neighbourhoods. I crossed to the other window, expecting much of the same.

The dark hulk of The Remains sat and taunted me. Below it, I caught what looked like a glowing light. I closed my eyes again and again, hoping to be able to see clearly when I opened them. But the glow remained. It hovered above the top edges of the walled garden. Here and there, below the trees, other spots glowed. The light wasn't harsh like firelight, but it flickered softly. I leaned as far out the window as I could, hoping to see who was there.

Faint noises came from the black garden. At first I thought I was hearing unfamiliar bird calls, but birds can't speak. It was definitely the sound of people talking, and even a baby crying, far below.

"Hey! Up here!" I screamed as loud as I could, but no one came to the house. I didn't see anyone at all. And the glowing spots in the garden stayed where they were. After a while I got tired of yelling and lay back down on the bed, bone-tired of it all.

A knock on the door had me back up and running for the stairs.

"Wait!" I forced myself to slow down, terrified of falling and breaking my neck. "I'm coming. Hold on!"

Whoever it was knocked again—three quick raps—just as I got to the door. "It's locked," I said, loud enough that whoever was on the other side could hear me. My lifetime training of not talking to strangers through the door went out the window. I was sure a rapist wasn't going to knock on the door in the middle of the night. I didn't care who it was as long as they got me out.

No answer came back.

"Is the key in the lock?" I asked. "Maybe I dropped it on the ground."

No voice.

I pounded on the door to let them know I was there. "Hello? Oh, wait. Come back!"

Then, again, three quick raps on the door.

I pulled the latch, figuring it was worth a try, and the door swung open. A young man stood in the doorway, his hat beneath one arm, a crutch beneath the other. Behind him was a girl in high boots with war-era hair. A younger girl, dark-haired and familiar, came up and held her hand out to me.

"Oh, thank you. Thank you for getting me out. Do any of you have a phone I can use? Mine died and I need to call the cab." I babbled on, but no one said a word. The young girl took me down the path, away from the house, and toward The Remains. I couldn't feel her holding my hand, yet her force was soft but insistent as she led me forward.

Here and there along the path, others stood and waited for me to pass. It was still dark, far from dawn, and I couldn't understand how I could see them. Until I realized they weren't solid. The little girl's hand glowed against mine, illuminating my skin with a soft yellow-green light, like a firefly seen through mist. I pulled back from her, but she reached out again, this time wrapping her arm around mine. Rather than feeling abducted, I felt welcomed, accepted.

"I'm dreaming," I said aloud.

No one noticed I had spoken.

"You're a bunch of ghosts but I'm not scared. I should be shitting myself right about now. I was locked in—"

Many of them were crowded around the gate to the walled garden. Above the wall, the sky glowed with the light of hundreds of them, and I imagined a party inside. I caught the young girl smiling up at me. Then she was laughing.

"You locked me in," I said, not questioning. She shook her head. No. But her smile said otherwise.

Behind the gate, people worked. They kneeled and weeded, pushed wheelbarrows, trimmed fruit trees, pruned roses and vines. All silently. All without noticing me.

I turned and the little girl was gone.

When I turned back, everyone else was gone and I was alone in the garden.

#

Tuesday, June 29, 2010 10:04 a.m.

Lauren called up the stairs. "Toni!"

She'd come back to the house, determined to figure out what had happened to her photographs. When she arrived, she found papers littering the garden. Not that the garden was tidy otherwise, but the papers hadn't been there the day before. The papers were dry, their ink clear, but they lay on wet ground. Lauren picked one up and then saw another a few feet away. They led her to the brick house set in the kitchen garden's

wall. The keys were on the ground in front of the door. It took a few tries, but she found the correct key and unlocked the door. A lipstick lay on the floor among smeared footprints in the dust and soot.

"Are you here?"

She ran up the stairs, following the footprints.

The American lay slumped on the floor beneath a window. Lauren grabbed the woman's wrist and checked her pulse while repeating a litany of apologies and assurances.

"Please, wake up. I didn't mean to leave you behind."

Before Lauren could call for an ambulance, Toni's eyes opened.

"I got locked in," she mumbled.

Lauren helped her up onto the bed, but Toni refused to lie back down. "No, I'm all right. Just give me a second."

Lauren held the pile of papers and explained where she'd found them.

"They were in my bag. I looked at them last night," Toni said. "I looked at them here, in this bed. And I met everyone."

"Everyone?" Lauren took hold of Toni's wrist again and tried to remember the first aid training she'd had years before.

Toni shook her off. "I'm fine. Just kind of sore from sleeping on the floor."

"You must've fallen out of bed."

"No. After I came back in, I missed the bed. I was too tired from everything out there."

"What—" Lauren started.

"The people. The workers. The people who lived in this house and worked out there in the garden. And even some of them who lived in the big house." Toni stood and paced the room, stretching her arms above her head. "My ancestors. They're all here." She stopped walking. "Christ, I sound like a bad cliché, don't I?"

Lauren stayed on the bed, a centre of calm in the whirlpool the other woman was creating. "I'm sorry. You've had a bad night, getting locked in with no food."

"If you tell me it was all a dream, so help me…." Toni threw up her hands in surrender and sat on the bed, their shared weight causing it to sag dangerously. "Look," she pointed at the papers on the bed, "How do you explain these? I had them here last night, and you found them outside. I was outside last night, in the garden, with everyone."

“No,” Lauren said, shaking her head. “You went outside last night, maybe you were sleepwalking. And you left the papers there in a dream state for someone to follow and find you here.”

Toni stopped her pacing and faced Lauren. “I’m not Hansel and Gretel. I was locked in!”

“Exactly,” Lauren said. “You were locked in. You couldn’t have been outside last night with whoever it was you dreamed about.”

“So how did the papers get out there?”

Lauren pointed at the open window. “That overlooks the garden leading to the big house, right? And you fell asleep reading the papers. A breeze came up and blew them out the window.” Even as she said it, Lauren knew how ridiculous it sounded. How impossible. The papers had been lined up, like breadcrumbs in some warped fairy tale leading her to the witch’s cottage.

“Then how do you explain this?” Toni pointed at her shoes. They were covered in grass and dirt.

“You were outside in the garden yesterday.”

“Oh.”

Toni grabbed up her bag and the papers.

Back downstairs, the door stood open to the morning light. Toni splashed some of the water from the bowl onto her face. Lauren walked around, inspecting the room, and took photographs.

“Wonder who this is,” she said as she looked at the photograph pinned to the wall.

Toni didn’t have to get close to the picture to recognise the girl.

“It’s her. From my dream last night. She took me into the garden. She led me by her little ghost hand and showed me to everyone.” Toni unpinned the photograph and put it in her bag.

Lauren shivered at the word everyone. If asked, she’d deny believing in ghosts. It was too easy when working in these old houses to get sucked in to such nonsense. But then she remembered why she’d come back to the house.

“Let me finish here and then I have something to show you,” she said. After taking a few more photos, Lauren nodded at Toni and they locked up behind them. Two steps from the door Toni’s phone rang deep in her purse.

#

"Sorry," I said to Lauren. "It was dead. A brick. All last night. And now it wakes up."

It was Kevin.

"I'm sorry," was the first thing out of his mouth.

"Why is everyone apologizing to me?"

Lauren flinched, but I didn't care. I was starting to feel like everyone was keeping secrets from me, like nothing in my life was under my control. I didn't know whether to do the zen thing and go with it, or to fight back. After a night on the floor, my mood said fight but my body wasn't having any part of it.

Kevin didn't say anything, and for a second I thought I'd lost the connection.

"Hello?" I asked.

"Toni, I'm sorry but I have to quit."

"Okay." What else was there to say?

He went on, explaining about a gallery in Albuquerque and classes he wanted to take and a litany of excuses. I let him talk and rested my gaze on the green around me. When he was done, I asked him to stay until after the Tyler exhibit, giving me time to come back to the States and take over from there.

"My assistant just quit," I said after hanging up. I expected to feel angry and panicked, but I was calm.

Lauren raised her eyebrows in commiseration.

It was only when I got back to my hotel room that I remembered Lauren had said she had something to show me. But I'd just spent the night on a mattress I'd rather not ever think about again and had eaten purse-rummage. I was dirty and tired and hungry, and it wasn't like The Remains was going anywhere. I, on the other hand, was low on cash and only had a couple more days until my flight home.

So I did what anyone would do in my situation. I took a shower, put on comfortable jeans and sunglasses, grabbed my little camera, and went out to play tourist in London for the day. I had to forget all of the shit for a while and enjoy myself. The city was loud, full of people, and hot, but at least everyone around me was real.

I became part of the crowds in the National Gallery, tailing a group of Italian tourists who were following a woman with a little flag on a stick from one room to another. Outside, I rambled up to Covent Garden and over to Chinatown, then back down to Parliament and across the river to the Eye. I was anonymous. Some American woman who was here to see the sights and take home a few tatty souvenirs. I bought

myself one of those little red metal phonebox piggy banks. Might as well save my pennies with style.

Returning to my room and seeing the box of papers on the desk, however, brought it all back. The garden, the ghostly dream, Lauren, the Legacy. So I ordered room service, put on some jammies, turned on the TV to have background noise, and settled in for the night.

I fired up my laptop—thank you free hotel wifi!—and logged onto a genealogy site to try my luck. My parents led to my grandmother, who led back to England before World War II, which was what I expected. No surprise there. Tracing the female line was tricky, with name changes and all.

I dragged the box over next to me on the bed and skimmed through it again, looking for names to pop out at me. Ralston, Brown, Thomas Hill, Samuel, Doris Miller, John Seawell. General searches on the first two sent me down the research bunny-hole into gardening history. The Hill names were too general and sent me nowhere. Seawell, the artist, was an interesting find; turns out I missed seeing one of his pieces when I was in the museum earlier that day, but a page showed some of his work. The earlier stuff was nothing too special but the Garden Gothics? What I wouldn't give to have those in my gallery. Tootling around some more with him I found a mention of his subject and a name: Mary Hill.

Another Hill, a hundred years after the first ones. They must be related. So I turned back to the genealogy site and tried it. Bingo. From Samuel Hill to his son William to his son Jonah to his daughter Mary. Other people had been looking into the same names and had posted what they knew on the site. Family stories, legends, rumors, that sort of thing.

> *My great-grandmother several times back, a cousin to Sam Hill's wife, supposedly passed down the story of his brother Tom. Something to do with faeries and the brother being a changeling! Obviously it's one of those stories that's been warped from generation to generation. But supposedly the brother was adopted into the family, so any descendants from his (Thomas's) side might not be truly related.*
>
> *Mary (Lillian Marie) Hill was Sam's great-granddaughter, via Jonah Hill (my great-great(?)-uncle, brother to my great-great(?)-grandmother). She is the niece of Madeline Louisa Bartlett, a lady photographer. I can't find*

anything much about Madeline or her sister, also Lillian Marie. If you have anything, would you share?

I took the photographs out of the pile and lined them up. The one of the girl in front of the trees. She had to be Mary. Maybe Madeline took the photo. That sparked something and I went back to the site about the painter. One of his showed the girl with a camera in the garden. I compared them. The girls were the same.

My email pinged, and I found a message from Lauren, asking me to meet her at The Remains the next morning. I replied sure and then yawned so hard my jaw cracked. But I wanted to follow one more thread before crashing for the night.

I went back and tried Thomas Hill, but his name was so common I came up with less than nothing. I dug back through the letters and found the one he wrote to Ralston, but no other mention of him. He was a dead end. So I looked up changeling. I mean, I'd heard the word before and vaguely knew what it meant, but I was desperate for something. Changeling: a child left by the faeries in exchange for a human child, sometimes an old faerie left to be raised by humans and die in the human world. People really believed this stuff? Then I remembered the garden, hearing the butterflies, the gardener's house, and all of the ghosts. The question wasn't whether people hundreds of years ago believed, but whether I did.

#

Wednesday June 30, 2010 9:30 am

While I was en route to The Remains the next morning, my phone rang. I picked it up expecting Kevin, who had left a number of messages apologizing for quitting, but it was an unknown UK number.

It was the solicitor's assistant, asking whether I would mind them passing my contact details on to someone who was interesting in perhaps purchasing The Remains.

"Someone wants the house?" I asked, shocked at the idea I might unload the place so much more easily and quickly than I had thought just hours before.

"Not the house. The land," she said. "It's a developer wanting to put up flats and houses. The house isn't listed, so there would be no restrictions on tearing it down."

"Oh." I let what she said sink in a minute. "But it's not listed because I haven't put it up for sale yet."

"Historically listed," she said. "It's not graded, so it can be torn down."

“Oh,” I said again, suspecting I looked like a guppy in a glass bowl. I felt as if I had gone back in time a few weeks to the first phone calls with the solicitor, constantly in the middle of an English-to-English translation.

“Miss?” the assistant asked.

I blinked and brought myself back to the task at hand. “Sure,” I said. “I mean, yes, it’s totally okay with me if you pass on my phone number. Thanks.”

I’d finally figured out how to get almost all the way to The Remains via public transportation, only requiring a short cab from the train station. Had I known all of it, I would have gotten a hotel nearer The Remains before I’d flown in, but remembering my touristing the day before made me happy that I was staying far away from the epicenter of my biggest problem. As I hung up the phone, the train driver announced the next stop. My station. No, not *my* station, I reminded myself. Only the station I needed. For now.

#

The ground-floor windows had all been boarded over, but the windows on the first and second floors still boasted glass. Well, the ones that hadn’t been damaged in the bombs before I was even born.

“It seems the caretaker has been rather diligent,” Lauren said as we approached the house. “Squatters are lightning quick in parts of the UK, and it takes a lot of close attention to keep an empty house empty.”

“One more reason for someone to take it over.”

The key ring was cold in my hand, the keys still foreign and strange.

“I feel like I should say something momentous,” I joked. When Lauren didn’t respond, I just shrugged and unlocked the door. “Here goes nothin’.”

Some rooms weren’t just empty, they were stripped. Here and there a remnant of plaster work, only a few inches wide at most, remained to give a hint to the grandeur the rooms once held. Fireplaces were bricked in or even gone, leaving gaping holes where, I imagined, carved marble once surrounded the fires necessary to heat the huge rooms. Wallpaper had been torn off of some walls, revealing chipped plaster. One section of rooms—a living room, a couple of bedrooms, a bathroom and kitchen—were as my great-aunt and her son, my cousin who died only a few weeks after her, had left them: furnished but dark, dusty, lacking any joy.

The garden house had been old and dirty, yet cozy. But the size of this place, full of long hallways, empty rooms, and hidden staircases, gave me the creeps. Our footfalls echoed off the walls, making me feel jumpy, as if I were in a horror movie in spite of the bright sunlight pouring in through broken windows.

"How there's no graffiti, I don't know," Lauren said. "When you first called, I expected us to find the place a bee hive of squatters."

"This whole place—with the house and the buildings and the garden—doesn't feel like we're anywhere near a town. I can imagine hearing a horse-drawn carriage pull up to the house, farm workers in the fields, that sort of thing."

Lauren stopped and turned to me. "You can still hear all of that in England. You don't need to time travel for it."

Damn. "I didn't mean—"

"No, it's okay. Tourists come here for the twee. But I like to think of the past as a smell rather than a sound."

"What does it smell like?"

Lauren stopped and tucked her hair behind her ears. "Well," she said and inhaled. "Much like this place. Empty, musty, dusty, but there are hints of woodsmoke and wood itself—like cleaning wax—and old meals and the people who lived here."

"Huh. I've inherited a shell," I said. "With a smell."

Lauren looked around, getting her bearings. "This way," she said and led me to a door at the end of a hallway on the second floor. In the room, she went straight to the window and tried to open it. "Sometimes they're nailed shut to keep people out. Looks like this one's only painted shut." She thumped the heel of her palm against the frame to crack the seal. When it was open, a wire holding a single light bulb swung back and forth in the breeze above my head.

She motioned for me to look out the window.

The walled garden was below. "Hey, the wall fell down."

Lauren nodded but didn't say anything.

"Did someone knock it down the other night? Is that what you want to show me?"

"You don't see the plane?" I

laughed.

"No, really. You don't see a plane? You've never seen one?"

I didn't know this woman well, but I felt a sort of kinship with her, that deep trust you sometimes feel with someone new. I guess that's what happens when someone

rescues you. I knew Lauren wasn't putting me on. "I don't understand. All I see is no wall where there used to be one."

She opened her bag and removed her camera. "Look," she said and turned the camera around so I could see the little screen. "I took these our first day here."

The plane's tail, rounded and old-fashioned, stuck up out of a garden in the middle of wreckage. I clicked the button to see the next photo, and the next. The garden gate was the same as the one I opened that morning. It was the garden with the flowers and the sundial and the mermaid. It was the garden from the night I'd been trying to think of as a dream.

"Look," Lauren pointed out the window.

It was the same garden below. Half of the inside of the enclosed garden was viewable, but there was nowhere for an airplane to hide.

"It's a Messerschmitt Bf109, Lauren said. "I double-checked online, to be sure. Second World War. German. My dad was a big plane buff, and—" she shrugged "—you're a girl with no brothers, your dad shares his hobbies, you do what you can to please him. It's a fun party trick."

"So it was a dream. But I had it in the daytime, too."

Lauren gave me a puzzled look, but rather than start down that road again I decided to work with something solid. I took the slim box out of my bag and started organizing the papers to have something to do, to give myself a minute to think. "I'd never seen most of these papers before a few days ago. This folder is from when my mother died—the lawyer gave it to me, but I stuck it in a drawer—and the rest of it is from the solicitor here. I showed it to you the other day at the coffee shop. Paperwork like this is why I hire accountants to do my taxes and Kevin to keep my books." I thought about having to train another Kevin and sighed. "Anyway, I like art, and paperwork isn't art."

One by one, I set them down on the windowsill. Yellowed, some stained with coffee-mug rings and wine spills, they were less romantic in the daylight than they'd been the night before.

"I tried to read some of them … that night. And last night I did some research. Here, this one might interest you. I found it folded up inside another." The drawing showed a knot garden with a fountain in the center, its water thin lines of ink leaping high on the page. Along the edge of the paper, the artist had listed names of plants.

Lauren studied the drawing. "This garden doesn't exist here. Or, it doesn't any longer. It was most likely dug up and changed."

"Turn it over," I said. I had my own surprises, of a sort.

Lauren's eyes went wide and she smiled. "Charming," she said. "Absolutely charming." The drawing, in the same hand as on the reverse, was of an enclosed garden, its walls drawn as if the artist had been up a tree, the perspective skewed so the viewer could see the outside and inside of the garden simultaneously. Inside, the flower beds were arranged around a family tree.

"It's not my family," I explained. "At least, not according to the official family tree that was handed down to me. I've no idea who most of these people are. I only know it's possibly related to the house because of the Hills here," I pointed, "and here. I found the name Thomas Hill on one of the letters in the box, but he's not on this tree. I just don't know why I've got it now if it's not my family."

"Papers like this end up staying with their houses," Lauren said. "Gardeners—and owners—could be rather territorial and even secretive about garden plans. Victorian gardeners treated their bedding schemes like state secrets. Who these people were, though…."

I knew who they were. I just had to convince her. "Can papers be dated?"

Lauren nodded. "Easy enough to have done."

"What about this?" I picked up the blurred photo of the young girl standing in front of the tree. "I think she's Lillian Hill. She's in paintings, weird and beautiful paintings, done by an artist who once stayed here. Lillian's aunt was a photographer. And I think she was, too."

"Interesting, even though she's not your ancestor," Lauren said, matter-of-factly.

"Well, so far I know more about her than I do about the ancestors who lived here at the same time."

"It's odd. She's definitely not a daughter of the house. Her clothes aren't fine enough. But to have your photograph taken outside, as a child at that time...." "There's a lot odd about this," I added.

Lauren sorted through the photographs. She lifted one of a young woman in costume, a medieval-style robe pooled around her feet. Lauren pointed to writing on the back of the photo. "Lily Marie, 1865. It's the girl from the other photo, but older."

I laid all of the photos out atop the papers. "I saw them all that night."

"These photos have been in your family for years. You probably saw them when you were a child and it stuck somewhere in your head. Being here, it's a lot to deal with. So you dreamed about what you barely remember."

I pointed out the window. “And I suppose your childhood—learning about the planes from your father—means you created a World War II airplane from thin air and photographed it? Good party trick.”

Lauren winced, but the loudmouth American me didn’t care. None of it was believable, but it was starting to make sense.

“This place,” I said, still pointing out the window, “has been inhabited for how long? Four hundred years at least? And for decades now it’s been left to rot. It wants us. It wants someone to come back and take care of it.”

I told her about being in the garden that first morning, when it had turned itself up to eleven, and about going in there that night. About waking up, the glowing in the garden, the knocking, and opening the door to all of the ghosts. “He was there,” I said and pointed at an old gardener in one photo. “And Lily Marie. And him. And her. And the rest of them. And I bet if I saw paintings from earlier I’d recognize more of them. They’re here. They’ve always been here.”

After my grand speech, I expected straightjackets and drug cocktails. Lauren turned and marched away, out of the room. I left the pile of papers and photos and followed her.

“Where are you going?”

She stopped, halfway down the main staircase, and looked back up at me. “Back to work. You can’t afford to keep it, can you?”

I shook my head. I didn’t know if I was going to be able to afford breakfast. “I got a call. Someone wants to maybe buy it, tear it down and put up houses.”

“I see,” she said, unruffled. “Then I am going to take as many photos as I can today. Perhaps the Legacy will take it if I can make it attractive enough, even if you aren’t a Lady.”

“Will you show them the plane?”

She shrugged. “I’ll keep it in my back pocket for now. Hauntings are a special consideration.”

I stopped dead at the top of the stairs. “You think it’s haunted?” That word never even crossed my mind.

“You said you saw ghosts in the garden, right?” I

nodded.

“And I have photographic evidence of a plane that is there and not there. Schrödinger’s plane, if you will.”

“Yeah.”

"What more do you need?"

Now there was a question. What more did I need? A million dollars, a rich client list, a personal trainer, a hair stylist that didn't leave me feeling as if split ends were a crime against humanity, boots that didn't pinch my feet, and a cabana boy to bring me margaritas on command. In my hand I still held the photograph of young Lillian—Lily Marie—in front of the trees. I studied it for a moment to give myself time to decide what to say.

"You're right. I do need more. But let me ask you: if this place were yours, if you were me with my problems, what would you do?"

In the dim stairwell it was difficult to read Lauren's face, and I didn't know her too well, but I knew surprise when I saw it.

"Oh. No one with a stupid big house like this has ever asked you that before?"

She nodded. "Plenty of times. But none of them were you. They all had the titles and the pedigree and degrees from great schools. They all looked at me as if I were the next in a long line of assistants and solicitors and 'helpers', like a trumped-up maid. I was there to help them save their house because it meant saving their family name. Saving what they'd always had."

I laughed. "Well, you definitely can't accuse me of that."

"Would you please do me a favor?" she asked, her voice soft and quiet, as if we were old friends.

When I nodded she continued. "Hold off on the buyer. Give me the weekend at least. Let me talk to the Legacy and see what I can do first."

"I can't. I get on a plane day after tomorrow. With Kevin quitting, things at home—"

"Okay. Just today and tomorrow then. I want to be sure you exhaust all avenues. I want to give you time to consider."

"Sure, okay. What do I have to lose?"

As we left the house and I locked the door behind us, I thought of that question again. What did I have to lose? My business—my life—in the States, or The Remains … the remains of my family here in this overgrown, weed-choked lot.

#

I lied.

Well, I didn't lie-lie. When Lauren dropped me off at the train station I waved as she drove away then went next door to a coffee shop, grabbed a quick lunch, and caught

a cab back to The Remains to meet the possible buyer, who had called me right before I'd arrived at the house earlier that morning.

I didn't have much time and had to cover all my bases. If Lauren and the Legacy didn't come through, I had to have some way of unloading the place. Quickly. And I wasn't looking this gift horse in the mouth.

When I got back to the house, I still had a few minutes before the prospective buyer, a Lawrence Brown, was supposed to arrive. I walked to the edge of the curved front drive and stood for a few moments, looking around at the gardens and the house. I suppose I was wondering whether I had any feelings for the place. I mean, I had owned it for all of two weeks and was, I crossed my fingers, about to sell it. It was like going to one of my favorite stores, putting something I loved but couldn't afford in my cart, and walking around the store with it for a half an hour, owning it, until putting it back and walking away. Would I miss a house I had never moved into or even slept in? Well, I remembered, I had sort of slept there, in the kitchen garden house at least.

Movement in the garden caught my eye. Someone was there.

"Hey!" I thought perhaps it was Mr. Brown, arrived early and scoping the place out. Maybe he'd parked his car elsewhere, or had taken a cab like me.

I jogged down the path of flattened weeds, the result of us walking back and forth from the walled garden to the big house over the previous few days. A head of dark hair, gleaming in the sun, bobbed up ahead, just visible for a moment through the jungle of overgrown plants, and disappeared around the corner of the walled garden. "Mr. Brown!" I called, but he didn't stop.

When I turned the corner, no one was there. But the gate was open.

I wasn't sure what to expect inside the garden. Vibrant colours, air thick with perfume, the hypnotic buzz of insects? Or destruction and the impossible carnage of a World War Two relic?

I stepped in.

He had his back to me.

"Mr. Brown? I didn't see your car."

As soon as the words were out of my mouth I realised this wasn't Mr. Brown, unless my buyer had just stepped off the stage or out of a time machine. Or was very eccentric.

His dark green coat blended in with the garden, and his long hair was pulled back in a ponytail. Neither of these details, on their own, was strange. It was the embroidery on the coat and the velvet ribbon in his hair that clued me in. The sun shone

nearly straight down, throwing short shadows, but his face was difficult to make out and I blinked, hoping to clear my vision.

Something nudged my leg and I stepped to one side, too entranced by the man to look down, almost unconsciously deciding it was a weed brushing against me. The feeling repeated itself and I took another step to one side. It happened a third time and I looked down to find a vine, bright new green in the summer sun, touching my ankle.

I screamed and lurched away from it. The tip of the vine hung in the air like a submarine periscope.

A voice inside my head—not my voice and not my grandmother's—spoke. *It won't hurt you. It's still sluggish. Just be still.*

A man's voice with a strange accent, British but different.

He thinks you're a flower.

I was so focused on the vine and the voice I had forgotten the man for a moment. He hadn't moved from the spot, but there was movement. As I watched, the decoration on his coat shifted. At first I thought it was the crazy vine near my foot sliding up his torso, but then flowers bloomed and leaves unfurled. The embroidery grew until his coat was more garden than green, until he looked like … well, like a human-size faerie.

"Time to wake up, Toni," I told myself. "Just wake up. You've fallen asleep in the sun while waiting for the guy. All this travel and strange food, it's no wonder you keep having these weird-ass dreams." He shook his head.

His face was still blurry, but he shook his head. At me.

And as quickly as everything had gone completely over-the-top psychedelic, it was gone. He turned and walked out of the garden through the giant hole in the wall, the vine slithered back to wherever it belonged, and my brain went quiet.

"Miss Hammond?"

I was hearing voices again.

"Miss Hammond!"

My phone rang. It was the buyer, Mr. Brown. He was in the drive, looking for me.

Showing Brown around The Remains took much less time than I had anticipated. I suppose I should have known he didn't care about the house or the walled garden or the kitchen garden or any of it. Only the land. He barely asked any question but I kept on wanting to tell him things. "The house is over four hundred years old." "This walled garden is the oldest thing here, from the Tudor era or before, which is incredibly rare." "The kitchen garden still has its greenhouses, but they need some

restoration." "The kitchen garden cottage would be livable with a little work." Each time I opened my mouth, real-estate speak came out.

Just like Lauren had said. Sell it.

But I was already sold.

#

Thursday, July 1 2010, 11:15 am

The key ring's blue bauble comforted me as I rolled it in my palm and waited for the clerk to look up the record.

"Unit 115," he said. "On the first floor. Stairs are through those doors."

I'd matched up all of the keys from the solicitor to their locks. Except one. In all of the madness of the previous few days I'd forgotten about the storage unit. Tiny brass key, solid brass padlock. The last unlocked door to my family's past.

I pulled the rolling door open, unsure what to expect. Like the house the day before, the storage unit was almost empty. I ignored the dozen cardboard boxes piled in one corner and made a beeline for the tall, skinny crate, open on one side. Of course I recognised the box as the kind used to transport art. The largest painting was of a couple in eighteenth-century dress, The Remains—in all its glory—behind them. I studied the tiny figures in the background, one by one, as they worked in the gardens. Being surrounded by art during most of my waking hours, I sometimes took it for granted, forgetting it represented life, even in the abstract. Uncountable brushstrokes on canvas now were once countable people living their lives then, with names and families and joys and secrets.

"Mr. Brown may tear down The Remains, but you're coming home with me."

The smallest item in the crate was a cardboard box, similar in size to the one in my bag containing the papers I'd been hauling around with me everywhere for days. With nowhere to sit, I didn't want to go through more paperwork in the storage unit, so I stashed that box in my bag as well and locked up.

#

Thursday, July 1 2010, 6:30 pm

Lauren met me at a pub in the middle of London, making it easier for her to get home and for me to get back to my hotel before having to fly out the next day.

"One quick drink, and then I have dinner plans at half seven," she'd told me on the phone.

"It'll be quick," I promised.

It wasn't the weekend yet but the pub was close to being full, half the clients in suits and skirts having a drink before heading home, the other half tourists. Like me. I wondered how long it took to stop feeling like a tourist in a new town.

I grabbed one of the last two empty tables, going for a small two-seater booth against the wall. Asking for a meeting in a pub wasn't exactly asking for privacy, but the noise of people talking and recorded music pretty much insured what I had to tell her wouldn't be overheard.

When she arrived I waved her over to the table and took her drink order. "Here." I pushed the slim box across the table toward her. "Take a look and I'll be right back."

As I waited at the bar I watched from across the room as she opened the box. The slight frown of someone tired from a long day and thinking about her busy schedule changed to a look of surprise, then horror, and then calm understanding.

With drinks in hand, I braced myself for what was next.

"The Cottingley fairies," she said before I had a chance to sit.

I hasn't prepared myself for that. "The what?"

"A hundred years ago, two teenage girls with a camera made some photographs of themselves playing in a garden with little fairies, which turned out to be nothing more than paper and glue. Very early Photoshop. But people believed they were true." She placed her hand flat on the closed box. I wondered whether it was to take possession or ensure it stayed shut.

"And?" I asked.

"You can't show these to anyone."

"Why not?"

"Those fairy photos dogged the two girls their whole lives, until they were old women. That was way before the internet. If these got out?"

"Even if they're not fakes?" The thought of the weight of the internet falling down on my head was daunting.

Lauren shook her head. "I know they're not."

She'd only just seen them for a minute or two. I'd had them for most of the day.

“I’ve studied art for years, and counterfeit art is everywhere.”

“It’s the Land Girl.”

I glanced up, wondering who she meant, expecting to see a group of younger adults in costume at the bar. Since arriving in London I’d seen some rather outlandish clothes, especially in the center of town.

She grabbed my wrist and I pulled my attention back. “Toni, in here,” she said and patted the box beneath her hand. “Victorian photographers had all manner of tricks—everything from brackets to keep children still for the long exposure times to ways of layering negatives to alter prints. They added ghostly images to photos all the time. But they never added the future, especially not an accurate one.”

It had been a good move, then, to let her look at the photos alone. “You’re right. But I think you’re wrong, too.” Before she could take offense, I continued. “I don’t think they’re ghosts. Not in the way we think of them. And I don’t think it’s about them so much as it’s about the place.” I explained about the day before when I’d seen the walled garden for what it was now. And about seeing him, the man in the green coat, the man from the painting and the photographs and the night in the cottage.

“I know you have to go,” I said, looking at my watch. “But I had to show these to you, to help explain why I can’t sell, even though…. Damn. I’m not exactly in the right state to make such a huge decision.”

“My dad always used to say it’s when push comes to shove that we make the decision we really want, even if it’s too outlandish to reckon.”

I looked beyond her then, at the crowd around us, before saying what was likely to be the stupidest thing I was ever going to say in my life. “Even though I’m nearly broke and my business is failing, and Brown’s offer was amazing, I can’t do it. I can’t let some guy tear it all out and pave it over.” I had to stop because the weight of all of it, of what I was going to do, was just so much to carry, and I felt tears coming.

Lauren slumped a bit in her seat, and I steeled myself for the voice of reason to take over. Then she smiled. “Good. Because if you didn’t do it, I was going to have to figure out a way. You still flying out tomorrow?” I nodded a yes. “Hold on a sec.” She let go of the box and grabbed her phone, gave me the I’ll-be-right-back finger, and walked a few feet away, phone to her ear. Not a minute later she slid back into her seat, her face flushed with excitement. “Right. Looks like we’re having a working dinner. Have you got some paper? We need to make a list.”

#

It wasn't that easy, of course. Nothing in my life is ever easy.

Turns out I wasn't a Lady This, That, or Anything Else. Which was fine by me. Life had become surreal enough without that to add to it. I had inherited the house through the entailment but not a title. Those only came to my ancestors—ancestresses?—through marriage.

On Lauren's and the Legacy's advice, I hired someone to live in the house via a property-management service where people live somewhere for cheap or even free, and the homeowner—or even office-block owner—is assured that it's inhabited, vital when trying to keep squatters away. I interviewed a nice young couple who were tired of paying London rent and wanted to try something new. He's a grade-school teacher, and she does something with construction. Between them they know how to garden and fix things. Result!

They moved into The Remains with Lauren's help because I had to come back to Santa Fe and figure out the next step.

The Tyler exhibit, with Kevin's help, went off without a hitch and I sold most of the pieces. On the success of that, I soon sold the gallery, too, to a lovely woman who decided to up sticks and move to the desert from the East coast. She even liked my house, so I sold her that, too. It was like a weird existential pay-it-forward. On paper it sounds easy, but it was anything but. The small profit I made paid off my debts and left me with enough to live on for a little while, even though I had nowhere to live.

My friends thought I was crazy. My friends thought I was brave. I've still not decided what I am.

Moving countries is not a matter of just packing and going. The lists I wrote!

That's not all I wrote, though.

Following Lauren's advice, I knew I had to sell The Remains. Sell its history and its soul and its magic. So here I am now, writing the story of this place. I have some facts. Bits and pieces from here and there: stories shared on the genealogy sites, paperwork from my ancestors, passages in books. I've haunted the British Library and the small local one near the house, and can't pass a thrift shop without taking a look at the books in case there's one about the county. I even called the Women's Institute. They connected me to people who have lived near The Remains all their lives, and the stories—and gossip—they've shared has helped me start to sew together the layers. I even had tea with the daughter of a woman who worked here as a Land Girl.

“Mother died just five years ago. The stories she told me about that house gave me nightmares as a young child. When you’re young you don’t understand about time, how it piles up on you, how you end up carrying so much of it around with you,” she said, fiddling with her teacup.

I mm-hmm’d agreement but didn’t add anything, silently encouraging her to continue.

“There was a séance one night—this would end up being the night the bomb hit and two of the girls, two of my mother’s friends, died. Anyway, the lady of the house arranged a séance, and I can’t think about the house without imagining a dark conservatory lit only by a candle.”

“Did your mother see any ghosts?” I asked, curious for reasons I wasn’t ready to share.

“Mother said she saw them in the gardens, all the time.”

To know it wasn’t just me, that it wasn’t just now, brought tears to my eyes, but happy tears this time. I took a bite of scone to give myself a chance to recover.

Honestly, though, I still haven’t.

So I’ve cobbled together what I’ve found and have started to write the story of The Remains and of the people who lived here. The rest of it, though? Well, I suppose you could say it’s all a load of bull. Made up. Embellished.

The Legacy has dozens of historic houses tourists can visit to see how life was lived, upstairs and down. Twenty-first century people can learn to churn butter, bleach laundry with pee, set a banquet table, and steam a pudding. It’s all there. But it turns out the most important part of The Remains is the once-great garden, and the walled garden has been here maybe longer than any other walled garden in the country. Lauren and I concocted a plan to do something different with this house and gardens than has been done with others: not to restore The Remains enough into a working model of a Stuart or Georgian or Victorian house but into an events center for weddings and retreats for artists and writers, a place where people can once again become part of history.

Because what’s a garden if not a place to make things up, to embellish, to dream?

#

November 1, 2010 4:15 pm

We turned the clocks back last night, and the sky is turning dark early. It's that periwinkle color I love so much—not blue but not purple and so strange it hurts your eyes to look at it too long. Like a color from a Maxfield Parrish painting. A color from fairyland. A color from a dream. I miss the desert sometimes, especially being able to see for miles and miles. The world here is hemmed in by so much green, embedded in so much history.

Halloween isn't such a big deal here, and Diá de Muertos is barely a blip. I've come down to the garden to keep to the holiday, to visit the relatives. It's never appeared to me again as it did that first day, but I kept the memory of it in mind when we rebuilt the wall and cleaned the flower beds. The sundial was smashed to pieces—I found the flat bronze horse piece beneath a tangle of vines—leaving the center empty. It's a good place to stand.

I visit the garden daily. Checking up on what is growing, even this time of year, is a way to mark the days and the passing of the seasons. I look forward to spring, to seeing what survives the winter. My grandmother knew this garden as a young child, and I regret not being able to ask her what she saw. My guess is she saw them and that's why she never gardened in her life. I looked for her in the photographs, for a glowing outline of a little girl with a family resemblance, but no luck. There is one form, however, that sits along the garden wall in one picture, her shoes beside her and glasses on her head. Lauren didn't see that one; I kept it in my bag at the pub.

The boarders, Wendy and Simon, have hinted to me they've seen the others. It was only a matter of time, but I'll leave them to make of it what they will. I have moments when, out of the corner of my eye, I think I see movement. I don't look. I don't chase it. This is a garden, and things move here all the time. You can't keep a garden from growing.

The sun has sunk below the top edge of the wall. When I finish making my rounds of the garden I step into the middle and stand where the sundial used to mark the hours. The only shadow I cast is one that stretches backward and forward through time.

THE END

GARDENS AND THE FANTASTIC:
SPACE AND TIME IN *THREADING THE LABYRINTH*

TIFFANI KAY ANGUS

Introduction

Gardens are more than the sum of their parts. They exist in the space between home and public, between order and chaos, between the present and the future. Gardens take up physical space—actual land—around houses great and small. They are corralled by the borders that separate houses from one another; some are kept secret behind their houses, while others are out front, open to public appreciation, opinion, and even derision. Gardens are only gardens because they have borders: those lines—whether strong stone walls or something less permanent yet still effective—indicate the difference between the order of purposely chosen and tended plants and the chaos beyond, be it wilderness or an abandoned lot full of weeds. Gardens cannot exist outside of time; when you plant a garden in the present, you are actually planting the future, the ideal you have in your head of what it will look like one day in the coming months or years. Yet they are ever in flux; the garden may attain that idealised form, but it is alive and will outgrow its borders (and become wilderness/chaos) if given enough time. Gardens are symbols and metaphors and, in Abrahamic culture, gardens in literature are often synonymous with the "ultimate" garden, the Garden of Eden. Gardens represent power, from the great gardens of Versailles down to the front and back gardens of suburbia.

Parsing out the meaning of a garden—both the physical thing itself and the literary representation of it on the page—is a complex act because of the garden's position in space and time. Mikhail Bakhtin's definition of the chronotope, Julia Kristeva's and Susan Stanford Friedman's arguments about spatialization, and Michel Foucault's construction of the heterotopia, along with the concepts of the polder, the palimpsest, and the *hortus conclusus*, all combine to create something far beyond what most people would see as a set of plants placed inside a border. These theories and concepts help us better understand the potential, effect, function, and metaphor of the garden. Each of these concepts and theories, as they are related to time and space, overlap in places. I have focused on each in order to explore the theoretical framework of *Threading the Labyrinth* as well as to analyse aspects of the novel and my writing of it.

The first clue to the complexity of the setting—the space and time—of my novel is its title, *Threading the Labyrinth*. In his *Postscripts to* The Name of the Rose, Umberto Eco asserts that "A title must muddle the reader's ideas, not regiment them" (1984, p.3). When considering the title, I insisted on using the word

"labyrinth" although I purposely only described an actual maze or labyrinth in my fictional English country-house garden in passing. I visualised the incarnations of the garden, layered atop one another, and the movement of the characters inside that garden as they slipped forward or backward through time, as a labyrinth without an ending because time itself has no beginning or end. Walking a contemplative labyrinth, navigating its twists and turns to its ultimate end, is called threading. It best represents not only what I have attempted to do in the novel by taking a garden that has been planted over and over, tended by generations of the same family, and "sewing" it together, but what I am attempting to do here: to stitch together—to quilt—a collection of ideas and theories on time and space in gardens, fictional gardens, and literature into a cohesive whole.

In Chapter One, "Borders: Historical Fantasy, Magic, and *Threading the Labyrinth* in Context," I investigate the borders that I have attempted to cross in my creation of *Threading*…. The first border is that between the historical fiction and fantasy fiction genres, and I argue that my novel is a combination of these genres. The second, the border between one time and another, leads to an examination of the fantasy element of timeslip, and I argue for my use of the term "temporal instability." I also investigate how gardens have been used in fantasy and non-fantasy fiction for children and adults and maintain that *Threading*... straddles the border between them.

In Chapter Two, "The Garden as a 'Time-Space': the Chronotope, Characterisation, and Verisimilitude," I use Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope to argue that gardens are "time-spaces" in both real life and in my novel. I also use his examination of the chronotope in literature to investigate my creation of characters and argue that I have attained the verisimilitude necessary for readers to suspend disbelief when reading historical and fantasy fiction.

In Chapter Three, "Structures in Space and Time: *Threading the Labyrinth* as Composite Novel and Heterotopia," I argue that *Threading*... is a composite novel of five parts. This leads to an investigation of the sequence and structure of the novel, which affect the narrative distance. I use Foucault's theory of the heterotopia to argue that the garden in my novel is the "totality of the world" for my characters, and his theory of the heterochrony to argue that each section of the novel is part of a collection of times.

Chapter Four, "The *Hortus Conclusus*: Metaphor, Perfection, and Revision," explores the long tradition of the *hortus conclusus,* or enclosed garden, in art and literature and how it has influenced the creation of the garden in *Threading*…. The

difficulty in separating the religious overtones from an enclosed garden in any medium leads to an argument that the garden in *Threading…* is not a metaphor for the Garden of Eden or the "perfect" Paradise. This, in turn, leads to an examination of perfection in art, the argument that it is not possible, and the process through which I have revised the novel.

Finally, in Chapter Five, "Spatialization: Writing Myself into the Axes," I use Friedman's expansion of the theory of spatialization to explore both the horizontal and vertical axes in *Threading…* and argue that the contexts in which the novel and I exist have influenced its creation. Because it is impossible to separate the creator from the creation, I use the final chapter of this analysis to claim that I have unwittingly and unexpectedly placed myself into the novel.

As much as possible, I have tried to avoid repetition when moving from chapter to chapter, but untangling time and space is difficult and, like any time traveller, crossing over my own timeline is difficult to avoid.

Chapter One Borders: Historical Fantasy, Magic, and *Threading the Labyrinth* in Context

A garden is only a garden because it is separated from the surrounding wilderness by a border. Gardens and their borders are the result of human endeavour, no matter how non-geometric or so-called "natural" the style. Gardens are gardens because they are kept or, in the case of those that have been lost to decay, meant to be kept; hence the "lost" in the Lost Gardens of Heligan. Even overgrown, old gardens can still be recognised as gardens. Since the late nineteenth century, the excavation of sites in the Middle East has uncovered evidence of ancient gardens, and in Britain earthworks ("upstanding earthen remains" often discovered via aerial photography) have led archaeologists to the discovery of hundreds of gardens from as early as the twelfth century (Taylor, C., 2006, pp.17–18). The same can be argued of a novel: it is a collection of words kept inside a border (physically, the page margins and the cover; artistically, the arbitrary choice of where to begin and end the story), written with purpose no matter how easy or natural the style. Borders are vital for separating *is* from *is not*, yet it is the transgression and even dismantling of a border that interests me here as I begin an examination of my novel and its use of time and space. The physical borders and walls in *Threading the Labyrinth* hold in the garden's magic, but *Threading…* itself straddles a set of borders, one relating to genre and another to where it can be placed in an examination of other novels with garden settings.

In the beginning, I envisioned *Threading…* as a fantasy novel. It was only when writing the first draft that I began to understand that what I was writing was a historical fantasy, or a fantastic history. *Threading…* straddles the border between how other authors have used gardens in both fantasy and non-fantasy. It is a collection of stories that together compose a novel set over four hundred years in the same garden, making it historical; however, the novel contains slippages in time, making it fantastic. Trespassing over these borders is what I hope makes *Threading…* different and worthy of attention.

Threading the Labyrinth is historical fiction because it is based on a real historical past and is populated with characters based on historical research, some of them influenced by real historical persons. In *The English Historical Novel,* Avrom Fleishman claims that historical novels "address a specific past situation in all its concreteness, and often with more domestic detail" than other genres or forms of literature (1971, p.8). Change over time is one of the stories of the novel, and the time

span that *Threading…* covers, illustrated by the ways in which the garden changes, places it squarely as a novel set in history. In *Threading…* I address the life of workers in a garden in several time periods, including their interactions with one another and with the landowners, their home lives, and the influence that the progress of history has on their lives. Fleishman argues that not only is a novel a historical novel when it is set in the past, but that to "qualify as historical" it must contain a "'real'" historical person (p.3). On this requirement, he goes on to claim that "When life is seen in the context of history, we have a novel; when the novel's characters live in the same world with historical persons, we have a historical novel" (p.4). Such a strict rule can be difficult for a fiction writer to follow to the letter, especially in light of his comments on the requirements of historical novels to contain truth, which he claims is difficult when "even the nature of historical fact is problematic" (*ibid.*). Some characters in *Threading…* are based on real historical people; for example, Harvey Ralston in the 1770s section is loosely based on "landscape designer" Humphry Repton, and Aunt Madeline in the 1865 section is inspired by photographer Julia Margaret Cameron.

The majority of the contextual characters, however, are garden labourers, those who undertook "'stoop labour'" (Mabey, 2010, p.120). They are composites of information I found in my research. Fleishman later claims that the subject of the historical novel should not be a "world-historical" person because he or she would be "by definition exceptional" (1971, p.10) but instead a "typical man of an age" because it is through this character that the author can show the changes in history's forward progress (p.11). The questions then become "Who is a real historical person?", "Do only the famous count as 'real'?", and perhaps, "Are only men typical?". While the events in *Threading…* are based on historical events, the majority of the characters in *Threading…* are based on people whose lives were rarely recorded because of their class status and social backgrounds: be they weeding women or head gardeners they are, as Fleishman advocates, "typical" of their era and place. The first protagonist, Joan Cookstole, is a weeding woman in the early seventeenth century. Her name is a composite of the names of two weeding women from the Hampton Court accounts (Way, 2006, p.7), and the pay that she earns is based on records that show how little female hired labourers were paid (Quest-Ritson, 2001, pp.52–53). With few records of their personal stories—likely as a result of low literacy and education rates for women of this social class—I was left to fictionalise Joan's life using the scant facts I had. I did the same when creating Joan's husband Will, Thomas Hill and his family in the 1770s, and Mary Hill in 1865. By showcasing these characters, I can depict changes in society

during the years *Threading…* spans. Fleishman also argues that historical fiction "retells history in order to make a truer story than has been written by historians" (1971, p.10). With *Threading…* I have fictionalised these real people in an attempt to retell history and fill in the gaps left by historians.

As a historical novel, *Threading…* sits comfortably with other novels that use gardens as a central setting. In Susan Hillmore's *The Greenhouse* (1988), the narrative is told from the point of view of a greenhouse that falls to ruin as a family unravels as the result of a number of tragedies; Philippa Gregory's *Earthly Joys* (1998) and *Virgin Earth* (1999) follow the lives of John Tradescant the Elder, famous horticulturist and royal gardener in the early seventeenth century, and his son John Tradescant the Younger, who travelled to the American colonies; in Helen Humphreys's *The Lost Garden* (2002), a horticulturist finds a forgotten garden from the Great War while on assignment training Land Girls in 1941; in Gillian Linscott's *The Garden* (2002), a garden designed on the eve of the Great War is a "love letter" to the designer's adulterous lover and the daughter he cannot publicly claim; in Mark Mills's *The Savage Garden* (2007), an Italian garden holds clues to adultery and murder; *The Knot* by Jane Borodale (2012) is a fictional account of Henry Lyte, who in the sixteenth century worked to translate a Dutch herbal and who planted a knot garden in his native Somerset in spite of the danger of flooding; and *The Physic Garden* by Catherine Czerkawska (2014), set in early nineteenth-century Glasgow, follows the tragic story of young William Lang, who keeps the university's physic garden, and his relationships with botanist Dr. Thomas Brown and Jenny, an embroiderer. In these historical novels, the garden is often used to show the passage of time and it is populated with characters who are either typical of those who would be found there at that historical time, such as Land Girls, or based on real historical persons closely connected to gardening history, such as the Tradescants.

While what I have written is, in one sense, clearly a historical novel, it is also a fantasy novel and straddles the boundary between genres. In *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy,* K.L. Maund asserts that there are four categories of the use of history in fantasy novels: those mainly set "in a genuine historical context" that combine "actual historical events" with "fantasy tropes"; those set in an alternate world or universe based on real history; those that create a history for a make-believe place; and those that "borrow historical events and ideologies, and transform them to provide the basis for a new world" (1997). *Threading…* adheres to the first of these categories; its "genuine historical context" is an English manor-house garden in several different eras, each time

period populated with characters based on the people who would have worked there in real life, such as head gardeners, orchard keepers, and Land Girls. The "actual historical events" include cultural events such as changes to landscape design and political ones such as the Second World War. The main fantasy trope I use in *Threading…,* only slightly more difficult to explain, is what I have chosen to call "temporal instability."

I have chosen the term temporal instability because it most closely describes what happens to the characters who experience it. The closest official term for what happens to my characters is "timeslip," yet differing definitions of the term render it uncomfortable for my use. According to Andy Duncan, the term timeslip is used to describe the moment when characters "purposefully or accidentally" travel "from one timeline to another" in stories that "presume that more than one 'parallel world' with divergent histories can co-exist" (2003, p.21); an example is when Gary and Sarah in William Sleator's *The Last Universe* (2005) use a garden maze to travel between parallel universes to find one in which Gary is not ill. In *Threading…*, however, the characters slip from one time to another within the same space rather from one parallel world to another, making their grasp on time unstable. Brian Stableford argues that "literary timeslips are rarely random" and usually link together time-challenged lovers or characters with their ancestors (1997). An example of a non-random timeslip is in Alison Barber's *The Ghosts* (1969), in which Victorian-era siblings Sara and George slip forward through time to the twentieth century to ask Jamie and his sister Lucy for help; Jamie and Lucy then timeslip back to try to save them. The timeslips in this novel are not random because the character Mr. Blunden purposely finds Jamie and Lucy's mother to give her a job as a caretaker in the house where Sara and George died; furthermore, once Jamie and Lucy save Sarah and George, the Victorian children are able to grow up and become the modern children's ancestors, strengthening the nonrandom link between the two sets of siblings. In the case of *Threading…*, I chose to ensure that the timeslips *are* random, hence why I have chosen the term "temporal instability." In a few instances, temporal instability allows distant relations to see one another, yet without the knowledge—for either character—that they are related.

The moments of temporal instability in *Threading…* illustrate the build-up of time in one place rather than unite families across time. Usually one character will see the temporally unstable character who happened to be in that specific space in the garden but at a different time. Examples include the moment when James Hitchen in the early 1600s sees Mary Hill in 1865 (pp.18–19), when John Alexander Seawell in 1865

sees characters from the past and the future (pp.137–38) and when Irene Beamer in 1941 sees Thomas from the 1770s (pp.141, 155, 171–72, 190). In none of these cases are the characters related to one another. The experience of a character randomly seeing a temporally unstable character from another time—past or future— results in the slippage of time being more about the place—the garden itself—than about the characters who inhabit it.

How time is affected by the temporal instability in *Threading…* differs from how time is affected by characters' timeslips in other fantasy novels. It could be argued that timeslips in fiction that happen in relation to well-known historic events or people must result in history as we know it remaining unaffected. In Alison Uttley's *A Traveller in Time* (1939), timeslips have no effect on causal time: no matter what actions Penelope takes in the 1580s, Mary Queen of Scots still dies. In contrast, in Barber's *The Ghosts* timeslips affect causal time: when Jamie and Lucy travel into the past they take action that affects Sara and George's future as well as their own. In *Threading…*, the temporal instability the characters experience affects time for neither them nor for any character who may encounter them. Again, the function of the temporal instability is to illustrate the layers of time present in this one space—in the garden—rather than to connect relatives, pass characters from one parallel universe to another, or throw together the protagonists with historic persons as a learning experience. Time itself remains unaffected, which places my use of temporal instability in contrast to timeslips in other novels and further explains my use of the term temporal instability.

In "The development of children's fantasy," Maria Nikolajeva argues that "more than any other fantasy motif, time distortion is influenced by contemporary scientific thought," including those "problems which fantasy authors meet when they venture on the exploration of time patterns" that "[allow] deep philosophical contemplations: the questions of predestination and free will, of the multitude of possible parallel times, of time going at a different pace or even in different directions in separate worlds, the mechanisms of time displacement, and the various time paradoxes" (2012, p.53). The moments of temporal instability in *Threading…* all take place in one spot—the garden, especially the enclosed garden—which highlights two of Nikolajeva's concerns above: "the multitude of possible parallel times" and "the mechanisms of time displacement."

Parallel time in fantasy fiction is sometimes expressed as the existence of a parallel universe, accessible through a portal, such as the wardrobe in C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950). A better example is Uttley's *A*

Traveller in Time, in which a day "away" in the 1580s is equal to a day away in the 1930s for Penelope, while in Lewis's novel time runs at different speeds from world to world. Uttley's character arrives back at her time in linear order while Narnia's time is unpredictable. In *Threading…*, instead of walking through a physical portal to another dimension, the characters experience temporal instability in the garden, travelling to another time in the same spot. The "parallel times" are all of the incarnations of the garden that I have written—a certain time in the early 1600s, the 1770s, 1865, early 1941, and June 2010—layered atop one another. In *Threading…*, time is a palimpsest, not so much physically (although gardens are built up over time, with newer ones hiding the outlines of those previous) as spiritually. In *Threading…*, in contrast to the novels listed here, when a character experiences temporal instability he or she is unaware of the event and returns to stability without losing any time: when Joan sees the "ghosts" of Tom and the Lady from the 1770s (pp.7–8), none of the three characters experience any changes to, or lose any, time. As for the means or mechanism of the temporal instability in *Threading…*, the focus is solely on the garden itself—a "time-being"—as the agent with an unpredictable psychic nature at odds with its predictable nature as a garden that must change with the seasons.

Gardens in Fantasy Literature

Threading the Labyrinth is part of a tradition of fantasy fiction that experiments with time in garden settings. In children's fantasy fiction, a garden is often a time-travel device used to move the young characters through time, while in adult fantasy fiction a garden is a place where time is a concern but it is not a mechanism for movement through time.

Children's fiction offers many excellent examples in which a garden becomes the locus of a timeslip. In Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958), each night when the clock strikes thirteen young Tom travels in time back to the late-Victorian period where he and Hattie play in the garden; he is a "ghost" in her world, and he appears to her throughout her young life until she is grown. Helen Cresswell's *Moondial* (1988) uses the sundial in a grand estate's garden as a time-travel device, allowing Minty Cane to travel back to the nineteenth century, and possibly even earlier, to help young children who are abused or are ill as a result of poverty and hard work on the estate. Lucy M. Boston's *The Children of Green Knowe* (1954) is the story of young Tolly, sent to stay with his great-grandmother Mrs. Oldknowe in the twelfthcentury

house Greene Noah/Knowe where, in the gardens, he encounters the ghosts of his ancestors, young children who died of the plague hundreds of years earlier; each of the family's generations shares names, as do the generations of the estate's servants, and the ghosts' appearances are taken in stride. In Barber's *The Ghosts*, a herb garden with an old sundial next to a historical house is the main setting in which Victorian-era siblings Sara and George appear to modern siblings Jamie and Lucy; the children use the herbs to concoct a sleeping draught that allows them to travel through time and try to save Sara and George. In Andre Norton's *Lavender-Green Magic* (1974), a garden maze is the time-travel device, allowing three young siblings to travel back to try to save a young woman from execution for witchcraft. Edward Eager's *The Time Garden* (1958) follows the adventures of a group of children as they travel from a patch of wild thyme in a garden through time to a collection of historically significant moments. In *Charmed Life* (1977), Diana Wynne Jones introduces us to Chestromanci Castle, where the forbidden garden can only be approached if one looks at it sideways; inside the garden, flowers bloom out of season, the garden slides around the protagonists, and a ruined archway is a doorway between worlds. Mary Downing Hahn's *The Doll in the Garden* (1989) is set in a house with a large back garden, half of which is well-kept, while the other half has gone wild; two little girls find an old doll buried in the weeds, and the garden takes them back to the late-Victorian/early-Edwardian period to right a wrong done by a child who is now the grumpy old woman who lives in the house. Finally, Sleator's *The Last Universe* concerns itself more with science than fantasy in a story about Susan and her brother Gary, who is in a wheelchair, and the maze hidden at the back of their great-grandparent's house; Gary becomes obsessed with going into the garden maze (which can only be seen from a high window in the house) because doing so results in the children exiting into other universes with alternative realities for each child.

Threading… sits squarely with the children's fantasy fiction I have described because the magic in those gardens is never explained and the gardens use time at their own will. In *Tom's Midnight Garden* and *Children of Greene Knowe,* for example, the garden, without any explanation, draws the protagonists back in time or brings the past forward to meet them. There are clues, such as the inscription on the clock in *Tom's Midnight Garden* or the great age of the house and the shared names in *Greene Knowe,* but the reader is never given any acceptable or believable explanation of the mechanics of the slippages in time. In *The Last Universe,* where quantum physics and Schrödinger's Cat are discussed, again neither the exact manner how nor the reason why

the garden is pushing the characters to other times or universes is clearly explained. *The Last Universe* is *science fantasy*, clothing its magic in the rhetoric of physics and science fiction; the exact mechanics of the time slippage are as mysterious as those in *Threading*…. but it sets the power of travel within the garden. This I have chosen to emulate. In no case in *Threading*… does a character go to the garden expressly for the purpose of travelling through time from their own year to another, such as Lucy and Jamie do in *The Ghosts* or Tom does when he walks out the back door in *Tom's Midnight Garden*. Instead, the garden in *Threading*…, as a palimpsest, contains all of its incarnations layered atop one another and as such acts as it wishes or, rather, does not consciously *act* by sending one character to another's time stream but just *is* and the characters slip backward or forward unpredictably. Examples are when Thomas as a young boy in the 1750s sees what he calls "the others" working in the garden (p.52), and when Mary in 1865 photographs temporally unstable characters from the past and the future (pp.134–36). Similar to the children's books I have described here, time in the garden setting in *Threading*… does not necessarily follow the rules of science while it generates the encounters that advance the plot.

Adult fantasy novels that use garden settings differ from the children's books in that, rather than being time-travel devices, the gardens are a place where time's unstoppable progress is highlighted, sometimes contributing to the feeling of the garden as a place of nostalgia. *An Adventure* (1911) by Charlotte Anne Moberly and Eleanor Jourdain (originally published anonymously and then under the pseudonyms Elizabeth Morison and Frances Lamont) is the authors' story of visiting the gardens of Versailles, where they allegedly slipped through time and interacted with people from the late eighteenth century (though written as a "true story" I include it here for its questionable veracity). Also from 1911 is H.G. Wells's short story "The Door in the Wall," in which a lonely young boy opens a mysterious door into a rather strange garden where he spends some magical hours; he sees the door several more times in different places as he ages but always ignores it because he is too busy with business, until one day when he is much older and goes looking for the door—and the respite that the garden promises—but cannot find it. In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954) trilogy, the Shire is a garden-filled hamlet, an idealised England, in *The Fellowship of the Ring* when the adventuring hobbits leave; in *The Return of the King* they find that the bucolic place of their dreams has been altered during their absence. Tom Stoppard's play *Arcadia* (1993) is set in a country house within hundreds of acres of English landscape garden; while not fantasy in the traditional sense, the play has characters from two

different time periods—early nineteenth and the late twentieth century—who overlap. In Winifred Elze's *The Changeling Garden* (1995), an ancient Mayan appears in the protagonist's garden after travelling through the universe and through time to warn her of ecological disaster. In other fantasy adult novels, the garden is a setting where certain adult situations and themes play out, but time is still a concern. The protagonist of Kage Baker's *In The Garden of Iden* (1997) travels back through time to study a specific garden in sixteenth-century England and find a plant, extinct in the future, that has important medicinal properties. Vonda McIntyre's *The Moon and the Sun* (1997) is set in the gardens of Versailles, which are not themselves magical but where a mermaid is kept in a fountain; the king wishes to eat the mermaid's flesh to attain immortality. Karen Tidbeck's collection *Jagannath* (2012) contains "Augusta Prima," set in a twilight world in a large estate where the characters play violent games of croquet; Augusta, having left the garden to look for her ball in the woods, finds a human corpse, steals its "machine" (a pocket watch), and learns about time.

Threading… sits with these adult fantasy novels and stories I have described because it is populated with adult characters, contains adult themes, and is concerned with time as an ever-present concept. Time is something that cannot be stopped, and the garden is a place where the past, present, and even future intersect, sometimes leading to a yearning for the past. Moberly and Jourdain's *An Adventure* touches on the idea that the past is always with us in a garden, usually invisibly, while Wells's "The Door in the Wall" takes this one step further to expresses the idea that the past (in the form of an exceptional garden) is unobtainable except through magic. Further, the use of a garden setting in both Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and Elze's *The Changeling Garden* contributes to a nostalgic look at an unpolluted past. In *Threading…* the garden is central to the idea that time cannot be stopped, an idea I touch on in the first and last sections. Joan realises this in the 1600s:

> Joan Cookstole stood near the centre of the walled garden, one hand on the sundial, and looked around as if seeing the garden for the first time. Edmund Vale standing before her at the end of summer was part of the pattern. The man and woman she saw at the beginning of summer were part of it, too. James Hitchen, Will, Her Ladyship, the apples, the book, the harvest. Ned. All of it had happened and would happen again. (pp.39–40)

Toni Hammond, the protagonist of the 2010 section of the novel, understands it also:

> It was cool and dark, the water, and I tasted the fountain it came from and the pipes that brought it to the fountain and deep underground where it flowed fast and dark. I tasted the years that the garden had been here. I

> tasted minerals and metals and stone and flesh and bone and hate and devastation and obsession and madness and love. (p.204)

By the end of *Threading…*, the garden is so overcome with weeds and decay that it is nearly unrecognisable, so the garden tries to seduce Toni by reverting to a past form (pp.205–06), and she "dreams" about garden workers from previous centuries (p.219), contributing to the idea that the past is a "better" place. *Threading…* straddles the border between the children's and adult fantasy books examined here with gardens as a main setting; it uses the garden as a place of unexplained timeslips—what I call temporal instability—to illustrate the existence of past, present, and future all in one place.

The magic of the garden—its temporal instability in addition to other ways in which it tries to keep characters inside of it—is intimately related to borders, both physical and social. With *Threading…* I have attempted to experiment with borders related to fantasy elements and genre designations. Temporally unstable characters fit in with the garden-as-time-travel-device trope used in many children's fantasy novels with gardens as main settings, while a cast of adult characters—as well as the rather adult theme of adultery—place *Threading…* squarely inside the borders of fiction for adults. It is only by challenging borders, shifting and destabilising them, that a new place can be drawn on an old map, which has been my goal with this novel. *Threading…* is set in five different times in our world, but the characters who slip involuntarily from one time to another do not have any direct influence in that time. The garden's magic manifests in a number of ways: in the 1600s section a character hears voices from characters in other times (pp.17–18, 22–23); in the 1770s a plant grows more quickly than is natural (p.65); a rose and a jewel from different times appear in a character's pockets in 1865 (pp.101, 104); the "ghosts" of characters from all different times appear in photographs taken during the 1865 section (pp.134–36); the extremely neglected walled garden in 2010 appears kept and its sensory aspects intensify to an extreme (pp.205–06); and a downed fighter plane from the Second World War appears and then disappears in digital photographs (p.217). Each of these incidents sets *Threading…* comfortably within the borders of fantasy; they are "impossible and unexplainable" (Mendlesohn and James, 2009, p.3).

As I wrote *Threading…*, I took advantage of the weak boundary between historical fiction and fantasy fiction. In *The Historical Novel,* Jerome de Groot argues that writing a historical novel, "which strives to explain something that is other than one's contemporary knowledge and experience: the past," is similar to writing science

fiction, "which involves a conscious interaction with a clearly unfamiliar set of landscapes, technologies and circumstances" (2010, p.4). By creating several incarnations of a historical garden and populating it with characters based on people whose lives are often not found in the historical records, I—in de Groot's words—strove to explain something beyond my own knowledge and experience. I consciously created several incarnations of one garden, a difficult task when one considers that gardens are not static beings. Writing the garden was like writing science fiction as de Groot explains it: I had to interact with an "unfamiliar set of landscapes, technologies and circumstances." One step to creating the garden in *Threading…* in all of its incarnations was visiting gardens from the time periods of the novel to become familiar with these "unfamiliar set[s] of landscapes."

A garden visited today will be different from the same garden visited yesterday and tomorrow, a concept rendered more complex when we consider the difficulty in recreating historical gardens. During my research I visited several gardens, Hatfield House, Fenton House, Biddulph Grange, Stowe, Sissinghurst, Clandon Park, Ickworth, Audley End, and Chelsea Physic Garden among them. The gardens, in some cases, were extant. For example, Stowe's eighteenth-century garden is much as it was over two hundred years ago when it was first created, and it became the basis for the 1770s section in the novel; Biddulph Grange and Audley End became the basis for the 1865 section; and Sissinghurst became the basis for any changes that the garden experienced during the interwar period. The earliest section, the early 1600s, was the most difficult because of the lack of any extant Tudor-era gardens. I visited the re-created Tudor gardens at Hampton Court Palace and Hatfield House, as well as Anne Hathaway's garden in Stratford-upon-Avon. I photographed the layouts and the plants grown in these gardens as well as in various herb and kitchen gardens attached to cathedrals and historical homes. Research also included studying how the labourers would interact with and care for the garden at each time, and how their technologies and circumstances were different from now. Also different, and included in my research, was understanding how the functions of gardens changed from era to era. For example, in the early 1600s, gardens were necessary for food as well as the herbs needed to make medicines; to this end, I looked at receipts and simples in historical texts, such as William Lawson's *The Country House-wife's Garden* (1617) and Elizabeth Grey, Countess of Kent's *A Choice Manual, or Rare Secrets in Physick and Chirurgery* (1653). I had to make the unfamiliar familiar to myself so that while writing *Threading…* I could render the unfamiliar familiar to my readers.

De Groot further argues that "the work that historical fiction undertakes" is a "conjunction of the fictional uncanny and the factually authentic" (2010 p.5). The uncanny is not only the "strange and unusual" but also "something outside our knowledge" (Ashley, 1997), which means that "uncanny" can be used to describe both fantasy and historical fiction. At Hatfield House (the original inspiration for *Threading…*), the garden's four hundred years of history means that when the Dowager Marchioness of Salisbury took on the re-creation of the gardens in the past few decades, she was faced with the choice of which incarnation of the gardens to re-create as well as the huge task of figuring out from the records left what the gardens looked like and what plants they grew. She muses that she "had to accept that without the mind, feelings and outlook of those gardeners of long ago, and with so much irrevocably altered, it would be quite impossible aesthetically or financially to attempt to replicate physically what they had created (in Snell, 2005, pp.21–22). She re-created a historical fiction and a historical fantasy of the original gardens.

In the case of *Threading…* as historical fantasy I had to emulate the Dowager Marchioness of Salisbury. I had to walk the boundary between the uncanny/strange and uncanny/unknown. In some cases, a character's actions, while historically accurate, will seem strange and unusual in the fantastic sense because it is outside our knowledge. I purposely chose certain historical elements to use in my novel because of their strangeness, believing that they would contribute to the mood of the novel. One example of this is from the earliest section of the novel, where Will Cookstole, the orchard man, has grafted a new apple tree but wants it to fail so that he can test the new head gardener, James Hitchen (p.15). Unknown to me was how apple trees are even grown (I had assumed they were grown from seed!), so I had to research how they were grafted four hundred years ago, which sent me looking for primary sources from that era.

In her introduction to a collection of John Evelyn's seventeenth-century gardening advice, Maggie Campbell-Culver asserts that "Gardening in the early part of the seventeenth century still retained that heady combination from the medieval world of bewitching magic and practicality" (2009, p.xvii). Author Thomas Hill's *A most briefe and pleasaunte Treatyse, teachynge howe to Dress, Sowe, and Set a Garden* was first published in 1563 and retitled for later editions; I found a fully scanned copy online of a 1608 edition, titled *The Arte of Gardening,* which includes a treatise called "The Booke of the Art or craft of Planting and Graffing" (*graffing* is the

seventeenth-century spelling of *grafting*). In the passage, Hill explains how to treat a sick apple tree by cutting it open with a knife to let the humours out before you are instructed to "dung him well and stop diligently his wound with clay" (p.81).[1] The idea that a tree contains humours that are making it sick is uncanny/strange in the sense that it mirrors human medicine of the time, in which it was believed that humours in our bodies needed to be balanced for good health (Leong, 2011, pp.55–56). It is uncanny in the sense of being unknown to us because contemporary fruit growers no longer practice these methods. Using strange yet historically accurate facts—de Groot's unfamiliar technologies—in *Threading…* contributes to the feeling of the uncanny and the dual fantastical and historical mood that I hoped to attain in the novel.

Garden Walls: Keeping the Magic Contained

A garden—whether public or private—is only a garden because it is within borders. The borders, whether brick or stone walls, woven hazel fences, or even living hedges, keep the garden under control (or under the semblance of control) and separate—both physically and conceptually—from the wilderness on the other side. In *Threading the Labyrinth* the walls of the enclosed garden keep it separate and protect it because it is a polder, an area inside a boundary that must be maintained to defend it from what lies outside (Clute, "Polder," 1997). Fantastical gardens are often further separated because in addition to having a physical boundary they are "magically distinct" from the surrounding world (Clute, "Garden," 1999). Instead of functioning as walls that repel threats, the walls of my enclosed garden keep the wild magic in, which creates a locus where the border—or gauze—that separates the time periods presented in the novel is at its thinnest.

The main character in *Threading…* is the garden itself. As I studied gardens, I came to realise that planting a garden is planting a fantasy, and even planting the future. They are never static and always growing, reaching beyond their borders. When you plant a garden, you are planting the idea of what you hope it will look like one day, months or even years in the future. It may grow to match that mental image, but then it keeps on growing past it. Planting a fictional garden was much the same: I planned for what I wanted it to be, but when I realised that it had to grow and evolve over four

[1] Hill refers to the apple tree as "he" throughout the instructions; this is perhaps because growing fruit trees at this time was specifically a man's job (Quest-Ritson, 2001, p.53)

hundred years, its initial form changed. I had to plan a garden in all states, from newly planted to decayed, and in several styles.

The garden itself in *Threading…* is the strongest character with the most agency, though initially its actions sometimes happen below the surface of a character's awareness or to the side (only seen in a character's or reader's peripheral vision). The garden and its incarnations control the characters and the stories that I chose to tell in each section of the novel. The first manifestation of magic inside the enclosed garden mimics the natural world when its weeds grow at an unnatural rate, resulting in Joan having to weed it a second time in one week (p.1). Joan explains away the weeds' appearance by noting the "'hot weather and cooling rains'" (p.27); however, that the weeds grow so quickly inside the walls leads the reader to wonder why the weeds outside the walls have not grown as quickly. It was important for me to stage this first manifestation of magic in this manner, to make it questionable so that the reader would initially wonder whether the garden has any agency. I started the garden's magical agency with this small event to initiate the building of suspense. Here, the suspense builds because the reader begins to know something that the characters do not: that the garden is acting of its own will. As the novel continues, the fantastical events Joan encounters in the enclosed garden begin to increase and are unexplainable: she witnesses two strangers in odd dress who disappear (pp.7–8); she hears voices that she initially cannot understand (p.22); and she sees the missing Edmund Vale one final time (pp.39–40). That most of these happen to Joan could lead a reader to question her sanity (just as she does), so I wrote in the moment when Hitchen sees a strange vision (Mary from 1865) (pp.19–20). Doing so gives readers the indication that the fantastical events are actually happening and not just figments of Joan's imagination or a mental break. These events establish the garden's agency and its status as the main character of the novel.

The enclosed garden undergoes slight changes according to the whims of its owners: it loses a contemplative labyrinth and gains a sundial in the 1600s. Meanwhile the larger garden around it changes in more drastic ways to follow gardening fashion, such as when it changes from the geometric style of the seventeenth century to the more natural landscape style of the eighteenth century. As the novel proceeds, threats to the enclosed garden from the outside world grow. In order to survive these threats, the garden's magic becomes stronger: the walled garden must bring people to it. In the absence of hereditary or tied keepers (such as the head gardeners who live in the cottage built into the kitchen-garden wall), it must create keepers.

In the 1770s section, the enclosed garden experiences its first real threat when His Lordship decides he wants to tear down the walls and extend the vista from the house. At the same time the head gardener is dying and the son most likely to take over the job, Samuel Hill, has a rather practical and "workaday" relationship with the garden. His attitude towards gardening differs from that of his brother, Thomas, who finds poetry in gardening. I show the garden's agency and its understanding of the threat through Thomas's interactions with the enclosed garden. The connection between Thomas and the garden grows as the garden seduces him: his knee heals (temporarily) when he is inside its walls (pp.64–66, 69); a seed he plants grows at an unnatural rate (pp.64–65); and he wakes at night to hear the garden calling to him, telling him that "she" will be there (pp.68–69). Thomas believes that "she" is Anne, the girl he loves who has married his brother. In a flashback the reader sees that years earlier the enclosed garden tries to help him seduce Anne when its vines reach for her during a romantic interlude the day before he is to leave for military service (pp.84–85); I wrote this flashback moment into the garden's and Thomas's timeline to show that even before he left the garden tried to keep him there to protect it. The woman the garden promises to him, however, is Her Ladyship, and the garden seduces them both (pp.73–74, 91) to guarantee its future. The ultimate result is that Toni in 2010 is a descendant of the landowners and of the garden itself, through Thomas. The garden's magical abilities, strongest in the enclosed garden, are able to expand beyond the walls' borders through Thomas, who becomes an agent of its power. The garden's actions leave no doubts to its fantastical, sentient nature.

As the novel proceeds and the garden has staff to tend it, its magical activity stays contained inside the enclosed garden's walls. In the 1865 section, the wider garden experiences more changes, this time at the hands of an owner who tears down artistic borders for the sake of fashion. While inside the house the décor changes from Romanesque to faux Egyptian, in the garden various styles are juxtaposed: a re-created Medieval garden complete with a flowery mead abuts a Renaissance garden based on the gardens at Hampton Court Palace during Henry VIII's reign, which both sit near an Egyptian garden and a fairy-tale inspired Bavarian glade. The enclosed garden, however, is protected from these changes because it is promised to an absent character, the current Lord's daughter (and his current, and second, wife's step-daughter). Its existence is safe—for now—but it still desires and demands attention. As well as keeping the magic contained, the enclosed garden's walls become a means of keeping people out: the garden is kept locked, with only the absent daughter and head gardener

Jonah Hill having a key. Further, the manifestations of the enclosed garden's magic are different from before. A visiting painter, John Alexander Seawell, stumbles into the enclosed garden one night, passes out, and wakes to find Mary, the head gardener's daughter, looming over him in the dark (pp.99–100). Later that night he discovers a jewel and a rose in his pockets (pp.101, 104), items from different sections/time periods of the novel: the jewel from the 1770s section and the 2010 section, the rose from 1941. In the absence of his memory of what he saw in the enclosed garden, these items are "souvenirs" of the past and future incarnations of the enclosed garden and the people who inhabit the space in other times. Gardens give gifts in many forms, and the garden in *Threading…* is no exception; but whether the gift is a curse or a benediction depends on context as well as geographical and cultural borders. In *Weeds: How Vagabond Plants Gatecrashed Civilisation and Changed the Way we Think About Nature,* Richard Mabey argues that a weed's value is "a matter of context" (2010, p.77); St John's wort, considered a magical plant in Britain's Middle Ages (p.73) and the "source of an effective anti-depressant" (p.245), was called "'malevolent'" by Tim Low in *Feral Future*, a 1999 book about invasive species in Australia (*ibid.*). The items that John gets are both a curse and a gift: the rose attracts the Lady's unwelcome attention and the jewel scares John into thinking he will be in trouble for jewel theft, yet they are reminders of his mysterious moments in the enclosed garden and inspire his study of the garden's more hidden aspects, which lead to his later artistic success. They are evidence of the garden's ability to physically trespass the "borders of time."

In the twentieth century, world wars threatened political and geographical borders as countries fought to keep theirs intact or enlarge them by swallowing up other countries. In parallel, the garden in *Threading…* is under threat from these wars, and its magic is spread thin in an attempt to wrest some control or to maintain at least one person as a "keeper." The interwar period was tragic for great gardens in England: the large staff of the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods died in the fighting or left service after the war; death duties and estate tax in conjunction with the increase in the national debt as a result of the Great War—which resulted in higher income tax rates and an increase in the cost of living in a time of high unemployment—led to the breaking up of many estates (Quest-Ritson, 2001, pp.227–229); during the Second World War the estates were often used as training grounds for troops and their gardens dug up for crops, further damaging gardens that did not have the benefit of large staffs to set them back to rights; and those that were not destroyed in bombing raids were often left to decay or lost as a result of the continued dire financial situation of high

taxes and rationing after the war (pp.241–242). Although the magic is still strongest in the enclosed garden, it is weaker than in the previous sections of the novel. The majority of the characters in the 1941 section are outsiders, brought in to work the land because the estate has no staff beyond the elderly gardener Mr. Hill and a few farm hands. The garden is losing its power because it is losing its status; its staff is all but gone and there are few skilled gardeners available to call to it because the servant class now has more choices. Thus the magic of the garden is leaking beyond its borders. Irene the Land Girl experiences the garden's magic from her first day there: she sees a strange man in a green coat (Thomas) walking in the fields while she is in the makeup chair (p.141); she finds old gloves and a trowel in the enclosed garden (pp.159–60), too decayed to have been left by Doris (the Land Girl whose place Irene has been given); and she "becomes" Joan for a moment in the enclosed garden (pp.160–61). It is only when she sees a man in a painting who looks like the man in the green coat and Her Ladyship is excited that someone else has finally seen the "ghost" that Irene realises she is experiencing the fantastic (p.174). When Her Ladyship calls a séance in the disused conservatory, the medium channels Irene's younger sister (pp.184–85), lost in a bombing in London, and Irene sees the ghostly image of a Victorian-era woman (p.187). The magical events in *Threading*… still happen in the garden, but, compared to earlier sections, more scenes are set in the Hall or in the area surrounding the walled garden, representative of the wider world.

In *Threading*'s final section, the garden's borders have eroded: part of the enclosed garden's walls have been destroyed, opening this space up to the world, and the greater estate has shrunk to only a handful of unkempt acres. The damage to the wall has allowed some of the magic to dissipate, but with the estate shrunk to a fraction of its former size the magic has more influence over what is left. The garden is also under its greatest threat, having experienced years of neglect and without a keeper. Toni is the estate's heir; a descendant both of the Lords/Ladies and, via Thomas, the garden labourers. She is, in effect, the Returning Prince(ess) or the Lost Heir. Toni's return means that the garden has regained a keeper in name. However, Toni, having grown up in the desert, has no garden knowledge at all; she is a poor choice for a steward. Furthermore, Toni is a woman with her own business and her own life far across the ocean, although her art gallery is failing and she lives alone with no partner, children, or family. The estate, which Toni dubs The Remains, is not a boon and she wants to sell it. The garden is on its last legs and has one final chance to be kept. It is up to the garden, then, to persuade her to stay. It needs to be recognised and healed.

In this final section of *Threading…,* the garden's magic is obvious and not easily explained away. During Toni's very first visit to the enclosed garden she is able to identify all of the flowers despite her ignorance of gardening and plants (pp.203–04). As she sits in the walled garden, which is miraculously well-kept (but only when she sees it and not when Lauren Ellis, the National Trust-like "Country Legacy" representative, does), all of her senses become acute: the colours brighten and sharpen, a butterfly's movement becomes audible, and scents become overpowering (pp.204–05). Finally, Toni accidentally gets locked into the head gardener's house and the "ghosts" of all of the previous eras appear to her in one last bid to entice her to stay (p.219). Though the garden's magic is erratic and possibly even misplaced (by focusing on seducing Toni rather than Lauren, who holds more power in its salvation), it shows Toni that choosing to keep The Remains is the best choice for her. By trespassing beyond the physical borders of the enclosed garden's walls, the garden is able to accomplish its greatest achievement.

In *Threading the Labyrinth,* I have straddled the border between the historical and fantasy genres to write a novel in which the garden is the main character. I have used temporal instability to illustrate a garden's palimpsest-ic nature while using physical walls—usually used to keep chaos/wilderness out—to keep wild magic contained. The next step is to investigate the garden as a chronotope, or "time-space," using Bakhtin's theory to understand how the garden's temporal and spatial natures intersect and how I have created the novel's historical settings and characters.

Chapter Two The Garden as a "Time-Space": The Chronotope, Characterisation, and Verisimilitude

My fictional garden in *Threading the Labyrinth,* especially the enclosed garden, is a chronotope, a "time-space." In *Garden Plots: The Politics and Poetics of Gardens,* Shelley Saguaro argues that "the garden is a rich exemplar of, and theatre for, theories of time and duration" (2006, p.17). Literature and art critics have used Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope to explore the manner in which "fictional time, space, and character are constructed in relation to one another" (Vice, 1997, p.201) as well as how historical places, events and people are represented in literature. The chronotope, an intersection of space and time, "conveys the inseparability of the two elements in any work of art" (p.200). The characteristics of gardens—both real and fictional—as time beings and time spaces can be understood as a representation of this idea. In "Bakhtin's Concept of the Chronotope: The Viewpoint of an Acting Subject,"

Lisa Steinby argues that Bakhtin himself "Believe[d] that chronotopes do not exist in literature alone" (2013, p.117) based on his claim of literature using "'actual historical chronotope[s]'" and "'real historical time and space'" (Bakhtin, 2008 cited in Steinby, 2013, p.117). Therefore, one can argue that his concept can be applied to real gardens.

Gardens and Time

As much as gardens depend on space, they also depend on time, show the passage of time, and cannot exist outside of it: the seasons change and the garden grows and dies off only to re-emerge the following year. This connection with time means gardens have historically been used to deliver lessons about its passage. Sundials, early gardening manuals, flower names, and garden design all carry messages and reminders of time's passage and even human mortality.

The sundial, a popular garden ornament in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, "enhanced the association of transience with the garden" (Coffin, 1994, pp.8–14). Sundials, traditionally made of metal or stone, were often engraved with epigrams warning the viewer of the inevitable end of (their) time. One example, circa 1660 in Denbighshire, warns the viewer: "'*Alas! My friend, time will soon overtake you*; / *And if you do not cry, by G–d I'll make you*'" (Eburne and Taylor, 2006, p.247). A practice popular in the seventeenth century was the horticultural sundial, a temporary sundial of flowers that would not last the season or the year, further reminding the viewers of their own mortality; this type of sundial is, of course, "preserved only in occasional prints or literary work" (Coffin, 1994, p.14). During my research at historical houses and gardens, I viewed both horizontal sundials set on plinths and vertical sundials mounted on walls, several of them contemporary or reproduction sundials, the originals stolen, broken, or just lost. The garden is the natural setting for a sundial due to the necessity of sun and shadows for them to work; however, the placement (or replacement) of new sundials in these historical gardens indicates the strong link between these time talismans and gardens. We unconsciously expect to see a sundial when visiting a historical garden. The association between the garden and time linked through a sundial has not been lost on writers.

Several of the novels I described in Chapter One contain a sundial. In Eager's *The Time Garden,* the children travel back in time in the thyme garden, where a sundial stands, engraved with the motto "'Anything Can Happen, When You've All the Time in the World!'" (1958, p.20). In Barber's *The Ghosts,* the children meet at the sundial in

the garden; this spot is also where Jamie and Lucy choose to travel back to the past. As in *The Time Garden,* the sundial in *The Ghosts* is itself not the mechanism of the time travel but stands as a reminder of "real time"; Victorian siblings Sara and George can wind time forward or backward because they are on real time as measured by a sundial, in contrast to twentieth-century siblings Jamie and Lucy who are on modern "railway time," which differs from place to place. In Cresswell's *Moondial*, the sundial (called a moondial because its magic works at night) is the mechanism for the time travel. By using the sundial at night when all is shadowy, *Moondial* may be making a statement about how the passage of time leads us to conveniently forget the more unpleasant stories about grand historical houses, in this case the stories about abused and ill children from the past.

Garden literature illustrates the deep connection between gardens and time. One of the earliest almanacs printed to assist gardeners with organising their land in a timely fashion is John Evelyn's 1664 *Kalendarium Hortense: or the Gard'ner's Almanac; Directing what he is to do Monethly, throughout the Year; And what Fruits and Flowers are in prime* published with *Sylva,* his famous treatise on trees. Farmers and gardeners depended on almanacs, which collected a year's worth of weather and planting information in one place. That Evelyn titled his almanac *Kalendarium,* or calendar, helps cement the connection between gardens and the passage of time.

Flowers have been imbued with meanings related to time's passage, often via myths: the anemone, associated with Adonis, represents the "brevity of human life" and even the "transience of everything human" (Heilmeyer, 2001, p.22); the hyacinth, named after the mythological youth Hyacinthus who was accidentally killed by Apollo, has come "to symbolise Nature's death and renewal" (p.32); and the marigold, *Clendula officinalis*, is named after the calendar because it opens first thing in the morning and follows the sun's light, thus indicating time (p.72).

Garden design and its evolution over the past couple of centuries is also linked to time. The English landscape style of the eighteenth century was tied up with the concept of time: this garden fashion created a high demand for trees with the understanding that the wood could not be sold for timber for several decades, which meant they were "a crop for the landowner's descendants, and an affirmation of faith in the future" (Quest-Ritson, 2001, pp.142–143). In the late nineteenth century Gertrude Jekyll and William Robinson began encouraging the practice of planting herbaceous borders with a selection of flowers that bloom at different times so that there is always something of interest (that is: alive) in the border in every season (Hobhouse, 1995,

pp.88–90). This planting practice exists still, which means that even now when we carry on our persons technology that connects us to what time it is *all of the time*, contemporary gardens are still a message of the truth of time's passage. It is easy to see, then, how gardens are chronotopes or "time-spaces."

It is a small jump from accepting that real gardens are chronotopes to understanding their fictional counterparts as "time-spaces." Bakhtin's theory is "based on the idea that spatial and temporal dimensions are … inseparable in works of literature" (Best, 1994, np). From the very start of writing *Threading…,* I kept this idea in mind. Early drafts began with the line "It was always a garden of one form or another" (Appendix B, p.371). A friend and critic (Professor Edward James) argued that opening with such a statement led to questions such as "How could a garden exist before settlements? Before the big bang?" I counter-argued that the story is fantasy, not science fiction, which gave me the freedom to make such a statement without explanation. Though the first page of the novel changed by the final draft, this basic idea remained, as is evidenced by the moments of temporal instability.

I had initially thought to follow the yearly cycle and set each section—each chronotope—in a different season (the 1600s section in spring, 1770s in summer, 1865 in autumn, 1941 in winter), because representing all of the seasons seemed the natural thing to do with a novel set in a garden. As I continued writing, however, I discovered that correlating the timeline to the seasons created the expectation that a reader could predict the events in each section according to the season, or that what I was doing was creating an idyll, an idealised space that exists in idealised periods.

In *From mythic to linear: time in children's literature,* Maria Nikolajeva claims that in an idyll "either there is no linear progress whatsoever, or the linear development rounds back into the circular pattern" (2000, p.31). To write the garden in *Threading…* as an idyllic space in which each section is clearly set in the height of a season would have been to end up with a narrative without much progress, or with a story that ends as it begins. Instead, in order to undermine reader expectation and subvert the idyllic mood that a garden setting can engender, I set each section on the cusp from one season to the next: the 1600s section starts in late spring/early summer with Joan weeding (p.1) and picking fruitlets to thin the apple trees (p.9); the 1770s section is in late summer/early autumn, when the Lady is surprised to see "strawberries in September" (p.70), the berries in question appearing during a moment of temporal instability from 1941; the 1865 section begins in late autumn/early winter in October (p.92); the 1941 section takes place in March in a cold and wet early spring (p.140); and the final section begins

on a rather specific Monday 14 June, 2010, at 3.28 in the afternoon (p.191). That these sections, if ordered chronologically, follow the sequence of the seasons is coincidental, although perhaps influenced by my initial idea of doing so.

The time stamps on each section, however, were much more consciously selected to indicate that the closer to the present the narrative gets, the more *specific* the time: the first section is only described as the "Early Seventeenth Century" (though if a reader puts together clues, she will find that the year is most likely 1625), and the following sections are labelled as 1770s (with some flashbacks to the 1750s), 1865 (with flashbacks to other specific years), March 1941, and, as described, specific dates and times in the final section in 2010. I decided to label the sections in this manner to draw attention to how we think of historical time versus now; being vague with the early sections gives them more of a patina of "the past," while being specific in the more recent sections makes them more immediate. The final structure highlights attention to time and the passage of it more clearly than if I had just set each section at the height of a season. The narrative's progression forward in time—and the hundred or so years skipped between sections—generates linear progress while retaining a cyclical pattern in which season follows season.

The concept of the "time-space" of the garden in *Threading…* is strengthened by the use of layers of time, resulting in a garden where time and space are so woven together that they cannot be untangled from one another. This idea has some precedence in scientific study with the quantum property of "entanglement" which is "a kind of correlation between two distant physical systems" (Maldacena, 2013). Scientists are using entanglement to study not just space—especially black holes and other systems in outer space—but also its connection to time and the possibility of time travel (Lloyd, 2013).

In *Threading…*, time and space are so entwined that the garden becomes a liminal, porous space. As a result, my characters slip, via temporal instability, from one time to another just by being in the garden. Time is an unstable thing in *Threading…*, much like in Lewis Carroll's *Sylvie and Bruno* (1889). In Carroll's novel, the gardener explains to Sylvie and Bruno the effect that time has on the garden: "'Ah, well!' the Gardener said with a kind of groan. 'Things change so, here. Whenever I look again, it's sure to be something different!'" (Chapter 5, np). Sylvie and Bruno must travel through the garden to get out into the world beyond it, but even the gardener—the keeper—cannot be sure of time's effect on his garden. I pushed this idea to an extreme in

Threading…, with fantastic events that happen in one chronotope appearing again in another, and from another character's point of view.

The first indication of both the porousness of the space and entanglement of these layers of time is when Joan nicks her thumb while weeding in the enclosed garden and sees a "memory" of a bright flash (pp.2–3), which readers can later connect to the metal tail of the Second World War plane that appears in the garden at the end of the 1941 section (p.189) and in the 2010 section (p.200). Later Joan hears a voice she cannot understand, "*Door isss … bay … reese … ey nuff … wyshss … howrss … muthrr*" (p.22), that corresponds in part to Irene saying "'Oh, enough already. If wishes were horses, as Mother would say'" in the 1941 section in a moment when the two characters' chronotopes intersect (pp.161). Joan learns to approach the walled garden "warily" (p.22) because she only ever hears voices when she is *in* the garden, indicating the entanglement of the chronotopes. When Joan witnesses two people, unknown to her, having sex in the enclosed garden before disappearing, (pp.7–8), the description of their costume gives the reader a clue that the vision is of people from a time after Joan's but before our own. Later, in the 1770s section, Thomas sees a woman in "coarse linen and wool kneeling yonder and pulling weeds" (p.74) and one of the Lady's guests at the party thinks she sees a woman beneath the shrubs in the enclosed garden (p.79); the reader, remembering Joan's earlier encounter and understanding that the costumes Joan saw match those of the 1770s, may place Joan's "ghost" out of her time but in this place where she often worked. After reading ahead, the reader may guess that the woman beneath the shrubs is actually Irene crouching in the enclosed garden in 1941 to find strawberry plants (pp.160–61). In this scene time circles back when Irene, mimicking Joan's stance in the same place centuries before, "becomes" Joan for a moment, recognizing the familiar feel of the weeding knife in her hand and wondering about her husband Will, the new head gardener Hitchen, and Her Ladyship. Where in *Sylvie and Bruno* the gardener could not be sure of time's effect *on* the garden, in *Threading…* time's effect *in* the garden is unsure. Linking past and present and future in the same garden in each section of *Threading…* cements the idea of a garden as chronotope, in this case a fictional space that is completely knotted together with time.

Attaining Verisimilitude in the [Fantasy] Chronotope

Building the world in *Threading…*, a palimpsest of five distinct chronotopes, involved a number of actions to attain verisimilitude of the historical characters and the

place, especially when temporal instability was added. Attaining verisimilitude and the suspension of disbelief necessary for successful historical and fantasy fiction is tied up in Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope as it applies to literature. My fictional garden is peopled with garden labourers; thus, the characters' individual—and collective—actions are determined by the specific place (a garden attached to a manor house), the time (one of the five time periods/sections of the novel), and by their social position in relation to one another. Steinby argues that "what a hero can actually do is strictly limited by the chronotope in which the events take place" and that "a concrete place is endowed with crucial importance with regard to what can actually happen" (2013, pp.118, 120). By setting *Threading…* in a specific garden and in several specific time periods, I tasked myself with complex world-building which relies on the construction of characters who behave according to the rules of each society and each chronotope.

The first step of populating the garden—in all of the novel's sections—was choosing the characters who would be found in a garden. I decided, very early, that the focus of the novel would be on the garden workers—especially female ones—because, so often, historical fiction is populated by the upper classes, the political movers and shakers, and the trend-setters, with a servant or two in the background. During my 2011 interview with Nick Bailey, head gardener at Chelsea Physic Garden, I described my idea of using garden labourers as protagonists and was pleased when his reply was one of surprise with the comment that that was the novel he always hoped to write (though, I have to say as an aside, that I doubt he ever planned timeslips and "ghosts" in his novel).

I chose a different chronotope for each section of the novel, hoping to differentiate the stories and to show how the garden—and its keepers—changed over the centuries. The closer I got to the present time in the novel, the easier it was to create the chronotopes in *Threading….* Creating the garden chronotope and the garden labourer characters in the oldest chronotopes in the novel was difficult because there are no extant Tudor or Stuart-era gardens (what we have are re-creations), and there are scant historical records for some of these people. Depicting an accurate chronotope that included the garden, the garden tasks, and the labourers consisted of combining what I found out through research and my own gardening experiences.

To create the look of the garden chronotope and to clothe and kit the fictional characters I relied heavily upon garden visits, literature, art and museum exhibits, and even movies. For the "feel" of the garden chronotope in the early seventeenth century, I

combined together aspects of Anne Hathaway's cottage garden in Stratford-upon-Avon with Mary Arden's Farm (just outside of Stratford-upon-Avon), and sections of Hampton Court Palace's gardens and the gardens of Ham House, Kentwell, and Hatfield House, along with artistic depictions in various paintings and even woodcut illustrations in books, such as those found in Thomas Hill's *The Profitable Arte of Gardening* (1563) and *The Gardener's Labyrinth* (1577). I did the same thing for the other incarnations of the garden, combining gardens I visited that depicted the particular chronotope (from the late eighteenth to the early twenty-first century) with artistic depictions.

To create the characters that existed in each chronotope, I had to clothe them, furnish their worlds with the correct physical items, give them accurate tasks in the garden, and give them accurate language and vocabulary. Giving the characters the right look was similar to giving the garden the right look and required visits to various exhibits: art exhibits on clothing (such as In Fine Style: The Art of Tudor and Stuart Fashion at the Queen's Gallery in July 2013) to accurately depict the differences between clothing of various chronotopes as well as the clothing of characters from different social classes within the chronotopes; the Garden Museum in London, which exhibits historical gardening tools and implements as well as art depicting garden workers; and even the Imperial War Museum's Ministry of Food exhibition in 2010 to better imagine my Land Girl characters. As for the weeding, planting, and sowing tasks, I relied on research as well as my own experience tending a large garden in Ohio (which has some similarities to England as far as the plants I could grow). Spending hours on your knees pulling up weeds and avoiding damaging the plants you want to keep is, I believe, little different now to how it was in the 1940s or even the early 1600s. Writing accurate dialogue according to a chronotope also helped differentiate between one "time-space" and another; to that end, I read accounts from the time periods I depicted as well as checked the etymology of any word that I believed questionable or, in the case of the 1600s section, nearly every noun, adjective, and adverb.

Writing historical fiction means following historical fact, but it also means that there is room for poetic license; one small instance of this is in how I dealt with the problem of literacy rates. After discussing the issue with my fiction supervisor, I created a backstory for Joan to explain her ability to read, albeit slowly, which added to her character; her ability matches the fact that the high illiteracy rate for women in London in 1600 dropped to eighty percent by 1640, though the rate was still much higher in outlying areas (and in some households the maids showed varying reading abilities)

(Fraser, 1993, pp.143–44), giving me the wiggle room I needed to make Joan literate in her particular chronotope.

Temporal instability added an extra complication when creating the chronotopes in *Threading*…. When the garden labourers in the garden were the subject of a scene, following the rules of the chronotope was a case of ascertaining what tasks would be done in that season by that particular worker according to gender and title. In his examination of mimesis in Aristotle's *Poetics*, James Wood maintains that "Hypothetical plausibility—probability—is the important … idea" because "probability involves the defence of the credible *imagination* against the incredible," which "is surely why Aristotle writes that a convincing impossibility in mimesis is always preferable to an unconvincing possibility" (2008, p.179, author's emphasis). My task, then, was to create a set of hypothetically plausible characters who exist side by side with the "convincing impossibility" of temporal instability. Attaining verisimilitude included detailing the physical (clothing, tools, particular plants, how the garden would look at that time) and the mental (a character's belief system, superstitions, education, and relationship with others), as well as checking the etymology of all of the language used in each section to ensure historical accuracy. An example is the moment when Irene in 1941 "becomes" Joan in the 1600s:

> She worked slowly, creeping her way along the wall, reaching beneath shrubs and around other plants, unrecognisable to her untrained eye.
>
> The weeds grew thick at the back of the beds, and she fought an urge to dig beneath their stalks and take them out at the root. She was here to get strawberry plants, not pull dandelions and groundsel, thistle and nettle. Grow food, not garden for pleasure. Plus, the trowel in her hand was too heavy, not the familiar weight of the small knife she usually used when weeding.
>
> Irene froze, one hand wrapped round the trowel's handle. Until joining the Land Army, she had never gardened in earnest in her life. She surely had never pulled weeds with a knife. Yet she knew the weight of that curved blade, the silky feel of the wood handle, smooth from years of use. It fit her hand perfectly.
>
> […]
>
> Irene bent back to what she was doing, the wheelbarrow squeaking as she moved it along the path, her ankles sore inside her boots. Cold seeped up from the ground and through the knees of her trousers, making her long for summer.
>
> […]
>
> The familiar smell of wet earth was like a perfume, and she breathed deeply to take as much summer as she could into her lungs. The white flowers of the sheepbine, open in the warm sun, were beautiful, but the vine was so knotted it hid the wall behind it, ruining the order there.
>
> […]

> She pulled up a small strawberry plant, working to keep the roots intact, and sat back on her haunches before placing the plant in the wheelbarrow and wiping her fingers on her apron. If she didn't take care of the weeds back here, the flowers were going to be choked and Her Ladyship would make her displeasure known upon her next visit to the walled garden. Fearing Hitchen's temper if he heard about any laxity, she bent to her work. (pp.160–61)

In the scene the characters are dressed in clothing and use tools appropriate to their chronotopes: Joan wears an apron and uses a small knife to cut weeds that cannot be pulled, while Irene wears the gumboots and trousers distributed as part of the Land Girl uniform and uses a trowel to pull up strawberry plants. Because the garden as a physical piece of ground exists in each section of *Threading…*, I had to alter the specifics of time to create a slippage of the chronotope. Doing so was important to strengthen the idea that all of the incarnations of the garden exist in this same space.

One specific detail I used to create verisimilitude in each chronotope was plant names. Hampton Court Palace's sixteenth-century records list weeds that the weeding women were meant to pull, among them "'charlock, nettles, convolvulus, dodder, thistles, dandelions and groundsel'" (Horwood 2010, p.271). I looked up convolvulus and discovered it is very closely related to what I know as morning glory, but I needed the name that characters in each chronotope would likely use for it. *Culpeper's Color Herbal,* a 2007 edition of Nicholas Culpeper's 1649 *The Complete Herbal,* calls the plant bindweed, and nowhere in the plant description does he use morning glory (Potterton). My next step was *The Englishman's Flora* (1958), in which Geoffrey Grigson has collected local names and folklore about plants; in his book, bindweed is known as sheepbine in Hertfordshire (1975, p.309), where *Threading…* is set, giving me a local name for Joan to use for the plant in the 1600s chronotope. Grigson's book, along with the 1930 gardening book *All About Gardening*, informed me that morning glory was known in the early twentieth century (Ward, Lock & Co., p.231), allowing me to have Irene name it as such. To further differentiate Joan from Irene and their chronotopes from one another, I paid close attention to the language they use. Irene uses "silky" and "trousers"; Joan, a hired servant, is deferential and sounds more old-fashioned, saying "make her displeasure known" and "Fearing Hitchen's temper." By using my research and paying close attention to the differences between Joan and Irene, I was able to create hypothetically plausible characters who in this scene exist side by side in the same space but across three hundred years of time, and whose chronotopes become entangled, creating the "convincing impossibility" of temporal instability.

Pushing the boundaries of the convincing impossibility became necessary, however, when I wanted to enhance the fantastic moments of temporal instability. *Threading…* is historical fiction but also fantasy fiction, and how characters appear to one another is an important aspect of the novel and the way I have chosen to use the chronotope. Ann Swinfen, in her *In Defence of Fantasy: A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature Since 1945,* argues that "there arises in time fantasy the problem of the physical appearance of the time travellers" with most time-travelling characters "appear[ing] normally solid and 'real'" rather than ghostlike (1984, p.51). In Diana Wynne Jones's *A Tale of Time City* (1987) the "ghosts" of people from the past appear regularly in Time City; their existence is taken for granted, however, in a society in a city built of time. The "ghosts" in Jones's novel are different from the temporally unstable characters in my novel in that hers are part of daily life and the characters are aware that they create more time ghosts each day, while mine are unaware of the palimpsest-ic nature of time in the garden. In *Threading…* when temporally unstable characters slip from one time to another, they may seem solid but they rarely speak or make any noise, they disappear in an instant, and in the case of Mary's photographs, some appear "no more than an outline, faint and transparent" (p.135).

I worked at verisimilitude to create believable chronotopes populated with believable characters who are, in Swinfen's words, "normally solid and 'real'." I chose to present these "real" characters as sometimes solid and sometimes "ghosts" when they are temporally unstable and appear in the wrong chronotope. Appearing normal and solid but then disappearing quickly, such as when Irene sees the man in the green coat (Thomas) walk across the field or in the woods, makes the past and the future more immediate to the present, which strengthens the connection between each incarnation of the garden and between each chronotope. The characters appearing ghostlike, such as in Mary's photographs, sets up a contrast with the solidness of their existence in their own chronotopes as well as with the solidness of the characters in the chronotope that they are visiting.

Ultimately, moving characters from one time period to another via a magical garden challenges the verisimilitude that I worked to achieve in my chronotopes. I slightly altered the characters' appearance when they are temporally unstable to render them more fantastical. One example is Thomas's first appearance to Joan. She does not recognise him (he is the disappeared Edmund Vale) and Thomas's green coat, which is just a plain green coat in his time (the 1770s) is, when Joan sees it, "such a dark green and so covered with vines and flowers that he all but blended with the shrubs and trees"

(p.8). Thomas's verdant appearance equates him to a Green Man or other woodland spirit. I intensify this image in the 2010 section when the embroidery on Thomas's coat grows and blooms, making him look like a "faerie" (pp.232–33). Keeping the temporally unstable characters' appearance almost completely accurate to their original chronotope adheres to my pursuit of verisimilitude in historical fiction, while altering them even a little contributes to the fantastical mood of the novel. This is especially significant because of the impossibility of any character coming into "true" contact with any others from a different chronotope. When a character meets a temporally unstable character from the future, such as when Hitchen in the 1600s sees Mary in 1865 or when Mary photographs Irene in 1941, the character from a future chronotope will be so fantastical that my altering that character's appearance or clothing is only there for the reader to notice. This alteration of the characters' appearance is in stark contrast to their appearance in their own chronotope, which ultimately assists in the historical accuracy of each chronotope while it assists in the believability of the moments of temporal instability and the garden's magic.

One way in which the chronotope of the garden is created is in the space that opens up between master and workers. In each period, the owner and labourer characters interact according to their chronotope, lending the novel an air of verisimilitude and contributing to a reader's suspension of disbelief. I chose garden labourers as my protagonists in the first four sections because I wanted to focus attention on the people whose work outside kept the gardens going; however, a garden like the one in *Threading…* requires owners, and I had to reflect this in the novel. In the 1600s chronotope, the relationship between owners and workers is the closest although there is a clear demarcation between the classes. In the opening pages Edmund Vale, the head gardener, relays to Joan that she needs to reweed under Her Ladyship's orders, regardless of Joan's argument that she had just done so (pp.1, 5), indicating the clear hierarchy of command; and the Lady commands Joan to listen to her while Joan weeds on her knees (pp.3–4). Later, however, when the Lady appears at Joan's cottage (p.24), she brings medicine, which was part of a Stuart-era lady's role as protector and keeper of the community that included those who worked in her house as well as on the land that her family owned; the relationship between this Lady and her workers in *Threading…* is closer than similar relationships later in the novel, following the rules of this type of relationship in this particular chronotope.

As time passes and the chronotope changes, the relationship between masters and labourers changes. In the 1770s section, in contrast to the 1600s, the garden workers

are not part of an "extended family" and the owners show less concern for their workers' livelihoods. In this section of the novel, as in real life, the labourers are subject to the owners' whims, such as when the Lord tears down and moves a whole village in order to make a view from the Hall more pleasing (p.43), an event that has precedence in real life: Noel Hill, First Lord Berwick, on the advice of his landscape designer Thomas Leggett during the late 1760s—contemporary to my fictional Georgian garden—had a village destroyed to open the vista but relocated the villagers, and Capability Brown advised Lord Milton to do the same thing in 1780, though in this case a dam was opened to sweep the village away (Musgrave and Calnan, 2006, pp.9,18). As a result of the change in the master/servant relationship from the previous chronotope, the workers are moved further away from the garden and from the garden's influence. The 1865 section shows continued separation of the garden labourers from the owners and the house servants when the Lady in this chronotope, unlike the Lady in the 1600s, does not help when Jonah is ill; young Mary is left mostly to her own devices, laundry is secretly sent to the Hall, and a young journeyman comes each night to get orders from the head gardener (pp.107–08).

By the 1941 section, the opening up of the space between the masters and garden workers in complete. There has been a shift of the garden labourers as part of the household (in the 1600s) or part of the larger estate (in the 1770s) to the labourers as outside help by the early twentieth century; the garden and its owners are meant to be interlinked, but this connection has flagged by the end of *Threading…*. The Land Girls, who are housed inside the Hall yet are not servants, can be likened to garden perennials: they last for a season and then are pulled up, only required for a short time.
The Lady of this chronotope lays down rules for them to follow, though the rules of the Women's Land Army take precedence; she also claims them as "my people" and expects them to attend church every week (p.163), yet they have only ended up at the Hall via the Land Army. This chronotope, in which the garden workers are transient, indicating a weak connection between them and the garden space, paves the way for the final section of the novel, where the chronotope necessitates a total breakdown of any relationship between master and servant because there are no servants. Also by the 2010 section, the distance between the sole survivor, Toni, and the garden is at its widest; her relationship to the land—the space in this chronotope—has broken down, in part, because of her "origin" chronotope, which is the same time (the late twentieth and early twenty-first century) but a completely different space (the American Southwest). Her move from her home space to the garden space in *Threading…*, which was originally

kept by servants and has decayed because of their absence, intensifies her distance from the land in spite of it belonging to her. The progression in time in my garden chronotope in *Threading…* makes clear the changes in the relationships between owners and labourers as well as those between the characters and the land—the space—of the chronotope, strengthening the verisimilitude necessary for the story.

While the shift in time from one chronotope to the next in *Threading…* illustrates the changes in the relationships between characters, the cementing of the chronotope in one space necessitated a similarity of actions for the garden labourer characters. In his exploration of the chronotope in literature, Bakhtin claims that some "time-spaces" severely limit what characters can do. One example is the "'pettybourgeois provincial town'" where "'there are no events, only "doings" that constantly repeat themselves'"; time "'moves in rather narrow circles: the circle of the day, of the week, of the month'" (Bakhtin 2008, pp.247–48 quoted in Steinby, 2013, p.119). By setting *Threading…* in one place, specifically a garden that requires attention yearround, I had to write the characters performing certain tasks at certain times of the day, week, month, and year to attain verisimilitude in each chronotope. For example, as well as weeding the gardens in late spring and early summer, Joan helps collect fruitlets during the June drop, when fruit trees thin themselves (p.9), and after the final frost Irene is tasked with preparing the soil for a market garden by raking and liming it (p.154). The characters' actions match those of people who have worked fields and orchards for centuries, which is, according to Sue Vice's study of Bakhtin, part of "earlier literary approaches to nature, such as the pastoral idyll or georgic, both of which are concerned with nature as a force humans are contained by, or, more significantly, work in" (1997, p.205). The characters' interactions take place in the garden itself or in its buildings, and most are, according to Bakhtin's above definition of "earlier literary approaches," out in the open for the other garden workers to hear: Joan and Edmund discuss her garden work while standing in the garden (p.1); Samuel gives commands to the other gardeners and they discuss the garden's future while in the enclosed garden (pp.55–57); Mary first meets her aunt near a garden shed (p.106); and Madeline begins to teach Mary photography in the garden (pp.110–14). Keeping to the actions necessary in a garden, I have also further strengthened my argument that the garden in *Threading…* is a polder, a space distinct from—and one that requires protection from—the space around it. The garden keepers need to act according to the rules of the space to keep it a garden, because to ignore its needs is to allow it to grow beyond its borders and, as a result, lose its status as a garden. By "containing" my garden labourer

characters in the garden, I have given readers a familiar setting and familiar behaviours necessary for historical fiction that hopes to attain verisimilitude.

While the labourers in *Threading…* act according to the season in the garden chronotope, their actions sometimes adhere more to Bakhtin's ideas of a private space than a communal one, undermining the idyllic nature of the space that "humans are contained by" (Vice, 1997, p.205). Bakhtin's investigation of the chronotope in life and literature follows the evolution of civilization from agrarian to urban, from open fields to the parlour, which he considered a "more privatized … form" (p.204). The garden in *Threading…* has spaces that provide as much privacy as any indoor parlour: a grotto, a collection of sheds and outbuildings, and, most important, the enclosed garden. It is inside these areas that the unsustainable "idyll" in each chronotope breaks down. In the 1600s section, the Lady spends time inside her enclosed garden each morning at prayer (or so Joan assumes) and the gate is kept locked (pp.1, 3). The enclosed garden's walls are as secure as any parlour's or bedchamber's, working like the borders of a polder to protect the Lady's secrets and keep anything harmful away. The Lady's subsequent exit from the enclosed garden and her speech about decay and death highlight the mystery of her time behind the garden's walls while simultaneously undermining the expected peace of the setting. Joan (like the Hill family after her) toils in the garden, living a life of hard work and worry, nothing like the idealistic and idyllic subjects of cottage garden and agrarian scenes in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century art, which "offers us a mythical unity and … attempts to pass itself off as an image of the actual unity of an English countryside innocent of division" as John Barrell argues in *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730–1840* (1980, p.5). Later, Thomas and the Lady's sexual encounter in the 1770s section (pp.73–74, 91) definitely undermines the public nature of the garden, creating a private chronotope inside a communal one and illustrating the walled garden's polder nature as a space separate from the outside world. In the 1865 section, the enclosed garden's gate is again kept locked: Mary has to steal her father's key to be able to perform her night-time photography experiments (p.136). Mary's late-night activities and the "ghosts" she photographs, unknown to her head-gardener father, indicate a crumbling of the wellordered system he has set up in the garden; furthermore, the appearance of the temporally unstable characters from other chronotopes, some layered over one another, show that things in the garden are not as idyllic as her father and the Lady (who has ordered the creation of so many different types of "ideal" gardens) would hope.

The instability of the idyllic in *Threading…*'s garden is increased in John's artistic practice of dressing up the garden workers in velvets and silks and surrounding them with fake flowers, making spring in October in a garden "room" that abuts the enclosed garden (p.92). This scene was inspired by the story of John Singer Sargent's creation of *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* (1885–86): the painter only worked on the piece during the few minutes before sunset, and when summer turned to autumn the flowers had to be replaced with fake ones (Riggs, 1998). Like the real painter, not only has the character John created an idyll where there is none, he has also created a fake chronotope by trying to re-create a summer garden in late October. By the Second World War, the idyll in *Threading…*, like the garden, has fallen to ruin. Mr. Hill's shed has a telephone, indicating a strong link between the house and the garden and bringing indoor technology to the outdoors, but the phone is dusty and buried beneath a torn potato sack (p.153); the lack of gardening staff has left the gardens in decay, and no longer does the house staff need to call the garden to order food or flowers. Though one would assume that any fictional garden where characters act and exist in a communal space is idyllic, the existence of private spaces in the garden in *Threading…* illustrates the opposite.

Throughout *Threading…*, the actions and thoughts of the garden workers are private, regardless of their lives lived out in the open; it may be necessary for them to labour according to the requirements of this chronotope's space and time, but the architecture of the space means that the reader is left to eavesdrop and hope for an invitation inside the garden walls just as much as if he or she were to hope to know the actions of the characters inside the Hall. Breaking down this idyll is an important step in not only creating believable garden-labourer characters with their own conflicts and desires but also in laying the foundation of reality needed for believable historical fiction.

It is in the garden where I subvert Bakhtin's separation of inside/outside chronotopes and the placement of the reader. Bakhtin studied the shift from narratives in which characters experienced their lives in public spaces to ones in which they lived privately, which he saw as a move towards secrecy: "The implication of the withdrawal from fields and roads to boudoirs and parlours was that life lived in the latter was secret; this contradiction of '*the public nature of the literary form and the private nature of its content*' meant that both narrator and reader are placed in the position of spies and eavesdroppers'" (Vice, 1997, p.206, author's emphasis). Gardens are no strangers to keeping secrets. In early modern Britain (and, we must remember, in the East) gardens

were "always enclosed by walls, hedges, fences or moats" to keep animals and trespassers out and because they were outdoor "rooms," an extension of the house (Quest-Ritson, 2001, pp.21–22); a garden's function from the beginning was to grow food, flowers, and herbs, and *to keep secrets*. Early gardening manuals, which began to be published in the sixteenth century in England, often promised to tell secrets that authors claimed were necessary for a successful garden, which meant better crops and more food and medicines in a time when most food had to be grown at home. Examples include the real Thomas Hill's *The Gardener's Labyrinth* (1577), "Wherein is laid down New and Rare inventions and secrets of Gardening not heretofore known" (1988, p.22); *The treasurie of commodious conceits, & hidden secrets and may be called, the huswives closet, of healthfull provision* (1573) by John Partridge; and *A Choice manual, or Rare Secrets in Physick and Chirurgery* (1653) by Elizabeth Grey, Countess of Kent. Most of these secrets came from earlier books but "the writers and compilers of these secrets felt compelled to insist that their knowledge came from practice rather than ancient philosophy or hermetic books" (Bushnell, 2003, p.177), showing that even the earliest gardening manual authors strived for verisimilitude.

I have created a chronotope inside a chronotope by placing an enclosed garden (or *hortus conclusus,* explored in depth in Chapter Four) in the heart of the larger garden, close to the house, and at the centre of the novel so that it can function as a place of interaction between the owner and labourer characters and a place of intersection between the non-magical and the magical worlds in the novel. The enclosed garden becomes another room of the house, an outside extension of the "upstairs/downstairs" situation that is a common trope of much historical fiction; servants and masters occupy the same space but for different reasons, and the wall is now something to keep secrets in, to be eavesdropped over, and to deny entry. When the Lady in the 1600s section locks herself in her walled garden each morning, the garden is the private space and keeps her secrets safe, so much so that the narrator and reader never get to find out what is going on behind the wall. In the 1770s section, Harvey Ralston is inside the walled garden and eavesdrops on Anne and Thomas and imagines how they look based on their interaction only to discover how wrong he is when he finally peeks over the wall (pp.52–54). Later in *Threading…*, the garden walls deny John entry (pp.116–17) with his bedroom window only allowing a peek behind that border as he spies on Mary's late-night excursions (p.119); yet, the angle of the window and the garden's walls obscure some of her actions and mean that it is only when he goes into the garden with her that he sees what she is really doing. At the end of

Threading…, the wall has been partially destroyed, leading one to assume that whatever secrets it held are now open to the elements. The space still contains secrets but these secrets are more a result of the layering of time in this space—the layering of chronotopes—rather than the product of a wall that has been built between characters. At this point, not even a wall could hold in all of the secrets that have built up over time, as Toni discovers when all of the garden's "ghosts" appear to her (p.219). Whatever magic the enclosed garden held in check has overflowed to the rest of the estate.

Because most of the moments of temporal instability happen inside the enclosed garden, it is clear that these walls create the strongest chronotope in *Threading…*, separating characters from one another as well as separating real life from the fantastic. Bakhtin's argument that physical landscape or architecture affects how characters act, resulting in "life lived in … secret," relates to literature set in "real-world" chronotopes, such as historical fiction. By using the walled garden as the place where the layers of chronotopes is most fluid, I have not only combined the separate chronotopes that Bakhtin described but also created a dichotomy of reader expectation, which in turn affects the strength of the novel's fantastic elements. The walls create a smaller space inside of which the characters (and readers) can keep secrets from other characters, such as the moment when Joan spies Hitchen using his book to identify plants (p.16); along with the reader, she learns part of his secret, and when he hides the book in the enclosed garden she steals it, creating a new secret. Yet as readers we often expect that we know everything—or everything important—going on in a narrative; however, the enclosed garden's walls create a separation that removes us from the immediacy of the narrative, which results in secrets to which we are not privileged, such as what Joan's

Lady does in the enclosed garden in the mornings. Seeing inside the walls generates in readers a sense of security, lulling them to accept the characters' and time periods' details as "true"; it is this sense of security that I depend upon when inserting fantastic elements into the story because the success of a historical fantasy narrative depends upon the readers' acceptance of the fantastic elements along with the historical ones.

One technique for creating a convincing impossibility in fantasy is using the rhetoric of the liminal. In Elizabeth Hand's *Illyria* (2010), a toy theatre is stored in a secret part of an attic. The focus of the book is the relationship between Rogan and Madeleine, but the theatre, the set of which changes each time the characters visit it—once it even snows on its stage—is never explained and in part inspired the garden in *Threading…*. By keeping the garden's walls solid and the gate closed in some scenes, by refusing to explain how the temporal instability and other fantastical elements of the

garden work, I create a separation between the readers and the garden's secrets. Explaining the garden's secrets would render them mundane, so keeping them hidden keeps them fantastic and liminal. Throughout *Threading…* I use the rhetoric of the liminal to enforce the separation between the reader and the garden's secrets, as Hand does with the theatre. In her examination of liminal fantasy in *Rhetorics of Fantasy,* Farah Mendlesohn argues that one characterisation of this form is that the characters, when "presented with the obviously fantastical," "ignore it or respond in ways that feel dissonant" which leads to a reader's doubt, "triggered by our sense that there should be some reaction to the fantastic" (2008, p. 191). Quite often my characters react to the fantastic in the garden not with fear but in a manner that denies the fantastic: when the couple (Thomas and the Lady from the 1770s) stand, Joan, eyes averted, "didn't hear them walk away, didn't hear the gate open and close. But when she looked up they were gone" (p.8), removing the possibility of her seeing their fantastical disappearance; when Harvey witnesses the seed that Thomas plants growing instantly, he says "'We are in an age of discovery. It would seem there is something here to discover'," (p.66) instantly equating the event with science rather than the fantastic; and when Toni experiences the walled garden in all of its extreme glory she muses "I wasn't sure when different flowers were supposed to bloom, but who knew when things happened in gardens in England? Definitely not me, so I just stood there and enjoyed what I was seeing" (p.203), damping down the fantastic with an excuse of ignorance. By employing the rhetoric of the liminal, I am able to further keep the garden's secrets and lull the reader to accept both the historical and the fantastical elements in the novel.

As I wrote *Threading the Labyrinth,* the techniques used to create the garden as a "time-space," a chronotope, became clear. These included consideration of how to attain verisimilitude and suspension of disbelief in a historical-fantasy novel via the characters' appearance and actions as well as the setting's appearance and actions through the seasons. Our next step is to look at how the connection between chronotopes and the progress of the novel from chronotope to chronotope informed the novel's structure and sequence, as well as how the garden is not just a "time-space" in *Threading…* but the totality of the world for its inhabitants.

Chapter Three Structures in Space and Time: *Threading the Labyrinth* As Composite Novel and Heterotopia

A novel's structure influences how it is read, and *Threading the Labyrinth* is no exception. Contributing to the complexity of the novel is my choice of using temporal instability to illustrate the longevity of gardens. Moving characters temporarily out of their own times "threads" together the five stories in the novel. My structural and sequencing choices, in addition to my point-of-view choices, affect the narrative distance of the novel and influence how readers relate to characters. Larger than the human characters, however, is the main character: the garden. As I established in Chapter Two, gardens are "time-spaces"; I use Foucault's theory of heterotopias in this chapter to further explore the connection between time and space in gardens, and in my fictional garden.

The Composite Novel

Threading the Labyrinth's structure is simple yet problematic. It is a novel, but one without a clear-cut narrative arc that follows a protagonist to a resolution in which the conflict is neatly solved and the story wrapped up. Placing it in a specific category according to form is more difficult than placing it into a specific category of genre. Composed of five distinct parts, each of which is novella length (over 17,000 words), and each comprised of a (mostly) self-contained narrative, *Threading…* adheres to some of the rules of composite novels, yet breaks—or at least stretches—others. Composite novels and short-story sequences share a history and, on the surface, their definitions share similar elements. J. Gerald Kennedy, in *Modern American Short Story Sequences: Composite Fictions and Fictive Communities*, explains that a contemporary short-story sequence is identified as a collection of short stories that are "linked by common ideas, problems, or themes" (1995, p.viii). This linking of common elements is vital to *Threading…*'s narrative, yet *Threading…* is not a short-story—or novella—collection; that is, although the novel is in sections, the sections were conceived to be part of a larger whole rather than to comfortably stand alone. What *Threading the Labyrinth* is, is a composite novel.

In *The Composite Novel: The Short Story Cycle in Transition*, Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris argue that "The composite novel is a literary work composed of

shorter texts that—though individually complete and autonomous—are interrelated in a coherent whole according to one or more organizing principles" (1995, p.xiii). Furthermore, they continue by arguing that the term "*Composite novel* emphasizes the integrity of the whole, while *short story cycle* emphasizes the integrity of the parts" (p.5, authors' emphasis). Because Dunn and Morris look at literary fiction in their examination of the composite novel, it is important for my analysis to understand how genre critics would define *Threading*….

In "The Composite Novel in Science Fiction," Eric S. Rabkin claims that in the science fiction genre one type of composite novel "might be called the *domain novel* … wherein the continuing return to the same domain, some combination of setting and at least some characters, gives each new story both the virtues of familiarity and the capacity to deepen one's understanding of a writer's narrative world" (1996, p.94, author's emphasis). Although *Threading*...'s temporal instability places it into the fantasy rather than science fiction genre, I could label it a domain novel because of the close association of these two genres. I could also argue that *Threading*... is a domain novel because each section is set in the same domain and because some characters appear in times other than their own—but in the same domain—as a result of the temporal instability. Rabkin contends that, unfortunately, the term "fix-up novel" has also been used to describe the composite novel in science fiction, a term that "suggests that the composite novel is produced after the fact" (that is, pasted together from published short stories that found some success) when, instead, "publication history indicates that rather more often sf composite novels arise from careful planning" (p.95). He claims that this practice has led to "a third type of composite novel, what might be called a concept novel in which some previously published material is used … in creating a larger work held together by and exploring some overarching idea" (*ibid*.).

Again, it is difficult to slot *Threading*... into Rabkin's terminology here, but because I have consciously created a novel "held together by and exploring some overarching idea" I can argue that the term concept novel as well as the term composite novel can apply to *Threading*…. I intended each section of *Threading*... to be a mostly self-contained story, yet the temporal instability that characters experience means that some storylines are only complete when the reader can stitch them together across novel sections. For example, when Hitchen encounters a vision in the walled garden in the 1600s section of the novel, he (and the reader) cannot recognise what he sees: "It had a crooked manner, twisted with cloak-like wings, its front limbs three long, thin sticks like a stork with too many legs, its back end gowned" (p.19). It is only clarified for

readers when they reach the Victorian section and see Madeline set up her tripod and duck beneath its black cape (pp.111, 113). If these were separate stories within a collection, there would be no answers to the questions which arise; it is only in a novel that events so distanced from each other in the sequence of the narrative, and the sequence of time, resolve.

Dunn and Morris go into much greater detail in their exploration of the composite novel than Rabkin and lay out five organizing principles that unify the parts of a composite novel: setting; "a *single protagonist* upon whom a work's text-pieces focus or around whom they cohere"; "the *collective protagonist*"; pattern; and "*storytelling,* or the process of fiction making" (1995, pp.15–16, authors' emphasis). I can relate the elements of collective protagonist, pattern, and setting to *Threading…* to make a case for it as a composite novel.

While most novels traditionally have a single protagonist, a composite novel can have a collective protagonist, "used to forge complex interconnective links in composite novels that cut a wide swath through historical time, or in those whose focus is multigenerational or multicultural" (p.15). In *Threading…*, I do both; I cut a "wide swath through historical time" by covering four hundred years in one garden, and I have a multigenerational focus with a story that follows the Hill family for several generations. A collective protagonist can take one of two forms:

> a group that functions as a central character (a couple, an extended family, a special-interest group) or an implied central character who functions as a metaphor (an aggregate figure who, cumulatively, may be "typical" or "archetypal" or "the essence of" or "the enveloping presence of" or "the soul of"—and so on). (p.59)

Dunn and Morris give as examples of composite novels that feature a collective protagonist William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942) and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989). Faulkner's novel features six generations of a Mississippi family, while in Tan's a group of unrelated women who play mah-jongg form a collective. In *Threading…,* I have created a collective protagonist akin to Faulkner's by writing several generations of the same family that, across centuries, cares for the same garden. Thomas in the 1770s section is an ancestor of Toni, the protagonist of the 2010 section; Mary in 1865 is a descendant of Thomas's brother, Samuel, as is Mr. Hill in 1941. This group of relatives helps form the "multigenerational" story of an extended family, linking each section as the narrative moves through historical time. In the 1600s and 1941 sections of the novel, however, the protagonists Joan and Irene are unrelated to the Hills and each other. Like the protagonists before and after them, Joan and Irene care

for the garden, making them part of a collective akin to Tan's, though one that spans centuries. Temporal instability further links them all together collectively when they appear in times not their own. The combination of a multigenerational story line and a collection of characters who all tend to the same plot of land securely places *Threading…* in the composite-novel camp.

The second characteristic of a composite novel is pattern. Dunn and Morris argue that a composite novel "may feature identical story patterns or reflect identical, sharply etched motif patterns," or the pattern "may structure one text-piece after another until, after having thus set a pattern precedent through repetition, a final text-piece startles (or encapsulates) through variation" (1995, p.15). In *Threading*…, I have repeated patterns, including relationships between labourers and owners and their differing status of "ownership" of the land, how arriving to the garden from outside alters the outsider, and lost children and parents. The pattern of relationships between the characters is based upon similar social expectations and constraints regardless of the era, as I discussed in Chapter Two in regard to chronotopes. In each of the first four novel sections, the owners are always only called the Lord and Lady because very little of the narrative belongs to them, and to name them would be to take attention away from the labourer protagonists in each section. I also wanted them to be interchangeable to show that their place in the garden is always one of ownership, with the responsibility passed on through bloodlines and not through any sort of affection for the place or aptitude for stewardship. In the final section of the novel, this pattern of naming is subverted because there are no longer any labourers; however, Lauren, the Country Legacy agent, is representative of those who now care for these once-grand estates, while Toni, as the new owner, is anything but "M'Lady," having no idea of her distant ancestors' legacy.

In *Threading…*, another pattern is that the keeping of and stewardship of the land takes precedence over the workers' desires or requirements. Joan must stay late one evening to weed the enclosed garden regardless of her need to return home to tend to her house and children (p.1). When the Lady visits Joan in Joan's cottage one day, she talks about "'my garden'" (p.25). Will, who has grown fruit for the estate for several years, is denied the head gardener's position in favour of Hitchen, who has promised his Lord a new apple (p.14); the Lord's desire for a more fruitful orchard blinds him to Hitchen's lack of real knowledge and Will's loyalty. Joan and Will are kept as labourers at the convenience of the Lord, and they work physically to tend it, but the ownership of the garden is unquestionable.

The gardening team in the 1770s section of *Threading…* is under threat because the Lord is planning to tear up the remaining parts of the old-fashioned garden to update it to the new landscape style and to move the kitchen garden farther from the house (pp.55–57). He wishes for more grazing land and more profit, and takes whatever common land he can (pp.43, 60). The gaining and retaining of land and stewardship over it is more important to him than the livelihoods of his workers. The Lady, who has inherited the house and whose daughter will do so in the future, is as concerned about the stewardship of the land, but is also concerned about the people who live on it:

> "I wish for a lake within view of the house," he continued. […] "Why do you think I removed the hamlet if not to open the view?"
>
> *Because you're cruel,* she thought but didn't say. She had to admit, however, that he was a good steward of the land. "I won't argue about that again."
>
> "There is nothing to argue about. The land is here to be used to its best profit, which means acres for grazing."
>
> "But the families…." The Lady thought of the village she had visited in the neighbouring estate. Charming though it was, her friend had disclosed—without any hint of regret—how much was spent to keep it looking quaint now that the villagers couldn't keep themselves. (p.45)

The workers themselves— Samuel and his team, and Thomas and his mother—discuss the losses that they and their neighbours have been victim to at the hands of those in power (pp.55–57, 59–60). It is clear that the wishes of the owners supersedes the needs of the workers in the 1770s section of the novel, which coincides with the Inclosure Act of 1773 (UK Govt., 1991), another act in a long history of those that allowed landowners to enclose common land for their own use. During the Second World War, however, the stewardship of the land was so vital that the government itself became a type of overlord, telling the landowners what they could and could not do with their own land and gardens, who in turn directed the workers' actions. Irene and the other Land Girls are symbolic of the importance of land—and the use of that land to grow food to keep the country going—over individuals. This power is illustrated in a conversation Irene and Sylvia have about Doris's disappearance: "'Maybe she can come back,'" Irene says, to which Sylvia replies, "'Not likely. You know how the Land Army works. A girl having to leave is like desertion in a war zone'" (p.150). Later, Irene contemplates the rules for Land Girls: "The rules stated that Land Girls were not domestic help: no dishwashing, no child minding, no housekeeping. They also were not supposed to be personal gardeners. They were recruited to help grow food— not flowers—for the public" (p.152).

In the final section of *Threading…*, a nearly bankrupt Toni decides that keeping what is left of the garden and the estate's land is more important than returning to her life in America:

> I looked beyond her then, at the crowd around us, before saying what was likely to be the stupidest thing I was ever going to say in my life. "Even though I'm nearly broke and my business is failing, and Brown's offer was amazing, I can't do it. I can't let some guy tear it all out and pave it over." (p.236)

This pattern of the needs of the land having precedence over those of the workers (and, at the end, over Toni) illustrates the collective nature of the protagonists, connected by situation and place. They are a collection of voices, each telling a similar tale and, hence, a collective protagonist.

The garden is a bordered space, but throughout *Threading…* new people come to it from outside, creating another pattern. When the fantastic intrudes upon the real world and "disrupts normality," what we have is an intrusion fantasy (Mendlesohn, 2008, p.115), but when the intruders into the fantastic are humans, there is a subversion of this fantasy type. In *Threading…*, not only do humans invade the garden from outside but, as I explored in Chapter One, the magic itself spreads beyond its usual boundary when the walled garden is damaged in 1941. These two movements—of humans in and magic out—are similar in Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* (1984) in which the magic leaches beyond Ryhope Wood's borders to lure new human characters in. As in *Mythago Wood,* in *Threading…* the outsiders' arrivals to the garden change their lives. One example is when the artist John in the 1865 section comes to the garden in hopes of impressing his patrons (the Lord and Lady) as well as the art world, but finds himself artistically stuck. He tries to find inspiration in the garden, but his outsider status means that he lacks access to all of it. When he trespasses into the walled garden by accident one night and comes away with a mysterious rose and a jewel in his pocket, his obsession with the garden's secrets—and with what happened that he now cannot remember—grows. His intrusion into the garden forces the garden to "accept" him by giving him gifts; its magic reaches out to him, causing an obsession that pushes his vision and artistic talent, resulting in fame. But in the end he cannot handle the memory of what he sees in the garden, and he ends up in a sanatorium (p.139).

A further example is Irene's experience of the garden in 1941. Irene, a city girl who wants to be an actress, has joined the Women's Land Army to be "safe" during the war on the heels of her sister's death during a bombing. Though she tries to hold on to her dream and at times acts as if she is being filmed (pp.146–47, 160, 168), she finds

herself becoming part of the group of Land Girls as well as delving into the garden's mysteries. At the end of the section, the garden's magic has pushed beyond the walls and Irene is forced to share the story of her sister's death (pp.186–87); she discovers that nowhere is safe during a war, even a garden out in the countryside, and she is changed by her newfound knowledge.

A case of an insider coming back into the garden as an outsider and experiencing change is Thomas in the 1770s. When Thomas returns to the garden from years away in the military, he is a changed man: he is broken both physically and emotionally, unsure where he belongs anymore. Though his time away has changed him, he is the ultimate insider, discovering that he was found as an infant in the garden (p.89). When in the garden, the pain in his leg disappears and he is able to move freely (p.66). He is also part of the garden's plan to create the next generation of keepers (pp.73–74, 91). Coming back to the garden, for Thomas, is a return to his true home and the garden accepts him. As an outsider, however, Thomas changes the people who are still purely insiders: he disrupts the family dynamic and the question of who will become the new head gardener (pp.57–58); he disrupts his brother's new marriage (p.66–67); and he disrupts the Lady's life with the moments of seduction in the walled garden. My garden in *Threading…* always yearns for keepers, for attention, even from outsiders who cross over its borders. The moment of change for the outsider characters always comes, but there is never a guarantee that the garden will change anyone for the better.

In each section, someone has been lost or is yearned for, a pattern that relates to the garden as a metaphor of the life-and-death cycle, constantly blooming and fading, something I will examine in more depth in Chapter Four. Joan and Will have lost children before, and now they are in danger of losing their infant son (p.6); Thomas's father is dying (p.59), and he has already lost his love, Anne, to his brother; Mary lost her mother soon after she was born, and her father's grief is so acute that he refuses to call Mary by her given name, which was his wife's, meaning that Mary has lost her name, too (pp.106, 111); Irene's little sister dies in a bombing in London; and Toni is completely without any family any more (pp.191, 193, 209). It is in the garden that some of the characters find not a replacement for what has been lost but a means of moving on in their own life cycle, and of acceptance of the status quo. By running the pattern of loss through the novel, I have underscored the idea that there is very little that can be controlled in our human lives and that time marches on. This contrasts with the moments of temporal instability in the garden, which highlight to the

characters—and the readers—that even something as controlled as a garden is subject to time and contains time. It also connects together all sections of the novel—all of the chronotopes—as well as those left unwritten in the intermissions; the humans lose each other or are lost, but the garden continues and, through it, contains them all.

The third element of a composite novel that I will relate to *Threading…* is setting, which Dunn and Morris argue "is a primary element of interconnection in a large number of composite novels and precursors" (1995, p.15, authors' emphasis). It can be argued that setting is an important element of cohesion in many novels, leading to question what makes my novel so special. My argument is that the physical setting—the garden—is the primary character in *Threading…* throughout all of the different times in which I have set the novel, even when a particular scene is set outside the garden. In 2010, while working on my registration documents, I stated "I want to write a novel about a garden in an old English house, like Hatfield House, and follow the changes it experiences through several hundred years." The garden in my novel existed before any of the human characters, and I created it before I wrote any characters. Umberto Eco, in describing how he went about writing *The Name of the Rose,* explains part of his process: "The first year of work on my novel was devoted to the construction of the world" (1984, p.24). He continues: "… I conducted long architectural investigations, studying photographs and floor plans in the encyclopedia of architecture, to establish the arrangement of the abbey, the distances, even the number of steps in a spiral staircase," and he set the novel at the end of November 1327 because he needed to slaughter a pig in the novel and pigs are only slaughtered when it gets cold (pp.25, 27). I did much the same: I started with the place and, as I researched English gardens and better understood the changes they have experienced in the last four centuries, I realised that I had to set the stories in the novel in a handful of different specific time periods to reflect those changes and make each section stand out from the others. For example, the knot gardens of the late-Tudor/early-Stuart period are in stark contrast to the landscape style of the Georgian, which is different to the garden "rooms" of the mid- to late-Victorian era. It was only after I chose time periods that I began to populate the spaces.

The rule is that a character must experience change for a story to be a complete story, and the same rule can be applied to the setting of *Threading….* The garden changes from novel section to novel section, working its magic on the characters, until it is in such disrepair at the end that it seems all but lost; however, each incarnation of the garden is still there, a layer in a spiritual palimpsest, populated with the characters from

the previous sections of the novel. The garden is *present* more than Joan and Thomas and Mary and Irene and Toni. In her essay "Place in Fiction" Eudora Welty links place and historical time: "Location pertains to feeling; feeling profoundly pertains to place; place in history partakes of feeling, as feeling about history partakes of place" (1998, p.787). It is difficult, then, to subtract the time period from the place, and vice versa. Dunn and Morris further investigate Welty and argue that in her essay she makes "'place' and 'setting' … interchangeable, so that a consideration of 'where' a literary work is set may also include 'when' and 'for how long' and 'with whom'," resulting in a setting that is "highly complex and multivalent" and that "offers numerous possibilities as an element of interconnection in the composite novel" (1995, p.30). The garden in *Threading*… is the ultimate connection between the characters, even if they are blood relations, because it is the setting of their lives, where they are born, where they work, where they die, where they even have sex. To this end, my novel is an extension of the traditional "village sketch," in which "the village *is* its people, and vice versa" (p.31). I have shrunk the village down to a much smaller setting, to a series of stage sets, which I will explore in more detail later in this chapter. Everyone here is connected to everyone else, through family or the worker/owner relationship, but more strongly through their relationship with the garden itself.

Sequence, Structure, and Point of View

My creation of a spatial setting, inside of which is a series of temporal settings, means that sequence and structure in *Threading*... are entwined. The sequencing in the novel is vital to the understanding of how the garden progresses from then to now; yet, taken out of chronological sequence, the narrative would work just as well because of the "eternalness" of the garden itself, and because of the nature of each section as a nearly stand-alone entity that depends upon the moments of temporal instability in other sections for cohesion. If the garden is for all time, and all times in the garden exist simultaneously, then taking the sections of the novel out of chronological order would paint the same picture of the garden and leave the reader with the same over-arching message: that the garden has always been a garden and, after "now," always will be *even if it is plowed up and paved over*.

Because *Threading*... is a novel in five parts, charting the narrative arc using Freytag's pyramid—in which a story's plot is traditionally structured to contain exposition, rising action, climactic moment, resolution, and dénouement—is nearly

impossible. In *Wonderbook: An Illustrated Guide to Creating Imaginative Fiction*, Jeff Vandermeer gives writers permission to move beyond the simple plot triangle and recognise that some stories reject being shoe-horned into this form (2013, p.147). Vandermeer provides a collection of alternatives, including photographs of symmetrical yet complex natural forms, such as marine life and even animal feet (pp.151, 153). Using this idea, I analysed *Threading…*'s narrative structure and decided that although each section, alone, conforms to the simple plot triangle or pyramid, the novel's overall structure resembles something with five equal parts. I have chosen a five-petalled flower—an apple blossom, specifically—to describe it. Like the petals in an apple blossom, each of the five sections of the novel is as important as its neighbour.

The sections of the novel are laid out in chronological order, yet the temporal instability the characters experience renders the timeline anything but concretely chronological. I could very well have rearranged the sections in a different order, because in the end my goal is to show a garden that is a palimpsest that has always existed and always will in some form. In each section, the garden setting is the cohesive element with the walled garden as the space that everyone "loops back" to, just as each petal in an apple blossom connects to a centre. I initially imagined *Threading…*'s setting as a series of concentric circles: the estate—or grounds—holds the garden, which itself physically surrounds the main house and head gardener's cottage, and inside the larger garden are smaller gardens mentioned throughout the novel (the pinery, the kitchen garden, the grotto, the market garden). The most vital of all of these, placed in the centre of the estate physically as well as magically, is the walled garden. The centre in a flower is where the reproductive organs are located; in *Threading…*, the centre is the walled garden, the larger garden's origin and the location of the strongest magic in the garden, the place where "where" intersects with "when" and "for how long" and "with whom." The walled garden, which I will investigate more closely in Chapter Four, holds the garden, and the novel, together.

By drawing so much attention to the setting, I have created a certain level of narrative distance. Using a garden as my main setting, I have created a place that readers recognise but cannot know intimately—at least on a first-hand basis—because of the nature of gardens as changeable. Yet *Threading…*'s structure and my point-ofview choices contribute the most to the narrative distance.

Threading… spans four hundred years, which meant compiling it from five stories with long periods of time empty between each. The blocks of un-narrated time between sections leaves the reader to fill in the blanks; I jump right into the story in

each section without explaining what has happened, so readers are left to recreate the garden in their imagination with the clues I have given. Doing so was partly a conscious decision on my part in order to build suspense and push readers to the next section. Additionally, the length of each section truncates the characters' stories. Once a reader delves far enough into the novel and realises that characters experience temporal instability and show up out of their own times, the border between sections—and time periods—becomes more fluid. Readers can expect to encounter a familiar character in an unexpected place in the novel—in a new time—which made truncating the stories less of a crime. This does, however, contribute to the narrative distance because a reader is never inside a character's head during a moment of temporal instability in both places/times. The closest they come to this is in 1941 when Irene "becomes" Joan for a few minutes while lifting young strawberry plants. I purposely left out any mention on Joan's end of feeling as if she was a woman out of her own time or any clear analysis on Irene's end of what had just happened. Irene only for a moment equates the feeling to acting when she thinks, "*Must be the acting. This must be what being a natural feels like. So easy to fall into character*" (p.160). She has experienced a moment of temporal instability but is so far removed from the knowledge of what has happened that she can only describe it using acting terms. Her inability to recognise that the garden is acting upon her—and to vocalise the moment correctly—places her character at a distance from her experience. Contributing to the narrative distance in this scene is my use of third-person point of view, which I use through most of the novel. The reader rarely gets a character's innermost thoughts, except for moments like that shown above, where the thoughts are set off in italics. When moments of temporal instability happen, the character does not realise it, so does not describe the experience. Instead, the characters experience their "normal" lives in the garden, with this collective protagonist giving the reader a look at the garden in a handful of different eras. Using third-person point of view through the first four sections of *Threading…* keeps the characters at a distance from the readers, placing the garden's importance above that of the human characters. In the final section of *Threading…*, however, I use first-person point of view. Changing the point of view for this section made sense because of the decrepit state of the garden; the setting has been abandoned, sold off in parcels, left to rot, and is without immediate keepers, so deploying the first-person point of view focuses readers on the character of Toni rather than place. It shapes the idea that the garden has lost its importance. It also places readers inside Toni's head; as a twenty-first-century

character, she is easier for readers to relate to, which brings her closer to them while setting the previous protagonists at a further distance, clearly placing them *in history*. Further, it also sets up a marked contrast to the other characters when she experiences magical moments in the garden. When Toni first enters the walled garden, it appears to her whole and well kept; while she is there, the sensory elements (its colours, scents, and sounds) increase to an impossible degree (p.205). Toni is like us, separated from those other characters who are dead and gone; so her experiences with the magic in the garden are immediate and devoid of the patina of legend or old wives' tales.

Finally, using first-person point of view in the 2010 section of the novel makes the writing of the garden's history seem inevitable. Toni is alone in a garden full of history—her family's history—and the only way to forge a connection to the past is to bring it into stark relief to her present. Writing the garden's past requires her to compile records and piece together, as much as she can, the totality of the world of her ancestors. For all of her work, however—and in contrast to the idea that first-person point of view gives the whole story of any character—she cannot ever know exactly the stories of her ancestors or the garden: "I've cobbled together what I've found and have started to write the story of The Remains and of the people who lived here. The rest of it, though? Well, I suppose you could say it's all a load of bull. Made up. Embellished" (p.238). The span of years between Toni and her ancestors is like Bakhtin's parlour wall, resulting in only pieces of the tale being told and the reader, as well as Toni, left to fill in the missing spaces.

Keeping the mystery of the garden's actions was always key when writing the novel. This became a problem early on, as I had a constant fear that I would never figure out *why* the garden acted this way. It felt that there had to be an answer, a talisman even (such as a ring or sword, like those found in traditional fantasy fiction). A fellow writer and early reader named it The Golden Trowel and told me, in no uncertain terms, that I did not need one. Fictional gardens can be magical and hold onto history (as in *Children of Greene Knowe, Tom's Midnight Garden*, and *Lavender-Green Magic*) because real gardens are magical and hold onto history. Only by placing a space between myself and my work, between the reader and the narrative, could I keep up the image of an "overview," of a story on an epic scale.

The combination of sequence, structure, and point-of-view choices contribute to how readers receive the world of *Threading…*, a world of one spatial setting but several temporal ones. In his essay "Landscapes and Language," Graham Mort maintains that "*landscapes* are conceived, discovered, designed, perceived, communicated. In this

sense they share their origins with literature. … Landscapes are not more presenttense actuality, they are a translation through the senses, through the energy of dreams and desire, through the conjugations of language and the fusions of literature into what *was*, what *is*, what *could* be" (2001, p.178, author's emphasis). In *Threading…* I have conceived a garden setting, designed it according to the fashion of particular eras, and attempted to communicate it—its design, its time period, its workers, its owners—to readers through a five-petalled structure and a chronological sequence that contains non-chronological moments. The garden in the novel—with its various "rooms," changing designs, and changing keepers—and the manner in which I have attempted to communicate the garden to readers are a fusion of these seemingly disparate ideas—of setting on the one hand, and sequence and structure on the other. However, it was necessary to construct the novel as a composite in order to convey the overriding idea that the garden is always "what *was*, what *is*" and "what *could* be."

Heterotopias and Heterochronies

Gardens draw us in: we spy the greenery, a path, riotous colours, calming water, and a shady corner, and are called to enter, to investigate, to leave behind the daily-ness of our lives and enter this other place/other time/other world with its own structure. Entering a garden requires passing a threshold into a microcosm of nature. It is a bit like being Alice, only instead of your body shrinking as a result of drinking a potion, the space around you is a shrunken version of the wider world. The same can be said of a novel: the other place/other time/other world shrinks down to the size of a collection of pages, and how the world is presented depends upon the setting of the story and the structure of the narrative. Here I use the concepts of the heterotopia and the heterochrony to continue my investigation of gardens—real and fictional—as "timespaces." *Threading…*'s settings, both spatial and temporal, affect the sequence of the novel and the characters' actions as well as my narrative choices.

Michel Foucault's theory of the heterotopia helps us better pin down the function of these spaces. Foucault argues that heterotopias are places that are "outside of all places even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986, p.24). For example, primitive societies have what are termed "crisis heterotopias," which are "privileged, sacred or forbidden spaces" to which individuals in a state of crisis, such as menstruating women, are placed (*ibid.*). A heterotopia of deviation in our society is, for example, a prison, where those expressing

deviant behaviour are placed (p.25). In each of these cases, the heterotopia can be located on a map, but the space is placed "outside" of the society's "normal" space or function.

Foucault has five principles of heterotopias, the third of which best relates to my investigation of the garden in *Threading…* as a heterotopia because he addresses gardens directly. Foucault argues that "The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible," and he uses for his example the garden: "perhaps the oldest example of these heterotopias that take the form of contradictory sites is the garden" because it is a "sort of microcosm" and is "the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world" (pp.25–26). The physical garden in *Threading…* juxtaposes "in a single real space several spaces": in the 1865 section of the novel, the kitchen garden sits near a reproduction medieval garden, which is located near a grotto, which sits close to a pinetum and a collection of glasshouses. The garden in this section, like real-life example Biddulph Grange, is a collection of spaces created to represent different ecosystems that could not be found abutting each other in nature. The narrative structure in *Threading…* is also a juxtaposition of different eras, with the novel built of sections, each placed in sequential order but with large spans of time (up to a century) skipped between them. Each section of the novel is thus a "microcosm" of time and space.

Foucault maintains that a garden is an example of the "totality of the world." We can see this in real-life examples: an estate garden from any time before the early twentieth century depended upon its garden for the majority of its food with the kitchen gardens, orchards, fields, and parks making up this self-sufficient world. Many single gardens were composed of collections from a range of disparate environments. Specialty gardens such as botanical gardens were initially created as places to hold specimens from all over the world. In the nineteenth century the craze for collection hit its zenith when wealthy British garden owners built grand glasshouses to create ecosystems to hold specimens from the far reaches of the empire. These gardens were built as personal utopias, spaces where the owners did what they could to control nature and create their own small worlds, to have the "totality of the world" on their own land. In *Threading…*, the garden is the totality of the world, the place around which all of the action is centred. I have set few scenes inside the manor house, the head gardener's house, Joan's cottage, or Toni's gallery. Strongly establishing the garden as the setting focuses my readers' attention on this specific physical space and draws attention to the characters' actions. For example, when Joan and Will in the 1600s section converse in

their cottage, they often discuss the garden and their place within it (pp.10– 11, 21); the same with Thomas in the 1770s section when he arrives home to his father's head-gardener cottage and speaks with his mother about his future in the garden (pp.58– 60). When he is alone in his room in the Hall, Victorian artist John obsesses with getting back into the enclosed garden (pp.115–17, 119–20, 122–24, 132–35). In the 1941 section, Irene, the other Land Girls, and the Lady discuss the garden while in the Hall (pp.149, 163–65, 177–79), and the Lady even arranges a séance to speak with the spirit of the garden (Thomas) (pp.181–84). In 2010, when Toni speaks or considers what she has dubbed "The Remains," it is often the garden that is her focus (pp.224, 233, 236); at the end she even says as much, that "the most important part of The Remains is the once-great garden" (p.238). Setting the majority of the action in the garden or concerned with the garden, where the labourers toil, makes it more important than the Hall—makes it the totality of the world.

The garden in *Threading…* may be the focus of the characters' lives, but it is limited spatially and in its ability because of its borders. Using a garden heterotopia as a main setting in a novel, using an "other" place, results in characters moving about on a stage. We can think of a theatre as another example of a heterotopia: the actors move about in a limited space that represents another place and the "totality of the world." A fantasy example is Ryhope Wood in *Mythago Wood*: inside of Ryhope Wood live the myths and legends of British history and even pre-history. Because the wood cannot grow out to encompass or absorb any more space, it has to draw humans to it who then, like the character Christian, become mythical beings themselves. When viewed on maps or from the air, Ryhope Wood is a small wood with rigid borders, like any stage set, but Christian and the other characters discover that it is larger on the inside. The wood is a heterotopia (as well as a heterochrony, which I will explore in relation to *Threading…* later in this chapter). The fifteenth-century illustrated manuscript *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* is a visual example of the stage set in *Threading….* A book of hours, *Les Très Riches Heures* contains illustrations depicting the garden workers in all seasons (Longon, et al., 1969); each page, with its rigid borders, is a stage set that holds the landscape (spatially staged) and the season (temporally staged), another example of the link between gardens and time, as explored in Chapter Two. Eco describes the temporal and spatial issue he faced when setting the stage of his novel *The Name of the Rose*: "I had many problems. I wanted an enclosed place, a concentrative universe; and to enclose it better, it seemed a good idea for me to introduce, besides unity of place, also unity of time (since unity of action was doubtful)" (1984, p.30). In

Threading…, I have created "unity of space" with a garden (and the walled garden inside of it), though my "unity of time" is an expanded version of Eco's, with seasons of the year (like in *Les Très Riches Heures*) rather than his canonical hours. While Foucault argues that "The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces … that are in themselves incompatible," in *Threading…* I have instead created a garden heterotopia in which five time periods are "incompatible"; they are made compatible through the use of a single setting. Furthermore, a limited setting such as a garden and a walled garden in particular could render the narrative claustrophobic; however, by using a setting with limited space but with unlimited time (as a result of temporal instability) I have created a stage set with more than the usual calculated area, giving the garden the ability to wait for much-needed characters (such as a keeper) to come to it.

Just as characters who "huddle in the wings" (Lamott, 1995, p.74) can represent a threat when they step onstage and enter the bounded setting, outsiders coming onto the stage of *Threading…* are threatening to the "concentrative universe" of the garden. Hitchen is a threat to the garden's ordered universe because of his lack of experiential knowledge (pp.14–15), and the introduction of his book into Joan and Will's relationship threatens to tear them apart. When Will finds the hidden book, his initial reaction is rage towards Joan: "She'd stolen everything from him—his vitality, his son, and now his position in the garden. Had Joan been in front of him he would have beat her and felt a deep satisfaction from it" (p.36). In the 1770s section, new gardening fashions from outside, represented by Harvey Ralston, threaten the status quo of the garden, its workers, and the walled garden. Ralston, a fictionalised Humphry Repton famous for his Red Book drawings and watercolour paintings showing clients' gardens in the "before and after" states, has come to design a new garden to replace the walled garden: "Ralston had begun his favourite part of the process—the second drawing in the pair to show the space as it should be, without the walls and as part of a landscape of undulating rises and valleys…" (p.52). Ralston's drawings are small illustrations of the larger stage set of the garden, showing how it can be changed.

Thomas, once an insider, threatens the stability of Samuel's new marriage and his mother's peace of mind when he returns. While working, Samuel muses:

> The head gardener position was his, or very nearly so with Father failing and His Lordship too full of new plans to search for a replacement. Samuel cut into the turf again, wishing for a way to avoid having to make any decisions about Thomas. Yet that was what a head gardener did: made the decisions necessary for the stewardship of the land in his

> care. It was just too bad that humans didn't behave as predictably as plants. (pp.57–58)

In the 1865 section, changes in gardening fashions again threaten the status quo in the garden (though the walled garden is protected by an absent owner). Jonah sees Aunt Madeline as a threat to the stability of his family when she appears and educates his daughter: "'All a girl needs is to cook and clean, watch the children, make clothes. The other gives her high ideas. I'll end up with a daughter who thinks she's the Little Lady in the Hall,' Jonah continued, "too good to get her hands dirty'" (p.117). It is only when Toni arrives in 2010 that an outsider is anything but a threat, but this is because she is, as a descendent of the owners and the gardeners, the "ultimate insider." Foucault's garden heterotopia, the "totality of the world" is easily threatened by outsiders; gardens depend on order and structure, so any risk to either—from a person or a change to the status quo—threatens to undermine the world of the garden.

Temporal borders between one space and another is the focus of Foucault's fourth principle of heterotopias: "Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time—which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies" (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986, p.26). Just as a heterotopia can separate us from our "normal" spaces, heterochronies separate us from our "normal" time. Foucault uses libraries and museums as examples. A botanical garden that assembles species from around the world can be considered an artefactual museum; when the gardener uses it to collect and store seeds from various species of plants, it becomes a library, too. Re-creations of historical gardens lost to time are also heterochronies. The 1865 section of *Threading…*, set when the fashion in English gardening at the height of the Empire was collecting as many species of plants as possible, is a particularly good example of the garden as museum or library. Glasshouses—built *en masse* by the wealthy after the repeals of the brick and glass taxes in the mid-nineteenth century and the development of heating systems that could keep delicate exotics warm—were necessary for this hobby to take hold (Quest-Ritson, 2001, pp.188–90). When Aunt Madeline takes her first photograph of Mary, they go to the pinetum (p.110), where the grand families would have kept their collections of pine trees, each labelled and planted to best set off its size and grandeur.

Threading… itself is a heterochrony. Separating the novel into five sections turns it into a museum of garden styles and time periods and a library of stories. As the National Trust sets up an estate to highlight the wealth and political power of the owner family, I have "collected" a set of characters and stories, placing each one into its own

display cabinet to draw attention to the toil and personal events going on behind the scenes in a place. Each section of the novel is then a heterochrony within a heterochrony much like the walled garden is a chronotope within a chronotope: the characters in their separate temporal and spatial settings (each section of the novel) are placed inside the heterochrony of the larger garden and its larger story.

In *Threading the Labyrinth* I have created a composite novel in which each section is physically linked through setting and spiritually linked through a collective protagonist and repeated patterns; they are also linked through temporal instability, resulting in a structure and sequence that could be re-ordered without the novel losing narrative cohesion. As a heterotopia and heterochrony, the garden is a protected space, the focus of the characters' attentions, while simultaneously a protected time. In the first three chapters, I have examined characterisation, verisimilitude, setting, point of view, structure, and sequence, the techniques necessary to create an historical-fantasy novel; in many of these arguments I have touched on the importance of the walled garden. Next I will turn my full attention on this enclosed space and expand my analysis by looking at the *hortus conclusus*, metaphor, and how rewriting leads to a final draft.

Chapter Four The *Hortus Conclusus*: Metaphor, Perfection, and Revision

In her writing guide *Bird by Bird,* Anne Lamott claims that "The garden is one of the two great metaphors for humanity" (1995, p.77). Using a such a weighted location—the garden—as a subject and a main setting in a novel is to risk creating the expectation that the story will be concerned with a romantic or Romantic idea of nature; that it will be rife with symbolism that links the characters with fertility myths or legends; that the narrative will concern an Arcadian idyll; and that readers will find an anti-progress and pro-environment message at the end. When I began writing *Threading the Labyrinth,* my knowledge of how natural landscapes and gardens are read as metaphors in fiction was the result of my own experience with reading fantasy fiction that uses these settings, such as Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* (1983) and Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy; furthermore, much of it was rather straightforward in the sense that, in my mind at least, a garden nearly always stood for a generic paradise, and landscape was weighted with historic and mythical symbolism. In Bradley's novel, a pagan ritual "wedding" between Arthur and Morgaine links the future king to the land he will rule; the priestess Morgaine symbolises the fertile earth, and the land itself then physically joined to the king's body, forging them together. In Tolkien's tale, the Shire is a "private Arcadia" that, at the end of the trilogy, the hobbits discover has been "ravaged by … industrialisation" (Carpenter, 1985, p.213); their gardened corner of the world is their paradise and a metaphor for England itself, William Blake's "green & pleasant Land" damaged by factories and pollution (c.1808, p.238).

Enclosed gardens are especially ripe for metaphor. Nikolajeva argues that in *Tom's Midnight Garden* "the magical *enclosed* garden … is a paradise, where there is summer and fine weather" (2000, p.103, author's emphasis), and in Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911) the enclosed garden is, according to Jane Brown in *The Pursuit of Paradise,* "the real miracle-worker" with "extreme" power to heal the sick (1999, p.35). It is simple to see that in many cases separating the natural setting from the metaphor can be difficult, which is why I purposely attempted—or at least kept the idea in mind—to avoid writing my garden as a metaphor for paradise or an Arcadia, because that seemed both too easy and expected. However, I found as the novel developed that while I wrote the garden as a metaphor for things other than those listed

above, the attempt to avoid this result was, as Oedipus discovered, the road to doing just that.

When I first started working on *Threading…*, I knew that there would be a walled garden as part of the larger garden, but it was only later that this smaller parcel of the landscape became central to each character's story. I began to pay closer attention to any mentions of a walled garden in the books I read, and to seek them out when visiting gardens. Though it is simple to inspire a reaction from people when you mention a walled garden—it seems that everyone has read and loved *The Secret Garden*—they are few and far between, likely due to age and neglect. I have visited walled kitchen gardens at Ickworth, Audley End, and Ham House (which also contains another, rather sad and empty, walled garden); the walled rose gardens at Hampton Court Palace and in the Abbey Gardens in Bury St Edmunds; the garden at Fenton House in Hampstead, London which, because of its urban location, means that the seventeenth-century gardens behind the house—including an orchard—are *all* walled; the series of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century formal walled gardens that surround Gywdir Castle in Llanrwst, Wales; the 1901 sunken Dutch Garden at Clandon Park, placed far from the house and surrounded by a high wall with a solid door; and a completely non-formal stone-walled garden at Trigonos in Wales. All of these walled gardens, along with illustrations of medieval walled gardens, influenced the enclosed garden I created in *Threading….* I wanted it to have high walls, originally of stone but later clad with heat-absorbing brick to assist in growing espaliered fruit trees; it has a solid door for secrecy; it is placed near the house but is not an extension of it; and its layout changes slightly as the years pass, except for a contemplative labyrinth that is removed early in the novel.

A walled garden is a smaller parcel of a larger garden; as such, it is finite yet, as a microcosm of the world, it is infinite. In *The Enclosed Garden: History and Development of the Hortus Conclusus and its Reintroduction into the Present-day Urban Landscape,* Rob Aben and Saskia de Wit argue the paradox of the walled garden: "In the enclosed garden … polarity emerges as its most distinctive quality: the paradox of the infinite in the finite, two extremes heightened by being present simultaneously" (1999, p.14). It is limited horizontally by its walls, but unlimited vertically by being open to the sky. Walled gardens are not only paradoxical in real life but also in literature; this binary is extended to metaphors in *Threading….* In this chapter I will examine how my walled garden is and is not the Garden of Eden or paradise and, connected to that, a metaphor for both fertility and decay; how it encompasses all of

time and space yet is also a beginning and an end; and how it is protection yet also restriction and exclusion.

Gardens, as I have argued earlier, have borders to separate the ordered from the chaotic. No matter the height or material, gardens require walls to keep them separate, sometimes even hidden or secret. In *The Pursuit of Paradise,* Brown argues the power of the enclosed garden using spiritual or religious rhetoric:

> The secret garden, a hidden place of enchantment and peace, where all our ills can be cured, is one of the most powerful ideas in cultural history. It is a place of submission, of refuge, of sanctuary and of looking inwards for hidden treasures. It is private, but more than that, it is the place for spiritual and soulful conversation, seclusion and once upon a time at least, a place to encounter both God and the devil. (1999, p.50)

Hortus conclusus, the term I will use here, is Latin for enclosed garden, and art has reflected the "spiritual conversation" of the *hortus conclusus* with the popularity, beginning in the fifteenth century, of paintings depicting the moment when the Angel Gabriel comes to the Virgin Mary in a garden, as well as those in which Mary is with the baby Jesus in a walled garden (Impelluso, 2007, p.304). It is barely a stretch to consider the Virgin Mary as the "most perfect" garden of all in this context.

The other famous *hortus conclusus* in Christian art is, of course, the Garden of Eden, where Brown has envisioned the encounter with "both God and the devil." It is Paradise, "the garden of eternity, of the beginning and end of time" (Impelluso, 2007, p.297). The term "paradise" is nearly impossible to disentangle from "garden." The Greek word *paradeisos* was first used to describe royal gardens in Persia in the fourth century BC (Jashemski, 2006, p.362). In *Garden History: Philosophy and Design 2000 BC–2000 AD,* Tom Turner's explanation of the etymology of garden-related terms shows the intimate connection of "garden" and "paradise": "the words garden, yard, *garten, jardin, gardinio, hortus,* paradise, *paradiso,* park, *parquet,* court, *hof, hurta,* town, *tun* and *tuin* all derive from the act of enclosing outdoor space. Thus, the Old English word geard, meaning 'fence,' produced our words 'garde' and 'yard'" (2005, p.1, author's emphasis). Furthermore, the physical form of the Persian garden was the precursor of later gardens depicted in Christian art: it was "the model of an ordered paradise … with walls around it to keep out the unpleasant world" (Aben and de Wit, 1999, p.32). Aben and de Wit further argue that "this medieval picture of paradise is seen to derive from three mutually influential archetypes: the Persian Pairidaeza, the classical Arcadia and the biblical Garden of Eden" (*ibid.*). Early Christian monasteries based their gardens on this idea—in combination with the requirement in unsettled times that a place of any wealth, such as a garden growing food, would require walls

and other types of protection—and created "symbol[s] of Earthly Paradise," but "This symbolic value would fade with time, and the *hortus* would become little more than the kitchen garden cultivated near the home and planted with vegetables and fruit trees" (Impelluso, 2007*,* p.127).

Though the religious link remains, the shape and purpose of the *hortus conclusus* has changed over time. Aben and de Wit trace the development of the *hortus conclusus* from the *hortus ludi* pleasure garden (which is not required to be symmetrical), to the ordered *hortus catalogi* where the classification of plant species dictates arrangement, to the *hortus contemplationis* or "garden of reflection" (1999, p.38).

In *Threading…*, I have created a large estate garden that contains an enclosed garden, once part of an abbey, as well as a large walled kitchen garden, complete with the head gardener's house built into the wall. Initially I rejected the idea that my fictional garden was in any way religiously symbolic in spite of the influence that the *hortus conclusus* has had on art, literature, and gardening in the past millennium. However, I have to admit that as a writer situated in the Christian West, and as a writer of fantasy, which is so often based (however loosely) on medieval Western European history, it is nearly impossible to avoid inadvertently creating connections between a fictionalised garden and these symbols.

Looking back as I was working on later drafts of the novel, I could see how I used Paradise, the Garden of Eden, and the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary in the walled garden as inspiration for certain scenes and events, and how the garden became a metaphor for these places and moments. Ultimately, however, I ended up undermining these simple metaphors. As James Weir claims in *In Search of Eden: The Course of an Obsession,* "The Genesis narrative, which with variation is the fundamental underpinning of all our cultures, has to be taken whole rather than in parts. That means that it is a story not just of Paradise, but also of transgression, shame, exile, violence, disaster and chastened recovery" (2007, viii). It is impossible to write about life in a garden without writing about decay; as with any binary opposition, each side needs its opposite in order to exist.

Life in the garden in *Threading…*, like life in any garden, is a constant fight against decay. Setting the novel's sections in the cusps between seasons highlights this struggle. While the 1600s section is set just as the garden is coming fully to life, the following two sections are set as it is dying for the year (in the 1770s and 1865) and as it is being prepped for new crops (1941). In 1865, Mary poses near frost-ruined flowers (p.94) and in 1941 Irene is surrounded by a garden that has been neglected for far too

long (p.152). In 2010, the most vibrant thing growing in what is left of the garden is a jungle of weeds (pp.200, 203, 232); they may be indicative of the land's fertility, but, as Mabey explains, weeds flourished at bomb sites in London during the Second World War (2010, pp.23–24), which we can look at as a strangely verdant marker of the decay of the fellowship of mankind. The situations in which the characters find themselves also illustrate decay: Joan's son is barely a year old and is already dying, "his skin milky pale with a hint of green" (p.34); Thomas has been injured to such an extent that he is physically decayed, and his father, the head gardener, is at death's door, "his body … nothing more than a pile of saplings" (p.59); Mary feels herself being pulled into the cycle of death and life and wants to escape (p.130), and John is slowly decaying from the inside from morphine addiction (pp.97, 104); and Toni's life is decaying around her, her only "child"—the gallery—dying in spite of her attention (pp.191, 213), much as Joan's did. Yet it is through decay that growth may sprout, as I examine later in this chapter.

The various purposes of the *conclusus* meant that I could downplay the religious weight of the term, especially in light of my using very little religion in *Threading*…. The most outwardly religious moment in *Threading*... is in the beginning when the Lady preaches to Joan about the inevitable decay of the garden:

> "Look, Joan, look, Gwen, upon God's wonders," Her Ladyship said. "The trees and clouds, the birds and beasts, even the smallest insects which swarm in the air. They are all here for our use and our education. Nature is but one of His ways of speaking here on earth."
> […]
> "I would wish to state that this garden is truly a paradise," Her Ladyship continued. "But nay, I cannot. There can be no paradise where there is rot and decay. Where flowers fade and turn to slime in the morning frost. Where weeds choke the paths which have been carefully laid. Where water lies stagnant and no fish ripple its surface. Death will not be avoided, so there is no paradise. Our work is to toil in faith, to create order from chaos on the land which He has given to us and to keep it, as His stewards." (pp.3–4)

The Lady then claims that the garden "holds the secrets which test our faith" (p.4). In this section of the novel, the enclosed garden is a secret place where religion holds sway. However, by drawing attention to this most powerful of metaphors—of a garden as the Garden of Eden or paradise—the garden in *Threading*... becomes just that, though subverted. The Lady cannot let go of the idea of the garden as a place of decay, yet Joan knows it as a place of overwhelming life because she is the one to tend to it.

This idea of the walled garden as a metaphor for paradise or the Garden of Eden gains more purchase in the 1770s section of the novel when Thomas and his Lady have

sex inside the walled garden, guaranteeing the continuation of the garden and their families. In their first scene together in the walled garden in the daytime, the garden seduces them with enhanced perfection. Thomas smells a perfume that cannot be there because the particular flowers are not blooming; and the Lady "feels" the light: "The light comes right through my skin. I can see the sun and the moon at the same time. I can *feel* the light. Can you feel it?" (p.74). The Lady, though far from pure and virginal, is experiencing something akin to the moment depicted in Fra Angelico's *The Annunciation and Life of the Virgin* (1426) when the Angel Gabriel appears to Mary in the walled garden and the holy light, a golden ray shining out of God's hands and containing a dove, reaches for her (Khan Academy, 2015). In their study "Creative Cognition in Science Fiction and Fantasy Writing," Thomas B. Ward and E. Thomas Lawson claim that one of the most basic writing processes is retrieval: "*new ideas* have their roots in *existing knowledge*" (2009, p.196, authors' emphasis). In this scene in *Threading…* I have done just that: I created an image based on something that I already knew (Fra Angelico's painting), though I did not at the time realise the connection. I used this image differently in *Threading…*, however, because the light is the garden rather than a divine spirit manipulating her and Thomas. Later, the two characters meet again at night. Here the garden in *Threading…* is the Garden of Eden run amok, taking over the Lady and turning her into a garden:

> Her skin glowed blue beneath the moon, a statue come to life in his arms, cold and smooth and flawless. She wasn't real. She wasn't calloused hands and cracked skin, dirty feet and greasy hair. She wouldn't age and fade. She was green and new, plump as a spring bee, sweet as a ripe apricot, warm as the sun on his skin. She was the garden, casting off winter's grey coat to be reborn each year.
>
> In the small spaces between kisses, the vine lay itself along her cheek, and she whispered, "It belongs to you now." Moonflowers, white as her skin, bloomed along her neck and shoulders, and a yellow rose snagged its thorns in her hair. Leaves like fingers lifted the hem of her dress. With a tug the vine took Thomas's crutch and he stood, unaided, while moths lit in his hair and along his sleeves, nearly lifting him into the air. But the Lady held him to earth, held him to her. (p.91)

There is another instance of my writing an image that I had studied before but that I did not, at the time of writing, realise I was using: Sandro Botticelli's *Primavera* (c. 1482) in which Flora, the goddess of spring, looks covered in actual flowers rather than just wearing a flowered dress (Uffizi, 2014). I took that idea and expanded on it in the scene where Joan sees the temporally unstable Thomas and the Lady, and Thomas's coat is "such a dark green and so covered with vines and flowers that he all but blended with the shrubs and trees" (p.8). Toni witnesses the same thing in the 2010 section:

> As I watched, the decoration on his coat shifted. At first I thought it was the crazy vine near my foot sliding up his torso, but then flowers bloomed and leaves unfurled. The embroidery grew until his coat was more garden than green, until he looked like … well, like a human-size faerie. (pp.232–33)

Both instances are in contrast to Thomas's actual coat in the 1770s, which is without elaborate embroidery. As the "spirit of the garden," Thomas in these scenes is Flora from Primavera, and the garden is paradise. However, the inversion of the Garden of Eden is further strengthened in this section when Thomas and the Lady find protection within the garden's walls for their tryst, they are never warned against being in the garden, and their carnal knowledge of each other is never punished.

In the Victorian section of *Threading…* I play with names connected to Christian stories to deepen the metaphor between the walled garden and the Garden of Eden/paradise and the Virgin Mary. Mary Hill, the protagonist, learns when she is ten that she was named after her mother, Lillian Marie. The name Mary is instantly connectable to the Virgin, as is Lillian, or Lily: in "A Rose Blooms in the Winter: The Tradition of the Hortus Conclusus and its Significance as a Devotional Emblem," Victoria Larson asserts that it "recur[s] in painting after painting of the Virgin from the medieval and early-modern period" as one of the flowers that is "emblematic of the Virgin, so much so that the white lily that appears in so many of these paintings is still called the Madonna lily (*lilium candidum*) even today" (2013, pp.305–06). I purposely chose this name to invoke a collection of ideas in the reader's mind: first, to link Mary Hill with the Virgin Mary, as I explain above; second, to link her with the importance of the language of flowers in the Victorian era and with flower symbolism in the works of the Pre-Raphaelite painters.

In *The Garden in Victorian Literature,* Michael Waters explores the language of flowers, or "floriography," and argues that it was "stable, fixed, and formalized," and that "middle-class Victorians took great delight in reviving the language of flowers, as the numerous flower books published in the period testify" (1988, p.118). He further claims that the "Pre-Raphaelites and Aesthetes were identified by their reverence for … lilies (and the tall madonna lily in particular)" (p.133). The affection that Pre-Raphaelites had for the flower was important to me because of Mary's relationship with photography and art though her Aunt Madeline (based on Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, who was associated with the Pre-Raphaelites) and the visiting painter John (also inspired by the Pre-Raphaelites). I further pushed the connection by having Mary practice drawing and photographing Madonna lilies in the garden (pp.118–

19, 131–32). Like the Virgin Mary in many Renaissance paintings, Mary Hill spends much of her time in *Threading…* in a garden, especially the walled garden; her father even tells her that she was born there (p.105). Finally, she receives "messages" while in the garden, just as the Virgin Mary did; rather than the Angel Gabriel coming to bring her a message, however, the visions she has—through her photographs—are of the "ghosts" of the past and future. The garden, for Mary Hill, is a message of time and of greater mysteries that she may never understand. In the following sections of *Threading…*, the walled garden loses its metaphorical connection to the Garden of Eden and/or paradise. Because it has keepers to look after it, seducing any humans to such an extreme is not necessary again until 2010 when Toni arrives. At this point, the enclosed garden has lost part of its protective walls yet, when Toni walks inside, it attempts to become a paradise again: flower stamens and pistils are "violently yellow with pollen," bees buzz loudly in the roses, and the once-light perfume from the flowers becomes "overwhelming" (p.205). It becomes a giant flower itself, pursuing Toni, who is necessary for its fertility and future. The effect is too much, however, and Toni turns "away from the colours and the light of the garden to rest [her] eyes again in the cool shade" (*ibid*.). When she sees that the small wall fountain is now "full of dead leaves and insects" and even a fish that swam unnoticed before, she bolts from the garden. It becomes a metaphor for the separation between humans and the natural world, in which what is natural is scary and foreign to us, and must be controlled. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden, separating humans from God's paradise, so now Toni, a thoroughly twenty-first-century woman, is unable to deal with how overwhelming the natural world—even one contained by walls—truly is. The subversion of the religious overtones is complete here, with the garden an anti-paradise to Toni, who at first wants nothing to do with it.

Gardens are, simply put, metaphors for fertility—this is an extension of the metaphors of the Garden of Eden and the Virgin Mary—and my garden in *Threading…* is no exception. The fertility of the garden is illustrated by the plants that grow there (strawberries, herbs, roses, various other flowers). In some cases, however, the fertility is skewed or not what is expected. In the 1600s section, Joan experiences the walled garden's fecundity when the weeds grow at an alarming rate (p.1), in the 1770s section Thomas witnesses the same thing when, in a flashback, a vine reaches to thread itself through Anne's hair (p.84) and again later when a seed he plants grows instantly (p.65), and near the end of the 2010 section a vine reaches out "like a submarine periscope" to touch Toni's ankle (p.232). I played on the metaphor to add the sense of the uncanny;

the garden is fertile, as it should be, but the excessiveness and speed of it alarm people, as I described with Toni in 2010 above.

Where there is fertility, however, there must be decay and destruction, and the walled garden in *Threading…*, as it weathers the centuries, becomes a metaphor for this as well. In the 1941 section the decaying garden is a metaphor for the decaying country, wracked by bombs and rationing. The once numerous gardening staff are all gone, dead in the Great War or having abandoned service altogether, leaving behind only Mr. Hill; the lack of labourers in the garden is a metaphor for the lack of men in industry in the country as a whole. Many sections of the greater garden have been neglected and are overgrown (p.152), which represents the lack of attention that the population as a whole has for gardens used only for pleasure. *Threading…* is set in England, itself a metaphor of paradise in the unofficial anthem "Jerusalem," where it is a "green & pleasant Land" (Blake, c.1808, p.238).

The use of England as a metaphor for an Eden—a "pure" place to return to in stark contrast to the "Dark Satanic mills" of industrialisation and war—is illustrated in fantasy fiction in Tolkien's Shire[2]. The Shire is Eden, an idyllic place, and the destruction that the hobbits return to at the end of the trilogy represents the destruction of this place—England—as the result of war (as the loss of Eden is a result of the gaining of knowledge). In the 1941 section of *Threading…*, the house and the walled garden are hit by a stray bomb and a small fighter plane; the literal trespassing of the war into the garden is a metaphorical wound to the country, as in Tolkien. At the end of *Threading…*, much of the greater garden is gone and the walled garden, missing a wall, has been left to decay. Lauren photographs it, capturing the missing wall and even a "ghost" of a fighter plane from the Second World War (p.217). This once-large garden, reduced to a few acres, represents Toni's family, which is also mostly gone and without much of a future. It is also Toni herself, facing the closure of her gallery in America and a pile of bills she cannot afford to pay. Like the walled garden, her life is broken, her choices few because of the situation in which she finds herself.

The walled garden as the heart, the intersection of space and time, as a place where time runs in a circle, is also the metaphor for the beginning and the end. In

[2] The case has been made by others with much more knowledge than I that Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy is a thinly veiled metaphor for the Great War. Though he denied this, I still believe the link between the Shire and a romanticised England is strong. See Garth, J., 2004. *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-Earth.* London: Harper Collins, pp.306–313.

Threading…, this idea of the garden as a place where time begins and ends is most clearly illustrated in Thomas's life. The reader first encounters him in the 1600s as Edmund Vale (who I named after Edmund the Gardener from the thirteenth century, the first recorded gardener in England (Musgrave, 2007, p.vii)), and his first appearance has religious overtones when he appears with a halo (p.1), but Thomas's first encounter with the garden came much earlier. At the end of the 1770s section, it is revealed that Thomas was found as an infant in the walled garden and is not actually a Hill by birth (p.89), a story that causes his "brother" Samuel to call him a changeling (pp.51, 57, 88). This story is complicated by a legend connected to the garden—and to its labyrinth—mentioned in the 1600s section about a changeling child who was found there (p.9). Thomas appears in all of the sections and time periods of *Threading…*, but he began in the *hortus conclusus*; it is his alpha. It is also his omega. In flashbacks to the 1750s, the reader learns that he has an affinity for the garden: he fears doing anything that might get him "thrown out of the garden" (p.52); this is an echo of God throwing Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden for their transgressions. Thomas desires always to be in the garden, and he gets his wish, evidenced by so many other characters seeing him in the garden. Though we never see Thomas age or die, he is always in the garden; it is his beginning and his end.

Taken one step further, the garden itself is the beginning and the end, though both stretch infinitely in each direction. I establish the garden as the beginning with clues that it has existed far longer than it seems: it was once an abbey (pp.198–99), which links it to early Christianity and the keeping of extensive gardens; but the appearance of a changeling links it to faerie, or even pre-Christian time. Additionally, the moments of temporal instability are "loops" in time, establishing the garden as eternal, the "alpha"; it is older than any of the characters and is the very thing that connects them all through time. To establish that the garden is also the "omega" I end each section of the novel in the walled garden. In the 1600s Joan and Will meet in the walled garden after Joan sees the temporally unstable Edmund Vale/Thomas Hill (pp.39–40); in the 1770s Tom and the Lady meet for a second time in the walled garden at night (p.91); in 1865 Mary and John are discovered in the walled garden at night trying to see the "ghosts" (p.138); Irene survives a stray bomb in 1941 and views the damage to the house from the area of the walled garden, and as an old woman she returns to the walled garden at the very end of the section (pp.188–90); and Toni stands in the walled garden on Diá de Muertos, the Day of the Dead, and says that the only shadow she casts "is one that stretches backward and forward through time" (p.239). In

some cases, I provide a short summarised epilogue to the section to describe what happens to characters after their final scene in the walled garden, but their final moments of dramatised action are all in the walled garden, leaving readers with the image of them there. The walled garden is the "end" of the story that the readers get of these characters, emphasising the walled garden as their narrative end.

As a part of the landscape, especially one that strongly shows the mark of human hands upon it, the garden can be a metaphor of all that is perfect and fecund (as I have explored above), or it can be a metaphor of restriction and exclusion. In "Landscapes and Language," Mort relates landscape to metaphor: "Landscapes … are psyche-scapes, metaphors representing the yearnings and aspirations, hope, betrayal, anger, and bitterness that we see in them" (2001, p.180). The walled garden is immediately a metaphor for exclusion because its gate has a lock, with different characters holding the key in each section. The keys are a small bit of power, restricting access to this important part of the garden. Later, as the garden loses its status in 1941 and 2010, the gate is left unlocked (p.159), indicating a change to the metaphor: it is neither protection nor exclusion at this point but something in between, or neither.

In the first three sections of *Threading…*, the garden is a metaphor in relation to the protagonist of that section and her or his experiences of restriction, oppression, and exclusion. In the 1600s section of *Threading…*, the walled garden is a metaphor for the restriction that Joan experiences in her world. Because she is a weeding woman from a low social class, Joan is tied to the land that she has to work and to her family; she lives in a closed-off world with tight borders, just as the walled garden is closed-off to the rest of the garden and much of what happens inside it is restricted because Vale and the Lady hold the keys and keep the garden locked. Her experiences with the fantastic, especially the voices she hears, cause her to avoid the walled garden when possible and to go silent, afraid that the voices she hears will come out of her mouth: "Joan pressed the book against her lips, keeping the names inside her mouth, inside her head where they were safe" (p.18). Because of the walled garden and its effect on her, Joan's actions become restricted and she is unable to seek help; she is walled in. When the walled garden shows off its ability to move people through time—when she sees Thomas and his Lady and, later, Vale—Joan is unable to share her experiences with anyone, even her husband; superstition and the fear of what will happen to her if anyone else learns about her experiences in the garden restrict her ability to even attempt to take steps to understand what is happening to her. She may not "step outside the walls" so to speak. Finally, the book that Joan steals from the walled garden is another example of

her exclusion. Barely able to read, she is excluded from book-based education; she is intellectually walled-in.

In the 1770s section, the walled garden is a metaphor for the oppression of the working classes at the hands of the ruling, landowning classes. While the landowners are tearing down walls to expand their vistas and their profits, the workers are suffering from the loss of common lands and from the "particular ambition of owners of eighteenth century landscape gardens" to have "invisibl[e] workers" as Martin Hoyles argues in "The Garden and the Division of Labour" (2005, p.25). In Thomas's case, members of his extended family have lost some of their livelihood and been moved to "model villages," toys for the landowners (Brown, 1999, p.149). The walled garden is under threat of being torn down, one more loss in a series of losses, among Thomas's loss of his status and his place in the world of the estate and gardens, his relationship with Anne, and his family. When Thomas first arrives back at the estate, he makes his way to the walled garden but decides not to enter (p.49–50), illustrating that he is unsure where he belongs. Soon the walled garden begins to "speak" to him, telling him that "*She will be here soon. Wait for her*" (p.69); he believes that the "she" is Anne, but readers later understand it to be the Lady, whom he finds early one morning in the garden (p.72). The walled garden has its own plans for Thomas, and he is tricked into thinking that Anne will meet him there, illustrating his exclusion from the relationship that he once had with her. The garden's walls represent the wall that has grown between who he was before he went away and who he is now. Finally, on the night of his (supposed) father's death he is told the truth about being found as an infant in the walled garden. He is from a place that is physically walled off from everywhere else in his world, which becomes a metaphor for how he is emotionally restricted (by Samuel) and genetically restricted from actually being part of the Hill family.

In the 1865 section of *Threading…*, the walled garden is a metaphor for the repression that Mary experiences and the small world she is allowed to inhabit as a girl. When Aunt Madeline arrives to educate Mary, Jonah has strong opinions about what girls should do: "'All a girl needs is to cook and clean, watch the children, make clothes. The other gives her high ideas'" (p.117). When confronted with Madeline's belief that Mary is much like her mother and her talents may go to waste, Jonah even equates Mary's worth to the garden: "'Nothing in a garden ever goes to waste'" (*ibid.*). Mary is expected to follow the status quo of girls at that time, to grow up to be a wife and mother. The walled garden is even a metaphor, more specifically, for

Mary's father: the first time Mary is seen in the walled garden, she asks John not to say anything because she will get in trouble with her father (pp.99–100). The garden's walls are as restricting as her father's opinions and power over her. Though Madeline educates Mary and teaches her the new art of photography, Mary finds herself cut off from Madeline and the wider world when Madeline disappears from her life. Mary retreats to the walled garden which, she discovers, has secret "ghosts" that she can capture in her photographs. She ends up restricting herself to its walls and to trying to capture the past.

Perfection & Revision

Writing about a garden means taking on a metaphor that is larger than life. The *hortus conclusus* is an image of perfection and, too often, gardens as depicted in art are pure and perfect. Larson asserts as much in her study of a 1410 painting by an unknown master: "One may notice, when one studies the detail of this *Garden of Eden*, that the flowers are not haphazard products of the artist's imagination, but are rather very specific botanical specimens that are painstakingly portrayed: irises, columbines, roses, lilies, cowslips, lily-of-the-valley, wild strawberries, and more" (2013, pp.305–306). Rather than a "natural" occurrence, the medieval flowery mead was a product of human hands taking on nature and perfecting it, an act that gardeners have repeated and continue to repeat. I show this in *Threading…* when the Lady in 1865 has a flowery mead planted, inspired by an embroidered fireplace screen (p.93); the garden in this case is an artificial creation based on an artistic representation of an artificial creation. Additionally, as I have previously stated, planting a garden is planting an image of a future perfect moment in the garden. Writing *Threading…*, like writing any novel, is similar to planting a garden; I envisioned perfection, but what I imagined at the beginning is nothing like what I have ended up with.

Creating anything is a pursuit in perfection, but the process is often more important to the end result than the idea or image we carry of that end result. In his memoir *Two Turtle Doves: A Memoir of Making Things,* jewellery designer Alex Monroe claims that "Making a successful original means making a series of failures" (2014, p.39). Notice he says "original" and not "perfect." Initially, I half-believed that depicting a garden that is so weighted with metaphor and so often represents a level of perfection not to be found in the world could only result in falling short of the goal. I learned—again and again—over the practice of writing *Threading…* that the writing of

a novel is as organic as the growing of a garden; that to make room for mistakes and happy accidents is to show respect for the practice. I believe that gardeners continue to garden not in pursuit of perfection but because they learn the humility of what it is to be human in a wild space; there is fun in the attempt, in the series of failures. Weir opens his book *In Search of Eden: The Course of an Obsession* with an argument about how one must undertake a journey: "To adapt a famous saying by my countryman Robert Louis Stevenson—who adapted it in turn from the haiku poet Basho—it is often better to travel without apparent purpose than to arrive at some predetermined destination" (2007, p.vii). Weir's thoughts can be easily related to writing: that it is better to allow yourself to write freely than to follow a rigid outline to the letter. Doing so allows for distractions and side trips that open the writer to the possibility of making connections between ideas that emerge organically.

Revision, or rewriting, can be an act of trying to find the perfect inside the flawed. My process was one of starting over and over again to find some sort of "perfection" in a beginning that was very flawed. I originally wanted *Threading…* to have a female character who slips through time, inhabiting someone who works in the garden in each time period in the novel. I started with a labyrinth outside the walled garden, a female character (Naomi) who is a film-location scout who wants to use the gardens for a movie, and a male character (Tony) who is a representative from a quasiNational Trust organization. Initially, Joan shares a mental connection with Naomi, whose voice she first encounters one day after Edmund Vale disappears:

> Joan put her knife down and sat back on her heels. She was alone in the enclosed garden. She'd never rested here, never seen it as a calming place. […] The ache in her knees told her that it would be very fine indeed to have someone—or many someones—cook and clean and care for the animals and gardens, and even dress your hair.
>
> *No, it wouldn't,* came another voice inside her.
>
> Joan started. The voice wasn't hers.
>
> *Don't be afraid,* the voice said. *I'm here.*
>
> The scrabbling sound was louder now. Closer.
>
> "Where are you?" Joan said, her voice barely above a whisper.
>
> *I'm here, inside you,* the voice said. (Appendix A, p.368)

Later Joan realises she has scratched shapes into the dirt around the sundial; she cannot read but commits the shapes, which spell "NAOMI," to memory. I also switch back and forth between the 1600s and 2010, mixing the two time periods together. Initial feedback from the fourteen other writers at the Milford Writing Workshop in autumn 2011 was that the idea of the story was interesting but, among other issues, the Joan/Naomi twist and resulting point-of-view problems (such as "The woman inside

Joan didn't like him either") made it confusing. As a result, I dropped the idea of a mental connection between Joan and a modern character, thinking that that was the source of the problem with the draft. I kept the idea of the voices in Joan's head, but what she hears is random:

> She was also worried about the voice she'd been hearing in her head. A woman's voice, to be sure, but not her own. Joan was unsure about so much these days, but that the voice wasn't her own she'd swear to in front of any magistrate. The way it spoke and the words it used—how could it be her own voice when she'd never so much as been outside of Hertfordshire?
>
> *This place is a total nightmare … So much bomb damage … You seen my phone?* (Appendix B, p.371)

At this point the draft still contained moments when Joan "blacks out" and loses time, and her son had already died (it was her older daughter who is sick). By the third draft of the 1600s section, I realised this all had to go. According to Todd Lubart in "In Search of the Writer's Creative Process," I had hit the point in Graham Wallas's fourstep process (preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification) that some researchers have found between the second and third steps, a moment of frustration at which point the creator "can either start over and fall into the same traps, accept a lessthan-optimal solution (perhaps rationalizing that it is creative), or push ahead, exploring further alternatives or moving in a new direction, perhaps reconceptualizing the problem" (2009, pp.154–55). As a result of years of experience in writing-critique groups, I know better than to try to rationalise a not-so-great choice, and I knew I had to push ahead and rethink what I was doing. I got rid of the idea of Joan being inhabited, but kept the voices and moved their appearance to the very beginning of the novel, before Vale disappears, setting up the situation *in medias res* and cementing the phenomenon as being part of the garden rather than a result of the man's disappearance. Taking on feedback about the differences between spoken English now and four hundred years ago, I also learned that I had to change the voice so that Joan would not easily understand it.

I was still hemmed in creatively, however, in my search for "perfection." In *Art & Fear,* David Bayles and Ted Orland argue that creators need to have room to work: "In making art you need to give yourself room to respond authentically, both to your subject matter and to your materials. Art happens between you and something—a subject, an idea, a technique—and both you and that something need to be free to move" (1993, p.20). I had neglected up until this point in the process to give myself room to tear the first section apart, likely in response to problems I was having with the

1770s section of the novel (I initially resisted having a male protagonist). By this time, the 1600s section of *Threading…* was missing an internal logic and the uncanny moments needed real-life events to anchor them. From the beginning I had included a moment when Joan, on her knees weeding, sees a tail slide out from under the Lady's skirt: "A tail, ringed and long and pinkish grey, twitched in the shade of her Ladyship's fine skirts" (Appendix B, p.374), and I was still hanging on to it as I was trying to figure out how the voices worked. As I focused attention on the other sections of the novel, I "incubated" the 1600s section, allowing my unconscious to work on it (what I like to call "letting it cook"); luckily, I reached a moment of illumination "when the promising idea breaks through to conscious awareness" (Lubart, 2009, p.154). To give myself the "freedom to move" within the garden, I had to take it apart to put it back together again. On the next daft, I got rid of all incidents of Joan hearing a voice before Vale disappears; instead, his disappearance and the arrival of Hitchen—the garden experiencing uncertainty about a keeper—became the catalyst for the voices. I also got rid of the tail; the original idea is from a short story (that I still have yet to finish), and it is an idea that I cannot yet let go of, but I had to accept that it did not belong in *Threading….* I also by then had learned enough about the history of gardening guides that I knew I wanted to bring forward the idea of experiential knowledge versus book knowledge and the theme of secrets, which tied in easily with the making of medicines. Later, instead of Joan's infant son having already died, I brought him back to life but very ill. This combination resulted in Hitchen's having a book (tied in with his secret identity) and Joan stealing it to use it to save her son. Had I kept with my initial idea and stuck to an outline, I would never have had the freedom to play with things and discover how the story more naturally fit together, or play up the themes. In the end, the section is not perfect but it is original, reached via a series of failures.

Just as Alex Monroe makes and remakes a piece of jewellery to find one that works, I have rewritten each section of *Threading…* at least a half dozen times, striving for not perfection but a novel that works. The drafts are evidence of how I have been influenced by my reading and other research. In "Historical Fiction: Some Whys and Hows," Katherine Paterson argues about the role of research in historical fiction: "One thing I think I've learned over the last 30 years is that historical fiction stands or falls on the rewriting. The more research you've done, the more you have to rewrite in order to bury that research" (1999). In *Threading…* I have embedded specific processes, from apple tree grafting to wet colloidal photography to preparing and planting a market garden. In each case, I had to learn the process (as much as I could without actually

being able to perform the tasks myself, due to time, money, and/or access) and then choreograph my characters acting them out. Feedback from my writers' group on the specifics of Victorian-era photography, for example, was split between "I like all of the details" to "too many details"; I erred on the side of leaving in the details I could depend on without ever having performed the process myself to give the scene verisimilitude, so that meant keeping descriptions of how things looked but not those on how they smelled. In the case of the gardening history, I buried much of the research, deleting short prologues I had written for each section that outlined current world events and how they influenced gardens. Instead, the different garden styles became part of the background, described to show changes from previous eras, but unexplained.

At each step of the practice of researching, writing, and rewriting *Threading…*, I made choices; overall I have made thousands of them, ending up with the draft you see here. Bayles and Orland argue that the process is one of choices:

> The development of an imagined piece into an actual piece is a progression of decreasing possibilities, each step in execution reduces future options by converting one—and only one—possibility into a reality. Finally, at some point or another, the piece could not be other than it is, and it is done. (1993, p.16)

Threading… is a *hortus conclusus*: an idea, a dream, a collection of possibilities barely controlled inside borders. The execution of it was, to use Monroe's words, "a series of failures," but after numerous drafts I have come up with the closest thing there is to creative perfection: "a successful original."

The religious and cultural resonances of the walled garden influenced the garden I created in *Threading the Labyrinth*, even when I tried to avoid them. The *hortus conclusus* is a metaphor of perfection; my walled garden is a metaphor for fertility and decay, possibilities and restriction, and the beginning and end of time. The idea of perfection dogged me throughout the process of writing the novel, which leads naturally to my final chapter, in which I explore where I stand in relation to the fictional world I created.

Chapter Five Spatialization: Writing Myself into the Axes

So far I have investigated gardens as an intersection of time and space that influence characters and narratives as well as exhibit the potential of the space in narrative. With spatialization, I can find where I stand in this intersection in the process and the final product of *Threading the Labyrinth*. Taking Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope one step further is Julia Kristeva in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic*

Approach to Literature and Art; in her exploration of the spatialization of the word, she argues that there are three coordinates in a text: "the writing subject, addressee, and exterior texts" (1980, p.66). In "Spatialization: A Strategy for Reading," Susan Stanford Friedman has expanded Kristeva's theory as a means to investigate the complexities of narrative. Friedman's argument for spatialization of narrative insists that a narrative contains two chronotopes, or axes: the horizontal, "referring to the movement of characters within their fictional world," which is "finite … within the bounded world of the text"; and the vertical, "referring to the 'motions' of the writer and the reader in relation to each other and to the text's interests" (1993, p.14).

The horizontal axis and the vertical axis have different functions. In a text, the horizontal axis can be visualised as "a line drawn from writing subject across to the addressee, who is either a character to whom the speech is directed or, more generally, the reader" (p.13). It is on the horizontal axis where the reader and the speaker/character exist in "conversation." In *Threading…,* the horizontal axis is the garden where the characters act while it is also the plane on which they (and I) move and "speak" to my reader. The vertical axis "is a line starting with the text and moving down to the exterior texts, or contexts, of the text in question" (*ibid.*). So according to Friedman, it is on the vertical axis where contexts—historical, textual, etc.—are layered. Just as a garden is a palimpsest, so too is the vertical axis. The vertical axis of my novel includes layers of the other texts that inspired it, such as gardening history books, historical and fantasy fiction, other novels with similar settings, and a wide variety of texts on British history, photography, and art, among others.

Gardens can be read as texts. Andrew Eburne and Richard Taylor's *How to Read an English Garden* addresses this very idea in a collection of chapters that explore the history and function of garden elements such as drives, hedges, water features, slips, and hothouses. For example, reading the drive or approach to a historical house means considering when it was laid out, its orientation in relation to the house, what aspects of the house and lands can be seen from it, and how passengers in carriages (and later cars) related to the landscape (2006, pp.21, 50–51). Answering these questions means that a visitor can ascertain the house's age and original entrance, and what aspects of the grounds the designer or owner wished to highlight or remain unseen.

What we understand, or not, draws attention to our own context as well. When visiting Stowe, I knew from my research that the gardens were full of messages to be read, but my understanding of them was restricted; for instance, the political messages that Lord Cobham wanted to relay to his eighteenth-century visitors through his Temple of

Ancient Virtue and Temple of Modern Virtue (pp.25–26) were current to them but are not to modern visitors. When we read any text, we move beyond reading the words on the page to interact with the history of that text and the events that led to it, with the fictional events in the text and the research (and history) behind it, and with our own context.

Gardens are physical manifestations of three-dimensional spatialization: we move across their horizontal plane while below lie strata containing the history of the garden, our personal experiences with those layers, previous owners/labourers and their experiences with the garden, the garden as the idea of a "garden" and our experience or lack thereof with one, and the historical and cultural contexts of gardens. I have attempted to represent this vertical axis in *Threading…* with a garden that moves characters backward or forward in time to show that the garden as it exists in a character's immediate present was once—or will be—another character's immediate present.

Threading… was influenced by some factors over which I hold sway and some over which I do not, the first being my own history and experience with gardens. I grew up in the American Southwest, an ecosystem unkind to much in the way of lush, green, or overgrown, and in a culture in which anything built in the 1950s was considered old. As a child, I read about the myths and legends of the British Isles, and as I aged my disdain for the absence of what I called any "real history" in my own world sent me to daydream about rainy, mossy, green gardens. For me, history existed far across the ocean, and when I discovered that the house that Elizabeth I lived in as a child was still standing—a miracle to someone surrounded by the wreckage of casinos "imploded" after fifty years to make way for something newer and grander—I was inspired to write about a place like it. As a teenager, I bought magazines that featured English gardens and tried to grow what would not grow in the desert, only to be disappointed again and again. It makes sense, then, that historical houses and gardens became the focus of my imagination: to me they were places out of time, ripe for fiction for they *were* fiction to me.

Creating a garden that has "always existed" and that I could visualise as a layer cake was one method by which I could illustrate the vertical axis fictionally. I was able to write about all of the times and people in the garden without having to limit myself to just one of each. Additionally, I could do so without the benefit of any sort of nonfiction aside or footnote explaining the elements to the reader, which risk pulling the reader out of the story.

One way to analyse the contexts of *Threading…* is to use Friedman's breakdown of the vertical axis into "three distinct strands: … the literary; the historical; and the psychic" (1993, p.16). The first, the literary strand, "exists … in relation to genre," where "the writer's and reader's awareness of genre conventions exists as a chronotope, a time-space, within which the specific text is read," and that text "exists—however centrally, ambivalently, or marginally—within one or more literary traditions or cultures" (*ibid.*). In the case of *Threading…*, the literary thread of the vertical axis includes the fantasy and historical fiction genres, and I have used conventions of both. The fantasy genre conventions I have used include timeslip (or temporal instability, as I argued in Chapter One) and magical spaces, which more specifically relate to the novels and stories I discussed in Chapter One that use gardens as their main setting. The conventions of the historical genre that are relevant here include multi-generational narratives (especially composite novels, as discussed in Chapter Three) and master/servant relationships, historical gardening manuals, and texts that explore gardening theory and philosophy. Untangling the knot of context and influence is difficult because stories and novels, as well as non-fiction texts, from each of these genres and subgenres has influenced the creation of *Threading….* Also, a reader's awareness of these other texts will influence his or her reading of *Threading…*; for example, a reader with knowledge of *Tom's Midnight Garden*—or who enjoys gardening magazines, for instance—will have a different experience from one who does not. My literary strand of the vertical axis will be different from that of my readers, and each of them will have a different history as well, resulting in an uncountable number of different readings of the novel.

The second thread of Friedman's theory is the historical aspect of the vertical axis, which "refers to the larger social order of the writer, text, and reader" and includes "political resonances" that may "include interlocking narratives of race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and so forth" (1993, p.17). The "larger social order" of myself, my novel, and my readers is, in part, tied up in the choices I made when writing *Threading….*, and those choices were informed by my status as a middleaged American woman from a working-class background writing about English history. C. Butler, in *Four British Fantasists: Place and Culture in Children's Fantasies of Penelope Lively, Alan Garner, Diana Wynne Jones, and Susan Cooper,* examines how these British authors' backgrounds and landscapes inspired their writing:

> Most British writers who deal in fantasy have sooner or later to face the fact that they are, in Patrick Wright's phrase, 'Living in an Old Country.' This circumstance is in many ways a boon: it makes available a fourth

> dimension in which to plot the course of one's imagination; it provides a wealth of historical and mythological resources, and potent ways of exploring the nature of time itself, most obviously through the time-slip or time-travel story. (2006, p.43)

I am an American writing living in and writing about Britain, which places me at a possible disadvantage according to some critics who would chide me for my attempt. Choosing England rather than another garden-obsessed culture, such as France or Italy, for my novel has to do, again, with my background. It is also part of my ancestry as recently as two generations ago. Give a child with an unstable home life an inkling that her grandparents and great-grandparents were from a country far across the ocean, and she will store that nugget away until the day it can be taken out, shined up, and used as cultural currency in fiction. It was only as I was beginning the final draft and still trying to figure out the actual end of the book that I realised that I had written myself into the story in the character of Toni, as I will explore in more detail later in this chapter. From a personal standpoint, as well as a cultural one, it made sense to me to choose to set the novel in Britain, but it was not until the point where the novel was nearly finished and I "looked back" that I could see why I had chosen to do so.

Though I have, as an American, as much claim on the past as any contemporary British writer, the choice I have made to write about British history is telling, and an important part of the historical thread of the vertical axis of *Threading*…. Rosemary Jackson in *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion* argues much along the same lines as Friedman and Butler, that "Like any other text, a literary fantasy is produced within, and determined by, its social context" including "historical, social, economic, political and sexual determinants" (1988, p.3). These contexts, however, expose what is missing rather than what is present and, as a result, "fantasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence or loss" (*ibid.*). So, while all of the aspects of my background contribute to my writing topic as well as the genre that I have chosen (historical fantasy), the final product is, according to Jackson, what I desire, a result of what my background lacks.

Jackson's claim gives rise to the idea that the border between fiction and nonfiction is a thin one. I am sure that some writers would balk at this, the equation that what we write is our inner-most selves laid bare on the page. When teaching new writers, I encourage them to accept that their stories are not them so that they might write freely and learn how to give and accept feedback without shame or fear. Yet, at the same time, I explain to my students that we do not exist—or write—inside a

vacuum. In her analysis of her novel *Water's Edge,* Gaylene Perry in "History Documents, Arts Reveals: Creative Writing as Research" argues that even when writing fiction, we write ourselves into the work: "*Water's Edge* is a work of fiction and nearly all of the details that I have just mentioned are fabricated. Yet I could write another synopsis consisting of a series of autobiographical details that form another layer of the imaginative work of this novel" (2007, p.36). Realising the thinness of the border, I believe, shows attention to the material.

Threading… is my "literature of desire," my way of acting out those adolescent yearnings for a sense of history and a new landscape. According to Butler, there are some problems with using Britain as a fantasy landscape:

> [T]he weight of tradition, both literary and historical, may be felt to be oppressive. Everything may seem to have been said before, the palette to have been muddied by a thousand brushes—while a focus on Britain as a history-saturated land may tend to corral fantasy writers into a restricted set of all-too-familiar themes and forms, or to render the country a place of mere spectacle and imaginative tourism. (2006, p.43)

As I wrote *Threading…*, I encountered some of these issues. First, as the list of fantasy titles with garden settings I provided in Chapter One shows, gardens are used rather often as time-travel devices. As I was developing my novel, I felt that I was trying to reinvent the wheel. At one point, I had a conversation with author Nalo Hopkinson about it; I explained that I was afraid of doing what had already been done before and that I did not want to write yet another garden-maze-as-time-travel-device story. She wisely reminded me that it all has been done before; the difference is in how the story is told. Perhaps, then, as an American writing about English gardens, I have something new to bring to the table. Second, by writing about the garden labourers rather than the upper classes I hoped to avoid the issue of touching on "all-too-familiar themes and forms." Finally, to avoid rendering my choice of setting as a place of "mere spectacle and imaginative tourism" I wrote Lauren into the novel as a quasi-National Trust representative. In my attempt to focus the historical aspect of the novel on the real, I had her wish to highlight the workers' rather than the owners' lives to mirror recent controversy in the British-heritage business in which critics such as George Monbiot blame the National Trust for the "sanitised, tea-towel" version of British history that its visitors receive when the stories about the grand historical houses and gardens fail to include the abuses that the labourers and local villagers endured as a result of laws such as the Black Acts and the Enclosure Acts (2009).

The third and final thread of Friedman's vertical axis, the psychic, includes a "compositional history of the text—the chronotope of the writer," and insists that rather

than "privileging the 'final' text as the 'definitive' one, we can read the various versions of a text as an overdetermined palimpsest in which each text forms a distinct, yet interrelated part of a larger composite 'text'" (1993, p.18). I would like to use this thread as a means to look at changes to gardens in general and my fictional garden in *Threading…*in the specific.

As I have argued, physical gardens are palimpsests; they are laid over previous gardens or built over an older space to become a garden, hiding but still keeping evidence of what came before. In her exploration of gardens in "The Garden as Occasional Domestic Space" Catherine Alexander runs down the changes gardens were subject to from the Medieval to early modern era and argues that these changes "make(s) a palimpsest of even the simplest garden" (2002, np). Plots of land, large and small, have been stripped bare, dug up, planted, dug up and planted again; as a result, the meaning and message of the garden on the land has changed with the alterations. In the case of a place such as Hatfield House, the original inspiration for my novel, the garden changed numerous times over 400 years and only in the past couple of decades has part of it been returned to a version of a Tudor garden, though what those gardens looked like is debatable as there are none extant because of the passage of time, changes in gardening fashion, and the nature of gardens as living things (Dowager Marchioness of Salisbury in Snell, 2005, pp.12–19). The current gardens at Hatfield House are not final because we can assume that they will undergo changes as the years pass; they are a palimpsest and, as Friedman asserts, interrelate to form a "larger composite 'text'."

Every palimpsest has a beginning or source. The deepest parts of our psyches—the bottom of the vertical axis—are often the source of our most pure creativity. As chronotopes, gardens are also "time palimpsests" and have a beginning: that is, the time experienced or the actions taken in the garden replace or write over earlier ones. The saying "There are faeries at the bottom of our garden!" is the title of a 1917 poem by Rose Amy Fyleman (later named "Faeries" in a 1920 collection); it has been printed on countless plaques, mugs, and other materials, and brings to mind the Cottingley faeries, first photographed in the same year (Harding, 2005); together, the title and the photographs along with our memories of them contribute to the idea that the bottom of the garden—the far reaches where it is closest to the wilderness that the garden border works to keep at bay—is where magic can be found. Consider the "time palimpsest" of the garden, however, and in fact it may be that the bottom is not a location in the present garden but the earliest layer in its time. The fairies—the magic— come from that *time* rather than that place. Using this idea, then, I can consider that the "magic" of the

inspiration for *Threading…* came not just from a particular place and my yearning for that place but from the bottom layer of my own "time palimpsest," my unconscious as it worked on "'trains of association'" during the incubation phase of the creative process (Lubart, 2009, p.154). The bottom layer is connected to my personal history as well as my family history, and writing about garden workers in England was a means for me to return to the earliest of my ancestry, not landowners or gentry but labourers.

The writing of a novel is also a practice in creating a palimpsest. The story inside *Threading…* contains layers of time, with a tale that spans several centuries. Because *Threading…* has taken me years, and several drafts, to write, the process of creating it also contains layers: no one time, and no one draft, has been written over to the point of being erased. The copy that you hold is, for the sake of university regulations, the final draft. But, as Friedman argues, reading back through drafts of a text, which she calls "the chronotope of the writer," can give insight into the "psychic dimension of the vertical narrative" (1993, p.18). Friedman claims that changes in the story "can reveal a process of conscious or self-conscious self-censorship" or, conversely, "a writer's repeated return to the scene of writing a particular story can be read as a kind of repetition compulsion in which the earliest versions are the most disguised, with each repetition bringing the writer closer to the repressed content that needs to be remembered" (*ibid.*). This second idea—that revision brings a writer closer to a memory—is especially important when looking at the contemporary section (the 2010 section) of *Threading…*, in which, I only realised late in the process, the protagonist is a representation of aspects of my own life.

In the first draft, Naomi the film location scout was the protagonist of the 2010 section. Creating a character who works in the movie industry makes sense when I consider my family's history in Hollywood. Over the next few drafts, the protagonist of this section became Toni Hammond, an American who inherits the remains of the estate, and Lauren becomes the Trust representative. Toni is without a family and has a failing business; the source of these character elements is simple to trace once I considered my own family history and current status in the world. She also knows very little about gardens (nor did I when I bought a house with a large garden in Ohio), but over the course of this section of the novel decides to keep the estate and write the history—as much of it as she can paste together from the records available—of the workers of the place. I do not claim that she is me, or that I am her, but that it took several drafts to see the similarities, as if my psyche were working through my own history, my family history, and my experience with gardens and England.

Threading… is not just a creation but also a story of creation. Writer John Mullan, in a section of *How Novels Work* titled "The Self-Conscious Novel," describes books in which the protagonist is him- or herself a writer, such as Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850), or in which the topic of the narrative is writing itself, such as Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) (2006, p.60). I would like to extend this self-conscious idea to creators—including gardeners—as well as writers. *Threading…* describes the creation and upkeep of a garden from its earliest inception to the present, when it is still a garden, though unkempt. It is, also, a story of the acknowledgement of that creation and continuous upkeep, about the history of that place, as compiled by Toni in its 2010 section. Toni is a gallery owner, not an author, but as an art seller she is familiar with the world of creation. Her ancestors and other women who helped keep the garden were also creators: they embroidered, drew, took photographs, and acted. They told a piece of their own stories through the outlets allowed to them in their time, but the stories of who they were have been lost to time and neglect. It is up to Toni to compile what she can in an attempt to fill in the gaps. *Threading…* is a *bildungsroman* tracing Toni's gaining of education about her family history as it relates to the garden. It is also a *kunstlerroman* (Baldick, 2008), tracing her artistic growth from gallery owner to creator—writer and gardener—who, with the gaining of education and skills, can take her place beside the women and men who kept the garden and created there in the past.

When creating exhibits, the museum curator attempts to span a distance, to grasp a sense of the past, of what actually happened and why. As the author of *Threading…,* I am a compiler, a curator of the museum pieces—heterotopias and heterochronies—I referred to in Chapter Three. I took what I could find out about the keepers of the gardens in these eras and attempted to fill in some gaps to create a "museum" of a garden. A museum itself can be thought of as a garden, too: a museum is conceived of and planned to showcase exhibits at their best just as a garden is laid out to show off its plants at their best over the growing season; and a museum changes over time to highlight newer or more important exhibits as research into particular historical eras or artistic periods progresses, just as gardens alter as planting fashions change and gardening technology progresses. In the sense of a compiler/keeper, Toni is a fictional representation of me. She pieces together what she can find to create as close to a whole as she can, not only in the garden but in the history that she writes of the garden.

A writer also attempts to span a distance—historical or narratorial—between the material and herself, between the first spark of the imagination and the representation of the idea on the page, and between the final writing product and the reader. Toni finds a

separation, a distance, between herself and her family history, from the first phone call from the solicitor to the moment when she walks into the cottage built into the kitchen garden wall and says that the place is "like a museum" (p.210). I am also at a distance from Toni; the distance is part of the horizontal axis between character and reader and author, while also being a manifestation of my uncomfortableness, as an author, to take on an authoritative stance in Toni's history, and in the history of the other characters. This uncomfortableness is a manifestation of the danger of Butler's earlier claim that to write about British history is to risk "render[ing] the country a place of mere spectacle." The distance is one of respect.

Threading… contains layers of time, where each year sits right on top of the previous but does not overwrite it completely. There are similar layers of authority/knowing in *Threading…*. As the author, I cannot know the lives of the people I have lifted from history, but I take responsibility for what I have researched and what I have written. I cannot claim to know something that I have not written, because who I was when I began the novel and who I am now are two different people. In his study of time, physicist Julian Barbour argues that there is no such thing as a past, just a series of moments, each a "now": "There are simply the Nows, nothing more, nothing less," he explains (quoted in Frank, 2012). Adam Frank expands on Barbour's idea:

> The Nows can be imagined as pages of a novel ripped from the book's spine and tossed randomly onto the floor. Each page is a separate entity existing without time, existing outside of time. Arranging the pages in some special order and moving through them in a step-by-step fashion makes a story unfold. Still, no matter how we arrange the sheets, each page is complete and independent. (2012, np)

The reader is a witness to the nows I experienced while writing *Threading…*, each moment arranged into a certain order to create a novel structured in a certain order. Had I started the novel a week later, or a month earlier, it likely would have ended up completely different. The reader only knows what I have given her and is left to fill in the gaps. The characters only know what I have written them to know, and no more than that. Some see temporally unstable characters from other times, but their understanding of the event is thin. Toni, as the most recent protagonist in chronological time, is in a position to know the most, but with a lack of records she is as ignorant of the past as any of the other characters. By structuring *Threading…* in this manner and populating it with these characters set in this garden, I have attempted to create a narrative that both provides and withholds information, ultimately ending up with a novel that is a text containing another text (the garden), but that leaves the reader with the inkling that one

cannot know all of the layers, all of the stories, because no matter how you try to control space, you cannot control time. Yet we exist inside of time and it defines who we are. As Peter Hollindale argues, "We depend for our identity on our sense of personal continuity in time" (cited in Hall, 2001, p.46).

Investigating the spatialization of a narrative, its horizontal and vertical axes and their many threads, enables me to better understand the context in which the text exists and the process by which it came to be. In her essay about place, Eudora Welty describes a lamp: "The lamp alight is the combination of internal and external, glowing at the imagination as one; and so is the good novel" (1998, p.784). Welty here has summed up spatialization in her metaphor: a "good" novel is one that works horizontally and vertically. It is one that has action on the surface and depth to catch a reader and for a reader to relate to and engage with. I am in no way arguing for the quality of *Threading the Labyrinth* as if this were simply a review. I am, however, stating my argument for *Threading…* as thought-out, as more than the sum of its parts.

Conclusion

When I first began this project, I had the idea that writing a historical fantasy novel about gardens would be straightforward. That the separation of gardening styles into periods meant that history was linear and, so too, would be the writing of the novel. Instead, I discovered when looking back at what I had done that there is no such thing.

To thread a labyrinth is to walk its curves and turns to the centre. I may have removed the physical labyrinth from my narrative early in the novel, but the curves and turns are still there. The layering of stories and time is a labyrinth that must be "threaded" by the reader, who will only understand the connections and layers once she is finished reading. Although I am the creator, I am also that reader, here threading my way through the labyrinth of the novel and its creation, only able to understand the whole when I look back closely at each part.

From the beginning, time and space were buzzwords when researching gardens. The garden became, for all intents and purposes, a TARDIS: a space that moves through time (and vice versa) and, in the case of the *hortus conclusus,* bigger on the inside. I was halfway through my first draft of my commentary when I realised that rather than be relegated to one chapter, space and time should be the focus of the whole analysis. Each theory and concept related to space and time closely relates to gardens and to the elements of a novel. It seemed an auspicious pairing and informed the final organisation of this commentary. Rather than split the chapters into elements (characterisation,

setting, etc.), I believed that using the concept of borders, Bakhtin's chronotope, Foucault's heterotopia, the *hortus conclusus,* Friedman's spatialization, and the concept of the palimpsest gave me a better path into exploring the creation of the novel and the creation of my fictional garden—and their relation to real gardens.

Untangling the threads of time and space in *Threading the Labyrinth* has meant crashing through dense undergrowth while attempting to find the border that was originally built to keep order from chaos. While I can look back at early drafts of the novel to see how it changed over the past few years, discovering in each case the inspiration behind those changes—the movement from *here* to *there*, or from *not* to *is*—is more difficult, hence my revisiting of gardens explored, art viewed, books read, and talks attended.

Defining *Threading…* according to a critic's idea of this or that type of fantasy has been one of the most difficult aspects of the analysis. I have called *Threading…* historical fantasy while touching on liminal fantasy and the subversion of intrusion fantasy. In the end, what *Threading…* is closest to is instauration fantasy, a fantasy about restoration, "in which the real world is transformed" (Clute, 1997, "Instauration Fantasy"). My novel fulfils several of the characteristics of the form: it is set in the real world, contains a "sacred marriage," focuses on learning, toys with metafiction, and the characters take a backseat to the message. *Threading…* is set in our world and follows the history of a place from its heyday to its near demise to its rebirth.
It contains a "sort of sacred marriage" in the joining of Thomas and the Lady in the 1770s section, resulting in Toni as the descendant of the owners and the labourers; though my novel does not culminate in this moment—a characteristic of many instauration fantasies—Toni's return to the garden at the end is the final required step to link together her ancestors and the present. She is the culmination of the marriage. In each section of *Threading…*, the protagonist learns that she or he is part of the larger mechanism of time; this education peaks with Toni's study of her ancestral home and her writing of the place's history (a metafiction), incomplete though it is. Finally, this message of time's unending progression—and constant existence—in this one specific place is more important than any of the protagonists. Each of them cross the threshold of understanding, which places them in the machine but not in charge of it. It is only now, at the end of the analysis, that I can look back and see *Threading…* for what it is, or what it is close enough to in the absence of a perfect point-by-point relationship. As I argued in Chapter Five, how I and others read *Threading…* will vary widely and will

change from reading to reading; no piece of creative work is all one thing or another, but a combination of ideas.

In *In Search of Eden: The Course of an Obsession,* Weir ends his journey contrasting writing to working in the ground:

> It is also important that I write here. If the definition of a crofter is someone who does something else as well as farming, then making text is my equivalent of fishing, or of hunting game. Rebuilding this place has been very much like creating a narrative, its syntax and lexicon inherited but wrested into new shapes. I would, frankly, rather write about the soil than bury my hands in it, chop weeds and hack down straggling growth; but when I catch that chocolatey smell on fingers, see a row of cleared docks and thistles, spot the first curl of a bean-shoot coming through the ground, I would rather do anything in the world rather than write. (2007, p.159)

I spent ten years in my real garden, and there were times when I would rather have done anything in the world other than pull weeds and fight pests and weather. Like Weir, however, there were times during the process of writing the novel and this commentary that I would have rather gone back to those muddy days than sit down and write. But the pull of the garden as a fantastic ground, as a magical text, was too strong, and so I returned to my "roots".

In the end, creating a garden out of words is nothing like creating one out of the ground, and it is everything like it. I had to design it, plant it, nurture it, prune it, and, like anyone who moves house, leave it behind to become a garden for someone else to read. The garden in *Threading the Labyrinth* has several keepers, but just as a garden requires a keeper to be a garden, a novel requires a reader to be a novel.

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Appendix A

[This draft is from 3 Sept 2011. It is the draft that I shared with my fellow writers at the Milford Writers' Workshop in 2011. The bolded text is either quoted or referred to in Chapter Four of this commentary. Notes on this draft is bracketed and bolded. The title from this early draft is different to the final title of the novel. I have left the notes to my critique group explaining my plan at the end of this appendix.]

Walking the Labyrinth

The mess of green was once a formal garden, designed to be viewed best from the top floor of the house. The house, once a U-shape, was built of a soft grey stone and broad across the front. Its origin as an abbey was barely evident anymore as most of the east wing of the house was long gone, and shards of glass sparkled on the path like frozen stars. The damage was acute at the sight of the bomb blast, that side of the house nothing more than a hole in the ground. The damage spread like ripples from a stone dropped in a pond; the further from the house, the less bomb damage there was, but neglect had done its own harm. Borders of brick or box were choked with weeds and brambles. Parterres had lost all elegance, their swooping lines blurred from time and neglect and war. The enclosed garden, however, was still intact, its wall scorched and scratched where stone from the house had hit it.

A path appeared at the edge of the crater, connecting the ruined conservatory to the enclosed garden's wooden gate, its stone walls too high to see over from the ground but easily breached from the few high windows left on that side of the house. As was the custom, a sundial had once stood in the center of this garden as a mark of the family's wealth but, most important, a symbol of the intransience of life. For where better than among beautiful but temporary blossoms to remind visitors that they would soon wither as well and lie beneath their own bouquet?

The sundial that reached to the sky was grander, and more terrible, than any brass trinket that the earl or duke who had built the house could have imagined. Its body was a sleeping hump beneath Mrs. Arthur Robert Waddell, planted to commemorate the family's losses during that other Great War. With no one to prune her, she straddled the cockpit in a riot of pink blossoms like the wreath on the Derby Day winner. Sunbleached scraps of fabric and paper fluttered from her thorns, leaving the garden

looking like a party had been enjoyed and forgotten. Reaching high enough above the vines to cast a shadow and crow the o'clock that no one would see or hear—for there was no one to see or hear—sailed the dusty tail of a Messerschmitt Bf 109.

Birds used the tail as a perch and rabbits burrowed safe in the hollow beneath as a disconnected pile of bones inside a flight suit waited, like Sleeping Beauty, for discovery in its thorny cage.

#

It was always a garden of one form or another.

Gardens are borders between worlds, every gardener knows, built to keep order in chaos, to keep beauty from decay, to keep what is inside safe from the threat of what is outside. One day a poet would take an old proverb and make it famous with his line, 'good fences make good neighbors'. But Joan Cookstole didn't have time to ponder the philosophy of fences and borders and wilderness and gardens. She was too busy every day pulling weeds, on her knees scrabbling in the dirt, to see the greater design.

She was also too busy considering how she had ended up here, in this garden in what she had calculated as somewhere around 1600—it could have been 1596 or 1603, she wasn't sure without asking too many questions that would have gotten her in certain kinds of trouble.

And she wasn't Joan Cookstole.

Well, she was.

But inside Joan's body, and next to the parts of Joan's mind that still knew weeds from desired plants, she wasn't Joan. Just as she wouldn't be Ameila Turner the Land Girl and the Countess of Wiltshire and the madwoman in the conservatory and any other number of women.

Joan had just nicked her thumb—again—with the small curved knife she used to dig out the roots of nettles and dandelions, groundsel and docks and charlock. She scolded herself for being so distracted. Just the day before, Will had grumbled about supper being burned, and she had had no excuse other than that her thoughts had been so far away. He had been silent the rest of the evening, and she caught him studying her when he thought she wasn't looking. It had made for an uncomfortable meal and night.

When Joan stuck her thumb in her mouth and sucked it free of blood, the bitter tang wanted to remind her of something. She had a quick image of a silver mirror—finer than any she had ever seen—sending up sparks of sunlight. And then it was gone and she was back on her knees, the smell of dirt and crushed leaves high in her nose.

She wiped the knife on her apron and bent back to the ground, concentrating on the here and now.

It was bad enough she was on her knees all day, digging out roots to be sure the whole weed was gone. Like the Good Book said, evil must be taken out at the root. Same went for dandelions and thistle and sundry other unwanted plants or they will flower anew. Joan didn't mind a nice dandelion wine, but for four pence a day, a pence more than many at other estates, she did she was told, knowing that there were others who would take her place before the sun set. So she did as she was told in the garden, but her Lady was making the job more difficult.

Every morning Lady Balfour went into her personal garden and closed the gate behind her, locked it even. The new girls, always curious about that which is kept secret, couldn't help but ask questions about what was beyond the gate, yet it was never long before they were in there of an afternoon with the rest of the women, pulling weeds and cutting vines. Never in the morning, though, when the air was still cool and the sun not high enough to breach the top of the garden's wall. Because then the Lady spent two hours, from dawn until breakfast, locked in her garden, doing what, they didn't know for certain.

Before returning to the house and her table, Lady Balfour walked among the weeding women, extolling them to look upon God's wonders found in nature. Joan, the eldest of the weeders, didn't dare tell her Lady that she spent more daytime hours up close with nature than the Lady ever had, on her knees, fingernails caked with dirt, her skirts permanently stained.

The work was hard. What work isn't? That was why it was called work and not leisure, Joan figured. But to have to listen to the Lady as if every Monday through Saturday were church, that was too much. Like a prisoner she felt. On her knees, head down as the Lady marched back and forth along the line, as if none of them had ever learned their catechism.

This morning, however, she was in a certain state.

When Joan dared look up, she noted that Lady Balfour looked less like a fine lady and seemed ill, or a madwoman even. She paced among the weeding women faster than any other morning Joan could remember, her skirts snapping behind her with each turn as if she pulled a storm behind her. Her voice rose higher and louder as she admonished the women to join with God. Her hands moved about her as if she was on strings, like the marionettes at the faire.

And on her last turn before leaving the women to their work, Joan saw something that had her wondering the rest of the day whether it was she who was in a state and not the Lady.

Lady Balfour walked so close that Joan felt the air stir from her swirling skirts and was afraid for her hands lest they be trod upon**. The Lady stood still for a moment and the grass behind her split, as if a snake were sliding there.** And almost too quick for Joan to register what she had seen, or thought she had seen, Lady Balfour strode away and was gone.

Not-Joan, able to believe anything at this point, knew what she saw.

Joan, logical and sound yet as full of superstition as the next person in any time, told herself that she was just seeing things, that it couldn't be, that she'd been out in the sun too long.

She looked at the others then. At Abigail and Martha, Gwen and Lucy. They had shared news with each other for years, minded one another's babes, kept confidences and vigils.

Only Abigail caught Joan's eye. Her lips parted as if to speak, and then she put her head back down again, dug up a dandelion, and threw its carcass in the pile with the others.

Where Joan's left hand was pressed flat against the grass, the ground shook. Just a tiny tremor, as if she were in a house and someone was walking in heavy boots in the next room. But the earth doesn't shake from above, she knew. Or thought she knew. Only from below.

The other women, bent to their work, didn't seem to notice. The men nearby, pushing barrows of dirt and manure, went about their work.

She held her hand to the ground and waited, but it didn't happen again.

And then a pair of dirty, heavy boots stepped next to her hand. The ground didn't shake. Inside of them stood the head gardener, Edmund Vale.

"Joan, my Lady complains that her garden is choked with weeds," he said to the top of her head.

The Queen ruled the kingdom, and inside that kingdom the Lord Balfour ruled the house. The enclosed garden was the special domain of the Lady Balfour, but in the main the gardens, under the watchful eye of Lord Balfour, were Edmund's kingdom, and the women his servants, though he was little more than the same himself. He answered only to the Lord and Lady, and the women to him. But Joan had known him

ever since he was an apprentice, and though she did his bidding, she would not be cowed by him.

She stood and wiped the dirt from her hands onto her apron.

"Sir," she said, "you know that within this week the women and I tended my Lady's particular garden."

"Joan," he said. It wasn't a question, but she knew not to wait. It was a demand for immediate attention. She stood to face him.

"My Lady Balfour requests that her particular garden be weeded. She has a dislike of dandelions as they spoil the lawn's continuity and she desires a smooth surface upon which to walk when in contemplation."

Joan disliked Edmund's way of speaking, as if he were a close personal friend of the Balfour's. **The woman inside Joan didn't like him either.** He wasn't a tall man; they stood eye-to-eye. But he stood as if trying to make himself taller, or at least larger, with his shoulders pulled back and his head cocked at such an angle that he peered down, his eyes barely open. Gardens aren't rooms inside houses, though. You cannot fill a garden, even a small one, with your presence. It is always bigger. And Edmund's attempt fell short.

"We weeded her garden just last week," Joan repeated.

"Would you like to go to the house and send that message to my Lady?" he asked.

It was nearly the end of the day, and Lady Balfour would be in her garden the very next morning barely after dawn. They were going to have to either weed it now, and then go home to a late supper, or weed it early the next morning in the dark. She asked for two volunteers and waited as Edmund unlocked the garden gate.

The gate was taller that Joan, its wood painted a dark green that nearly hid it among the shrubs that surrounded the garden. For a moment, as the gate swung open, Joan saw a flash of light. No, she didn't see it, she remembered it. A flash of light, as bright as the sun reflecting off the edge of a newly sharpened spade, only much, much larger. And then the gate opened and a calm oasis of green met her.

Edmund was forced to wait for the women to finish so he could lock the gate behind them. Even though she was hungry, Joan didn't rush the job.

#

The first thing on Naomi Ellis's list: Do something about the plane.

Because a Messerschmitt Bf109, no matter how historic, doesn't belong in a Tudor-era costume drama.

And this garden was perfect, she decided. Or it would be once a gardening crew came in to clean it up, replant it, move a few beds around, add a few appropriate touches. Like a knot garden, and some of those poles with the standard-bearing animals on top like she'd seen at Hampton Court Palace. Those would film well against brilliant blue skies, their painted gold shields shining in the sun.

Where other scouts might see a wrecked garden and think that it was too much work, Naomi could see the movie in her head, could see the actresses in velvets and silks walking among lavender and roses in a perfect period garden, their skirts sliding behind them as they walked down the path to the enclosed garden's door, and then that door opening to the magical world that lay hidden within. It was easier to rebuild greenspace than buildings, and filming outside in the sunshine and even rain gave period pieces a sort of verisimilitude that didn't always come across when they filmed inside. Moviegoers saw paneled rooms and stone walls and thought 'stage', but saw gardens and knew they were seeing something real.

But the plane had to go, first thing. Yet perhaps not before the representative from the country's largest protectorate of threatened places showed up.

Country's Hope. She'd had run-ins with their reps before, had dealt with one office and another over the years. They were, for all intents and purposes, in the same business: selling the past to the present. Selling was the key word. It was all about money, and Naomi was planning on the price the solicitor had quoted. Finding out who held the papers to what was left of the house and its grounds had been difficult enough, but if this place was going to be taken on as a new acquisition by the nation's most prestigious heritage group, Naomi knew she would be stuck in a new circle of paperwork hell. And that, of course, would lead to all manner of setbacks and negotiations. The film was due to begin pre-production in just over a month, once summer was truly here, which had more to do with the weather than the date on the calendar.

The first time she'd visited the house, Naomi had brought her camera and had turned her phone on to voice record. The house loomed over the site, its brickwork dull and faded in spots, in others completely hidden by overgrown ivy and various vines, including a wisteria that covered windows, leading Naomi to imagine the lavender shadows inside. One wing of the house was nothing but rubble where a bomb had fallen on it over half a century before. But, according to her research, the house had weathered

all manner of destruction and repair over the centuries. Once an abbey, it had been half burned out during the Dissolution and had been transformed into a country estate during the Reformation. Then war—and peace—had taken its toll as armies turned the grounds to mud and wealthy owners turned the mud to new improvements, forever changing the view.

It made sense to her that the house would still be in disrepair. With so many of the great houses lost to the wars, the families left without heirs, their fortunes gone, the houses were often abandoned or sold off in parts. To take on such a large building and restore it, bring it into the twenty-first century, wasn't just daunting and expensive but, in some cases, a practice in insanity.

But that there was still a plane in the garden. That didn't make much sense. Wouldn't taking it away have been part of the war effort? Or at least the post-war cleanup?

So far out in the country, though, maybe no one cared.

She approached the plane, its tail reflecting the sun so brightly she had to shade her eyes with a hand.

[In this first draft, Tony is the quasi-National Trust representative. Having two business people, neither of whom are in any way connected to the place, made it difficult to create a sense of emotional connection to the place. This changed by the following draft.]

#

The Country's Hope representative arrived after lunch.

While Naomi was taking measurements of the parterres, she heard a voice and then a rather tan man in his mid-thirties, wearing shorts and a blue button-down with sleeves rolled up above the elbow, work boots and a floppy canvas hat, came around the side of the house. He carried a tape measure and his phone and was busy typing on it as he approached Naomi. He finished his text, pocketed the phone and held out his hand to her. "Tony Hammond," he said. "Never met anyone in the film business before."

"Naomi Ellis, part of the studio frontlines." She shook his hand, noticing the calluses along his palm. The outfit wasn't an affectation then, she decided. "I'm just taking down some notes, but I can show you around."

He lifted the tape measure. "Report says you're not as interested in the house interior, more in exterior shots and the garden." Before she could answer, he continued.

“So I’ll just go deal with the house and meet you back out here in a bit.” And with that, he walked away and around the corner to the front of the house where, Naomi guessed, he had the key for the front door.

She kept taking measurements and making a list of tasks to be done, people to call, small details to remember. But while the practical part of her brain made lists, the rest of her dreamed. Naomi couldn’t help but imagine the people who had lived in the house over the centuries, who they were and what they looked like, what the garden looked like. She knew enough about gardening history from her mother’s endless chatter to know that there were no extant gardens from the Tudor era, that the ones she’d seen were reproductions. But that didn’t matter. They were still filled with ghosts. And her audiences liked ghosts of the past. The contrast of white lace on the costumes and green lawn would be perfect for the Underground poster ads. Naomi saw the commuters, men sweating in ties and women tired from standing in heels all day, looking out of the train windows at the idyllic calm and cool of a seventeenth-century garden. The film would be beautiful and romantic. It would be a hit.

Thinking about movie gardens led Naomi to think about her own garden. Two years earlier she had bought a small house, semi-detached with its own front and back garden on a lovely street at the edge of Lewisham, far enough outside of London to be able to afford it, but close enough to be able to get to the city quickly. Between movies, she hired a crew in to landscape the back garden. The front was mostly paved in, but she’d chosen some small trees and shrubs to replace the overgrown rose bushes. They had clean lines, didn’t tend to go scraggly, and would be much easier to take care of, she knew. Her mother wasn’t impressed by her calming back garden.

“The gravel is too bright on this path,” she’d said to Naomi, her hand held up to shade her eyes. “And why no flowers? A nice bed along the wall here, to soften the hard edges. I could do you a lovely delphinium, some foxgloves, a real cottage garden.”

Naomi shuddered. If her mother had her way, she’d cover every inch of the yard with frills and blooms, making it look like the chintz couch Naomi had always hated as a child. Flower beds were beautiful on film, but over-fussy, messy, and old-fashioned in real life. So she steered her mother inside and distracted her with a nice lunch. Which, of course, her mother commented on as well.

But although Naomi had found her mother’s garden sense outdated, she knew from years of pruning and weeding at her mother’s knee that to take a blank slate and try to make it look as if a garden had been here for some time was going to be a challenge. But, that wasn’t her problem. She was here to do what the producers wanted,

which was to find a location for exterior shots, and to find one that came rather cheap. The interiors could be done in the studios.

Mr. Hammond interrupted her daydream. “House is a gem. A mess, to be sure. But a gem. You can still find pre-Dissolution details from the section that belonged to the abbey, and I followed alterations through the next few hundred years. It’s going to take a pile of money to bring it back, but I’m definitely going to recommend that Country’s Hope take it on.”

“What about the gardens?” Naomi asked.

He put his hands on his hips and surveyed the immediate area, a sunken garden with crumbling stone steps and half-fallen down balustrade. The roses were so overgrown here that there was no indication that there were even flower beds along the walls, and the paths had long since lost most of their white gravel to decades of rain and storms.

“A project like this, it’s usually the house first.”

Naomi weighed the consequences of what she was about to say. “We need the gardens.”

“I understand that.”

“No,” she said. “We need them now. Filming is to begin very soon, and these gardens need a lot of work to be ready.” She might have just exceeded her budget by fifty percent. The wish was that Country’s Hope would take on the garden work and charge the production company a fee. But Naomi might have just taken the heat off of CH for the majority of the bill to restore the gardens.

Tony Hammond took a longer look at the gardens then took his phone out of his pocket. “I’m going to have to make some calls. Please excuse me.”

Naomi tried hard to eavesdrop, but with nowhere to hide in the shade-less sunken garden, she could only catch snatches of his side of the conversation.

“They want me to do an inventory of what’s here, measurements, layouts, etc.,” he said when he returned.

Naomi offered to give him the measurements she’d taken. Then he left her to go look at the garden himself. “I especially want to look at the enclosed garden. Saw part of it from one of the upper windows. Caught a reflection, something metallic.” Before Naomi could tell him about the plane he was gone again.

#

Tony inspected the handle and hinges on the gate. His job was to look at the details, the myriad small things that were wrong, or that could go wrong. Where others would see the house and, of course, the crater where part of it used to be, they would also see the spectacle of it. The beauty of it. The history of it. They were easily blinded by it.

[The internal monologue about house restoration here was altered and given to Lauren in later drafts.]

Tony saw it all the time: people who spent their lives dreaming about the past, walking into a Country's Hope house and imagining themselves in silks and velvets, bustles and riding boots, ordering servants about, dining with royalty. What they didn't see were the weeks and months and sometimes years of backbreaking work to bring it all back to life. The artisans who could reproduce lost plaster castings or hand-painted wallpaper or embroidered bed hangings to match what was lost. And that wasn't even the necessary updates, such as ventilation and plumbing so that the public could tour the houses without freezing or passing out, and would have modern conveniences rather than a privy at the bottom of the back garden.

So he took a moment before opening the gate to the walled portion of the garden, a moment to look closely and add to the written list as well as his own mental list of items needing attention. When he pushed the gate open, however, the practicalities disappeared and were replaced by the image of himself walking the garden at twilight while lanterns, hung in the trees by the servants, glowed softly, reflecting off of the blush pink of the roses, a color so rich it matched the sunset. Tony's footsteps were silent, lost in the soft, thick turf, amazingly weed-free, as he approached the sundial. It stood almost as tall as he, rendering it nearly unusable as a means of telling time. He looked up and behind him, wondering whether it had been readable from the windows that used to be there.

Atop the stone column, a bronze horse, mane and tail flying, carried the world on its back. Slight ridges on the globe indicated land masses. Tony reached out and felt tiny bumps on the oceans meant to represent waves. At the top of the globe was a flat disc holding the sundial's gnomon, its curlicues casting an elaborate shadow. Around the top edge of the column ran a motto: *Ver non semper viret.*

Tony had seen dozens of sundial mottos, and they usually warned of death and impermanence. This one was no exception: *Springtime does not last.* But right now, in this garden, spring was at its fullest, that could not be denied. The sundial's base was a riot of pink roses, and the beds that surrounded the sundial, each a square with a

rounded divot etched out of the corner facing the sundial, were in full bloom. Irises, peonies, foxglove, delphinium, primroses. Pink, blue, yellow, purple, red, all battled to be the brightest. And everywhere, green. The soft green of lavender, the bright green of box. It was intoxicating.

The sound of trickling water attracted his attention to a small half-circle basin set into a niche in one wall. A stone mermaid, green with algae and lichen, topped the wall fountain, and the water poured from where she wrung her hair. In the recess to the side of the mermaid a wooden bench invited Tony. It was placed just right to give a full view of the garden but hide the person from anyone peeking a head around the corner of the open gate.

The longer Tony sat in the shade, the more the garden around him grew in intensity in the full afternoon sun.

The edges of the flower petals sharpened, standing out against the leaves as if drawn rather than grown. Stamens and pistils, violently yellow with pollen, pulsed against the pinks, lavenders, and blues. The sun glinted so hard off of the sundial that he could barely see its shape, only a tunnel of light, shooting like a laser into the sky. Bees droned among them blooms, their buzzing taking on the grating edge of a lawnmower. He could feel the catch and hitch of the butterflies as they rubbed their legs along their antennae. And the smell. At first the scent of the roses on the sundial and trained along the garden's walls were a light tease, reaching him with each small puff of breeze. As Tony sat, hypnotized by the garden, the scent had become overwhelming, like being trapped in an elevator with a woman drenched in cheap perfume.

He was panting, trying to catch his breath. The walls of the small garden closed in on him and he was pinned back into the bench. The tinkling of the fountain caught his attention again, and he turned away from the colors and light of the garden to rest his eyes again in the cool shade. Had he not noticed before that the mermaid's smile was a growl, her teeth sharp, biting into her bottom lip? He jumped up and hurried down the path and out of the enclosed garden, and as he closed the gate behind him he felt as if he had barely escaped a wild animal and was locking it inside a cage.

Tony wondered how the enclosure was still standing. It was surrounded by destruction. The house, to its west, was missing half of its closest wing. The conservatory, just to the enclosed garden's north, was nothing more than some twisted rods of metal growing out of a pile of broken glass like some sort of a sick bouquet. Hedges that had once lined this part of the garden were stumps. The tennis court, put in sometime around the turn of the last century Tony guessed, was only recognizable by

the two poles meant to hold the net. The surface was nothing more than a weed bed. He cringed to imagine what the pool next to it looked like up close.

As Tony walked along the path further away from the sunken garden and parterres were Naomi was still taking measurements and making notes, he spied another wall, this one of brick, with roofs peeking up above.

[All of Tony's internal monologue is related to his work rather than his life, an element which changed by the following draft.]

Kitchen gardens, Tony knew from his time at Country's Hope, were usually close to the house until the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the landscape craze took hold, inspiring the landowners to tear out everything within close view of the house to be replaced with gently rolling hills, copses of trees and shrubs, and follies. Kitchen gardens and orchards were moved to make way for grand vistas.

It wasn't that the kitchen garden itself was in any worse shape than the rest of the gardens, just that the mess of it seemed an insult when one considered its original purpose and the work that went into a vegetable plot of any size, let alone one that took up nearly a whole acre. The brickwork would require extensive repointing in many spots and complete replacement near the door to the head gardener's house. Espaliered fruit trees still stood frozen, arms outstretched as if caught midway through arrest. A few even showed signs of producing fruit the previous year. The vegetable, fruit and herb beds, however, were bare of anything resembling an edible harvest, unless one's appetite included dandelions, nettles, and the bones of small rodents, presumably left by foxes.

Beyond the east wall of the kitchen garden were the old stables, close enough for easy transport of the manure so vital to the vegetable beds, and a large glasshouse, most of the glass shattered.

The damage to the house and grounds was nearly overwhelming. Tony couldn't remember another possible acquisition needing as much work. Then again, he'd only been with Country's Hope for a few years, and his status as a newcomer meant that he'd been new ears for all of the stories about the months and years of work that had gone into one house or another, the bragging about whose acquisition had had more wood rot or worse drainage.

When he reached the end of the path beyond the stables that led to the woods, he backtracked and inspected the grounds to the west of the house. The sun was beginning to set, stretching his shadow behind him, making him pull his hat down a bit to shade his eyes. It was so bright that he almost missed it.

[The first draft contained a labyrinth that was an important element of the story. This changed by the third draft.] The

labyrinth.

Not a maze, like at some of the larger gardens, often originally planted or planned by this or that royal. But a meditative labyrinth etched into the sod and outlined in white gravel. Or, it had once been. Most of the gravel was long gone, only a few small drifts of it here and there to indicate it had existed at all. And what was once close-cropped sod, soft and green, was now sharp-edged grasses. There was a slight rise to the labyrinth, the center higher than the outside edges. Naomi was there, standing in the center, a black silhouette inside the shining white mandala of the sun.

Tony moved toward her, ignoring the intended purpose of the labyrinth and stepping over its pattern of twists and turns.

"It's random," she said. Most labyrinths were split into quadrants, directing those threading it to cover the four sections, the twists and turns symmetrical. It was, after all, there for contemplation rather than entertainment.

Halfway to the center, Tony studied what he could tell of the pattern. He couldn't suss out halves let alone quarters, and there was no mirror-image that he could see. His shadow stretched to the labyrinth's edge, the sun draining all green from the ground and the gardens, setting it all a harsh gold. The few intact windows left in the house reflected the light back at him, filling his vision with blue and black spots, blinding him for a moment.

When he turned back to Naomi, she was gone and the sun hovered above the earth crowning the labyrinth. He walked to where she'd been and he became the dark silhouette and the sun his corona. Tony half expected to feel some sort of power surge or even a tremor, something to indicate the importance of the spot. But there was nothing. And then Naomi's voice came to him out of the light.

#

It wasn't long before Joan learned why she'd been set the task of re-weeding the enclosed garden.

Guests arrived the next week, and gossip from the house servants trickled to the kitchens and then out to the garden laborers. Lady Balfour's family, her mother and father, her brother and his wife and child, had traveled with a gift for the Lady. A visit such as this was an excuse for a celebration, and the house was turned upside down to

be sure that all was clean and well presented, which meant that the kitchen was ordered to cook a feast. These instructions trickled down to the garden, where more fruit and vegetables were ordered for meals and flowers ordered for the tables as well as the beds, floors, and trunks. Lady Balfour was especially fond of lavender, and extra armloads were taken in for the bedding and linens.

Joan had been hunched over a bed near the drive leading to the front of the house when the carriages rolled past. She was familiar with the Balfour crest, painted on the door of every carriage and even carved over the lintel in the great hall. A mouse facing a lion, with a motto she could not read. The crest on the door of this carriage was larger, more intricate, and as inscrutable.

#

Lord Balfour wanted the sundial for the center of the knot garden that lay in front of the house.

"It is large, magnificent, and should have pride of place for when we entertain," he explained to his wife.

She disagreed. "It was a gift from my family. I should be allowed to place it where I desire."

"But, dear, your garden is too small for it. It will overpower the space and impede your meditation. Perhaps a fountain would be more to scale." Lord Balfour had heard Edmund, the head gardener, talk about scale and perspective. It seemed the right thing to say.

"I will have a fountain, if you are offering one," she said. "But I shall have the sundial as well. The motto is in keeping with my garden's nature as a space where I consider my mortality and the reward I hope to one day earn. Plus, I think that it is a rather complicated piece. Something my father obviously chose. To have it in the open would be to invite opinions on it freely, and I will not have my possessions gawked at by the uneducated. If we keep it behind the gate, we can choose who will see it, and who we think will appreciate it."

The idea of choosing who could see the bronze sundial, of deciding who was of a level to understand it, delighted Lord Balfour, and his wife got her way.

The head gardener oversaw the installation of the sundial and drew up plans and lists for new flowers to replace those growing in Lady Balfour's garden the next year.

She had asked for her garden to inspire thoughts on the impermanence of life. Flowers are nothing if not impermanent. But Edmund Vale's garden of short-living flowers was never planted, for late that winter the head gardener disappeared.

It was a few days of people asking after Edmund and the Lord sending down orders that went unfilled before anyone realized that the head gardener hadn't been seen by any one person.

"Perhaps he's gone to see his family. I seem to recall him saying they live only a day's journey away," one of the under-gardeners said when asked.

"Nah, he's got a sweetheart at the next estate over," claimed a maid.

No matter, for disappearing on personal business without the leave of Lord Balfour was serious enough.

When Edmund didn't reappear a week later, a search party of a sort was sent into the neighboring fields and woods to see if he'd come to a bad end, fallen in a ditch or caught in a poacher's cross-fire. But nothing was found. His rooms were clean but not empty, his coat still on a hook, his hat on a chair. His boots were gone, apparently on his feet wherever they may be. But a satchel was found behind the door. Edmund had, indeed, disappeared. Only Joan ever saw him again.

[In this draft, I summarised Edmund Vale's disappearance and James Hitchen's arrival in one scene. Doing so did not give me room to explore how Joan and Will felt about the change in the garden. I expanded on this idea in the following draft.]

Early the next spring the new head gardener arrived. One of the older under gardeners, Will Cookstole, had appealed to Lord Balfour to take over Edmund's position in the garden, as well as his house in the back wall of the kitchen garden, much warmer and roomier than the cottage he shared with his wife nearby. But Will's expertise was the orchard, and he had never been anywhere, he hadn't traveled or discovered new species to bring to the house. Edmund hadn't, either, but Lord Balfour had new ideas. The talk at the last party had been all about whose head gardener had brought what specimen over the ocean. No matter to Balfour that his support and purse would be needed for such an excursion. So Will's years of service were overlooked in favour of a man who had sailed to the Indies, had much knowledge of exotic fruit and spices, and carried the tattoos to prove it.

James Hitchens brought a satchel, two trunks, and a wagon bursting with boxes and parcels. The satchel contained small personal items, souvenirs from his travels, and a lock of his mother's hair. One trunk contained his clothes, boots, pistol, books and botanic treatises, maps, and drawings. The other trunk, heavier than expected, seeds and

pressed flowers and leaves. But the wagon was his dowry. Instead of fine tableware and embroidered linen he brought cuttings and rootstock from foreign lands that were guarded by swarms of sea creatures, where men covered in pelts swung from the trees and creatures the size of the wagon itself could impale a human on its teeth.

Lord Balfour considered Hitchens a bargain and a boon to his household. Hitchens considered Balfour a fool, but a rich one.

#

[In this early draft, Joan becomes obsessed with the Lady because of the vision of the tail from the first scene. Here I have her attempt to get closer to get a good look at the Lady. I also used this scene to highlight the embroidery that the Lady does, one craft among many for my female characters. This scene was later cut.]

Joan inched closer to the windows. Dig, hook, cut, pull, inch. She was only a few feet away from the lowest window on the west side of the house, where one of the maids—Alice—had told her that Lady Balfour spent her afternoons sewing in the sunlight. Most of the windows on the house were small, the expensive glass imported. But Lord Balfour had been sure to build as large of windows as he could afford in the narrow west side of the house.

Dig, hook, cut, pull, inch. With Edmund gone and winter setting in, there had been little chance for Joan to try for a second look at what she believed she'd seen the previous autumn. Since the arrival of her family, the Lady had changed her schedule and taken to her garden later in the day, after Joan and the others were finished weeding. By the time she took to the enclosed garden, Joan and the others were set to tasks away from that side of the house. But Joan couldn't shake the image of the tail splitting the grass behind Lady Balfour's skirts. It reminded Joan of stories about the devil, his forked tail, red and black and scaly, stories her grandmother told to keep the children in line, although Grannie had been Catholic. But the devil was the devil, and Lady Balfour a fine woman, finer than herself.

Another few minutes and Joan was beneath the window.

Inside the Lady was entertaining another woman. Taller than Lady Balfour, with a thin face and red hair—like the Queen, both Joan and not-Joan thought—she must be the Lady's aunt. So wealthy that the Lord should have considered her as a match, it was gossiped. After nearly a year in the Balfours' employ, not-Joan understood gossip as legal tender in such a closed-in society.

The older woman reached across the low table and picked up a skein of green ribbon. The embroidery frame was angled away from the window, leaving Joan to wonder what the picture might be. Having never been in the house, she imagined hangings dripping with blooms, birds, and butterflies, all rendered in jewel-bright silk, all immune to the change of seasons. In her own house in the village, Joan's best piece was a cushion cover in blackwork. Her Grannie had made it as a girl and left it to her oldest granddaughter. When Joan's older sister died, young and childless, Joan had inherited it. Though dark with age and stains, she treasured it for its intricate flower designs. She'd always wanted to make another cushion cover to match, to go on Will's chair, but she'd never learned the skill. Simple stitches, enough to make and darn clothes but not enough to embellish them, were all she had. Her skill was in identification of the flowers and plants, no matter a stitcher's artistic license. Joan almost hoped to see the embroidery stretched inside the frame more than to see her Lady's person. Or to see what she could of the secret that her Lady kept.

Joan alternated between pulling weeds and popping her head up to look in the window. Lady Balfour and her aunt barely moved. They didn't even seem to talk. It wasn't long before Joan ran out of weeds to pull. She moved around what she had already pulled to give herself something to reach for in case the new head gardener came by. The other weeders were spread out, none near enough to see what Joan was doing.

She'd never told anyone what she thought she saw, not even her husband Will. Especially not him. He shared his opinions of the Balfour family too easily for Joan's comfort, threatening to have them both booted from the garden staff. And Joan had only been hired on because she was the wife of the man who was trusted with the garden's orchard. Like Joan, Will Cookstole had little education but an innate talent. Hers was flowers, his fruit. Apples to be specific. And Lord Balfour rather enjoyed having an orchard that was the envy of his important visitors. Apples graced most meals: baked, spiced, cooked in pastry, mashed with meats. The Balfour table was never sated. And James Hitchens made sure that Will Cookstole kept up with the demand.

Hitchens brought a new type of apple with him to the Balfour house. Wrapped in a dirty bit of cloth, inside one of the many wooden crates that came with Hitchens, was a cutting of an apple variety that Balfour didn't have. Had never heard of in fact. Hitchens assured his Lord that the cutting came from the orchard of a French duke, and that that man had stolen his original cutting from an orchard in the Holy Land.

Where other men dreamed of piles of gold coins, Balfour dreamed of mountains of a rare apple, and now he would have it.

Under orders from the head gardener, Will Cookstole grafted Hitchens's new apple in a corner of the orchard. Will was superstitious about the orchard and knew that to cut down an apple tree was bad luck. So if the new apple took, the gardeners were to graft dozens of trees from this single source and replace as many of the old apple trees as could be replaced rather than start a new orchard in another area of his land.

Lady Balfour moved, jolting Joan from her reverie on her husband and apples and the new head gardener. But the woman only bent forward to pluck a skein of silk from the basket. Her skirts barely stirred. Joan noticed that the morning was waning, so moved to another area. She would have to arrange to be near the Lady another day.

That afternoon, Hitchens came along and unlocked the gate to the Lady's private garden, and Joan spent the rest of the day cleaning up from the sundial's installation, making sure that displaced gravel and rocks were picked out of the grass and replaced on the path.

Nothing moved in the enclosed garden. No birds sang, no bees buzzed, and no sounds from the rest of the garden—sounds of horses pulling carts or men digging or moving tools here and there—could be heard. The other women were far on the other side of the house, and Hitchens had left. Joan was alone. But she felt watched nonetheless.

She bent to her work and forgot for a while the problems with Will, her growing obsession with the Lady, the worry over the coming winter and her daughter's cough. Amy had come down with a fever early that spring. Lady Balfour, having heard somehow about the sick child of the orchard keeper, had sent treatments from her own closet. But Amy's cough had worsened until her parents feared that she would die. One May night while a storm raged outside their small cottage, Joan and Will had prayed over the little girl's bed.

After midnight, while Will paced, Joan felt herself nodding off in spite of the hoarse coughing coming from the little girl. Her head fell to her chest and she felt the room open up, as if the walls had disappeared. Joan thought to be afraid of this feeling, for surely it was some sort of bewitchment, but the voice inside her head said that all was fine and calmed her.

Then an idea came to Joan. She stood up, stepped past her husband, and threw the door open to the rain.

"What are you doing, woman? Don't you know that the night air will poison the child?" Will said.

"It's warm and moist," she answered. "It will be good for her lungs."

Will scoffed. "Keeping safe from the dangers that float in the dark air is what will be good for her."

He moved to close the door, but Joan stepped to block his path. "No," she said.

"You want to kill another child?" he asked.

Joan shook herself free of the image of little Ned's head flopping back on his neck while Will stood and screamed over her. But sending the memory away wasn't as easy as that. Being bent over the dirt all day gave her plenty of time to think.

A small sound came to her from across the garden, and she waited for Hitchens to appear from behind the gate and ask whether she was done.

After a few minutes she realized that she still heard the noise but that the man hadn't appeared. Still the birds didn't sing. All was silent except for the scrabbling noise, similar to the sound she made when digging with her little knife.

[Below is Joan's final experience with Naomi. After this, I deleted the "shared consciousness" and in a later draft realised that any character experiencing temporal instability would not know that he or she had done so.]

Joan put her knife down and sat back on her heels. She was alone in the enclosed garden. She'd never rested here, never seen it as a calming place. For her it was work, a place to be kept perfect, unlike her small dooryard at home where the chickens scratched at the dirt and she hung clothes to dry in the sun. What would it be like to have others do for her, she wondered. The ache in her knees told her that it would be very fine indeed to have someone—or many someones—cook and clean and care for the animals and gardens, and even dress your hair.

***No, it wouldn't,* came another voice inside her.**

Joan started. The voice wasn't hers.

Don't be afraid,* the voice said. *I'm here.

The scrabbling sound was louder now. Closer.

"Where are you?" Joan said, her voice barely above a whisper.

***I'm here, inside you,* the voice said.**

Joan grabbed up her knife and stood, feet apart, ready to protect herself. She ran here and there, looking into the dark corners beneath the shrubs, along the wall, even

behind the sundial's base. She was alone, and the gate was still closed. The scrabbling noise had stopped. Joan returned to where she'd been weeding and saw a set of furrows in the dirt and gravel around the sundial's base. Joan thought that the shapes looked like letters, but she couldn't read. She thought to find Will and bring him, but how would she explain that she'd scratched up the Lady's garden? She was only employed because of Will, and they needed all the money they could get. Plus, after Ned, she couldn't give Will another reason to suspect his wife.

Joan studied the shapes and committed them to memory. She would ask someone, or learn enough to read it herself. But how could she have written it if she couldn't read?

I did it, the voice said.

Joan brushed gravel across the scratches, gathered up the pulled weeds, and bolted from the garden. But the shapes never left her memory.

N A O M I

**

[Below are the notes that I left on this draft for my Milford class.]

A rather wishy-washy Synopsis/Summary/Out-Loud Bit of Thinking

My general plan is to write a fantasy novel of the history of an English country house garden over 400 years, give or take a few decades. I'm trying to avoid using the usual trope of a maze that's a time-travel device, but there is time travel of a sort. I have a female character who slips through time, inhabiting someone who works in the garden, such as Joan Cookstole. Later she will be in the same garden in the mid 1700s, the late 1800s, World War II, and perhaps other times.

The garden itself is a polder and a chronotope, with every incarnation of the garden existing all of the time; I visualize it sort of like a layer cake with a common thread running through it. Or, rather, a few common threads, such as the meditative labyrinth and the enclosed garden.

Framing the novel is the story of Naomi and Tony, the film location scout and the Country's Hope (read: National Trust) rep. As they work on the garden, the garden itself 'comes to life' and they experience, separately together, the garden's different incarnations. (However, I am still not sure *why*…)

In Joan's story, she tries to solve the mystery of what she saw that morning with the Lady Balfour while her husband, Will, runs into conflicts with the new head gardener as the apple orchard dies.

Other stories, unfortunately, have yet to be developed. And the common thread that runs through them—the common character thread, or what links them aside from the setting—is still something I am trying to cook. Doing a novel for a PhD, I've discovered, is different from doing one the old-fashioned way! I'm hoping that Milford will jump-start some of this thinking process for me, will help me tap back into the fiction-writing part of myself, which has been neglected for a while.

Appendix B

[This draft is from 16 Dec 2011 and shows distinct changes from the previous draft. The bolded sections are quoted or referred to in Chapter Four of the commentary. The final pages here include beginnings/sketches for the following novel sections. In this version, I have deleted the (undated) introduction that describes the garden in its present state and begun with Joan's point of view, as it is in the final draft. From this draft until close to the very final draft I began with "It was always a garden of one form or another." This line, however, kept the novel from beginning in any one character's experience and was cut.]

1600

It was always a garden of one form or another.

Every gardener knows that gardens are borders between worlds, built to keep order in chaos, to keep beauty from decay, to keep what is inside safe from the threat of what is outside. One day a poet would take an old proverb and make it famous with his line, 'good fences make good neighbors'. But Joan Cookstole didn't have time to ponder the philosophy of fences and borders and wilderness and gardens. She was too busy every day pulling weeds to see the greater design.

She was also worried about the voice she'd been hearing in her head. A woman's voice, to be sure, but not her own. Joan was unsure about so much these days, but that the voice wasn't her own she'd swear to in front of any magistrate. The way it spoke and the words it used—how could it be her own voice when she'd never so much as been outside of Hertfordshire?

This place is a total nightmare … So much bomb damage … You seen my phone?

When the voice disappeared for days, Joan would begin to relax. But then it would come upon her so suddenly, the volume of it so loud as to be a shout in an empty room. Joan would startle, drop her weeding tools, once even experiencing such a tremor that she upset a bucket of water she had been carrying, ending up soaked from cap to shoes. The week before as she studied the way the morning light stretched across the grass, turning the dew on each blade into a tiny shining jewel, much like the ones pinned to her Ladyship's dress, the voice came out of the silence. "Freaking me out!" it said. Joan screamed at that, as confused by the words as by their source. Her husband,

Will, happened to be close by, talking to the head gardener. Joan's explanation of a spider running across her hand didn't hold. She'd never been afraid of them before.

Joan had considered going to the priest about the voice, but she was afraid of him. When Katherine Childe had made it clear that she and Ned Miller, a man fifteen years her junior, wished to wed, Father Sloane had made it clear that the widow Childe had enticed the young man away from his purpose, because everyone knew Katherine Childe could not bring a live baby into the world. His sermons for weeks had been on the topics of fecundity on Christian life, the duty of wives, and the ruin of a community that succumbs to the temptations of the flesh without considering Christian duty.

Joan shuddered to think what sermons Father Sloane would be inspired by if he heard her secret, no matter how confidential the confession booth.

As if the voice wasn't terrifying enough, Joan had begun to lose time, too. Sometimes it was only an hour or so. She'd spent enough time working in the garden to know the curve of every flower bed, the shape of each path. She was able to work while keeping her thoughts focused elsewhere. But losing these moments—an hour, an afternoon, and all of yesterday—was different. They weren't like being ill or going to sleep. One minute she would be talking to the other women, listening to their complaints and gossip as they worked together in the knot garden, and the next thing she knew she was in the kitchen garden helping to thin out the seedlings or even once walking through the orchard on her way home, Will at her side.

Joan woke every morning in fear that nightfall would see her running mad through the village. She felt Will's eyes on her every evening over their meal.

Joan nicked her thumb—again—with the small curved knife she used to dig out the roots of nettles and dandelions, groundsel and docks and charlock. She scolded herself for not paying attention.

When she stuck her thumb in her mouth and sucked it free of blood, the bitter tang wanted to remind her of something. She had a quick image of a silver mirror—finer than any she had ever seen—sending up arcs of sunlight. And then it was gone and she was back on her knees, the smell of dirt and crushed leaves high in her nose.

She wiped the knife on her apron and bent back to the ground, concentrating on the here and now.

[By this draft I decided not to name any of the Lords and Ladies; they are only referred to by title.]

Every morning her Ladyship went into her personal garden and closed the gate behind her, locked it even. The new girls, always curious about that which is kept secret, couldn't help but ask questions about what was beyond the gate, yet it was never long before they were in there of an afternoon with the rest of the women, pulling weeds and cutting vines. Never in the morning, though, when the air was still cool and the sun not high enough to breach the top of the garden's wall. Because then the Lady spent two hours, from dawn until breakfast, locked in her garden, doing what, they didn't know for certain.

The gate opened and Joan started, realizing she'd been daydreaming, hoping she hadn't lost more than a few minutes. Her Ladyship locked the garden gate behind her. But rather than walk away as she usually did, she studied the women in the grass around her.

It was bad enough she was on her knees all day, digging out roots to be sure the whole weed was gone. Like the Good Book said, evil must be taken out at the root. Same went for dandelions and thistle and sundry other unwanted plants or they will flower anew. Joan didn't mind a nice dandelion wine, but for four pence a day, a pence more than many at other estates, she did she was told, knowing that there were plenty others who would take her place.

Joan tried to look busy, not daring to move to another spot where she'd spied some weeds needing her attention, not daring to attract her Ladyship's attention. There was something a bit too intent in her Ladyship's gaze, like a cat watching the hay for a mouse.

[By this draft I gave the Lady a speech rather than summarise her monologue. Though she does not have a name any longer, the Lady has a voice and becomes a more filled-out character, though she remains flat throughout.]

"Look, women, upon God's wonders," her Ladyship started. "The trees and clouds, the birds and beasts, even the smallest bugs that swarm in the sky. They are all here for our use and our education. Nature is His way of speaking here on earth."

Joan didn't dare say that she spent more daytime hours up close with nature than her Ladyship ever had, on her knees, fingernails caked with dirt, her skirts permanently stained. She didn't dare say anything.

The work was hard. What work isn't? That was why it was called work and not leisure, Joan figured. But to have to listen to the Lady as if every Monday through

Saturday were church, that was too much. Like a prisoner she felt. On her knees, head down as the Lady marched back and forth along the line, as if none of them had ever learned their catechism.

This morning, however, she was in a certain state.

When Joan dared look up, she noted that her Ladyship looked particularly sharp this morning, her hair pulled back so severely that her nose and chin pointed forward like the bow of a boat. She paced among the weeding women faster than any other morning Joan could remember, her skirts snapping with each turn as if she pulled a storm behind her. Her voice rose higher and louder as she admonished the women to join with God. Her hands and arms danced in the sky around her head as if she were a marionette at the faire.

"I would wish to state that this garden is truly a paradise," her Ladyship continued. "But nay, I cannot. There can be no paradise where there is rot and decay. Where flowers fade and turn to slime in the morning frost. Where weeds choke the paths that have been carefully laid. Where water lies stagnant and no insects ripple its surface. Death will not be avoided, so there is no paradise. Our work is to toil in faith, to create order from chaos on the land that He has given to us and to keep it, as His stewards."

And on her Ladyship's last turn before leaving the women to their work, Joan saw something that had her questioning whether her sight was not going the way of her hearing, whether all of her senses were to fail her.

[I was still keeping the fantasy element of the Lady having a tail; by this draft I was much more descriptive and said it was a tail. This element was not deleted until much later in the drafting of this section of the novel.]

Her Ladyship walked so close that Joan was afraid for her hands lest they be trod upon. The Lady stood still for a moment and the grass behind her split.

A tail, ringed and long and pinkish grey, twitched in the shade of her Ladyship's fine skirts.

[By this draft, however, I had also got rid of the person "inside" Joan who has her own opinions on matters and can see what Joan sees. Deleting that element helped me focus on Joan's point of view only and helped "un-muddy" the scene.]

And almost too quick for Joan to register what she had seen, her Ladyship strode away and was gone.

Joan looked at the others then. At Abigail and Martha, Gwen and Lucy. They had shared news with each other for years, minded one another's babes, kept confidences and vigils.

Only Abigail caught Joan's eye. Her lips parted as if to speak, and then she put her head back down again, dug up a dandelion, and threw its carcass in the pile with the others.

Where Joan's left hand was pressed flat against the grass, the ground shook. Just a tiny tremor, as if she were in a house and someone was walking in heavy boots in the next room. The other women, bent to their work, didn't seem to notice. The men nearby, pushing barrows of dirt and manure, went about their work. And then a pair of dirty, heavy boots stepped next to her hand. Inside of them stood the head gardener, Edmund Vale.

"Her Ladyship complains that her garden is choked with weeds," he said to the top of Joan's head.

The Queen might rule the empire, and his Lordship's kingdom was his house and lands, but in the main the gardens were Edmund's domain. He answered only to the Lord and Lady, and the women to him. But Joan had known him ever since he was an apprentice, and though she did his bidding, she would not be cowed by him.

She stood and wiped the dirt from her hands onto her apron.

"Sir," she said, "you know that within this week the women and I tended my Lady's particular garden."

"Joan," he said. It wasn't a question, but she knew not to wait. It was a demand for immediate attention. "My Lady requests that her particular garden be weeded. She has a dislike of dandelions as they spoil the lawn's continuity and she desires a smooth surface upon which to walk when in contemplation."

Joan disliked Edmund's way of speaking, as if he were on the same footing as his Lordship. He wasn't a tall man; he and Joan stood eye-to-eye. But he held himself as if trying to make himself taller, or at least larger, with his shoulders pulled back and his head cocked at such an angle that he peered down, his eyes barely open. Gardens aren't rooms inside houses, though. You cannot fill a garden, even a small one, with your presence. It is always bigger. And Edmund's attempt fell short.

"We weeded her garden just last Thursday, today being only Tuesday," Joan repeated.

“Would you like to go to the house and send that message to my Lady?” he asked.

It was nearly the end of the day, and her Ladyship would be in her garden the very next morning barely after dawn. They were going to have to either weed it now, and then go home to a late supper, or weed it early the next morning in the dark. She asked for two volunteers and waited as Edmund unlocked the garden gate.

The gate was taller that Joan, its wood painted a dark green that nearly hid it among the shrubs that surrounded the garden. For a moment, as the gate swung open, Joan saw a flash of light. No, she didn’t see it, she remembered it. A flash of light, as bright as the sun reflecting off the edge of a newly sharpened spade, only much, much larger. And then the gate opened.

There was barely an inch of space between the plants that did not hold a dandelion. Instead of a calm oasis of green, the space was dotted with yellow, yellow, yellow. Joan couldn’t understand how it was possible.

Edmund was forced to wait for the women to finish so he could lock the gate behind them. Even though she was hungry, Joan didn’t rush the job.

#

The first thing on Naomi Ellis’s list: Do something about the plane.

She found the garden much as she expected: the overgrowth was so thick that she was barely able to see the conservatory roof from only ten feet away; shards of glass glittered up at her through the dirt and weeds with every step; ponds were clogged with years’ worth of fallen leaves, and large bowl-shaped depressions in the parterres promised to become muddy ponds after heavy rains; and every piece of stone work was damaged, some missing corners and others smashed to dust.

But a Messerschmitt Bf109, no matter how historic, didn’t belong in a Tudor-era enclosed garden.

From the house side, the enclosed garden still seemed whole, its walls solid but covered in vines. Open the gate on dry, scraping hinges and you looked onto the few acres left beyond where the enclosed garden’s other walls once stood.

Naomi had seen a few cases of extreme negligence in her years with the National Trust. Open roofs, rotted out floors, ceilings covered in mold, mice, owls, and all manner of animals nesting in cupboards and even, once, a feral cat and her kittens sleeping away in the unsprung remnants of an eighteenth-century sofa. Looking beyond

the mess and seeing the house and gardens restored to a state of glory was her job. She thought of it as a kind of time travel.

Where the public might see a wrecked garden and think that it was too much work, Naomi could see the past, like a movie, in her head. Could see women in velvets and silks walking among lavender and roses in a perfect period garden, their skirts sliding behind them as they walked down the path to the enclosed garden's door, and then that door opening to the magical world that lay hidden within. Builders and gardeners might argue over which was the more difficult job: rebuilding fallen-down houses or bringing greenspace back to life, but Naomi believed that it was imagining it through from beginning to end that was the hardest. It was why so many estates belonged to the Trust. Well, lack of money as well as lack of imagination and perseverance.

Regardless, she didn't understand how the plane was still there, over half a century after the end of the war. But, then again, everything about this estate was a surprise.

[house name] was nestled in the English countryside only an hour north of London. Once surrounded by thousands of acres of rolling hills and fields belonging to the family that had owned it, what was left of the house was now cocooned behind estate housing and an old garden suburb neighborhood.

[Though in this draft Naomi is still a location scout, Tony has changed from the quasi-National Trust representative to the American heir of the place, which helped create a better connection between a present-day character and the location.]

The records described the current owner as the son of an American cousin to the last British member of the family. For over four hundred years the family had owned the house and its surrounding acres, and for more than three-hundred and fifty of those it had cared for the place. Time and war had taken its toll, those great families rarely survived change and wars. While most of the great old houses had been sold off, their contents auctioned and carted away, this one had avoided that fate through the intervention of the wealthy American branch of the family tree. But the intended restoration project had fallen through, and now that man's son had inherited war damage, vandalism, and the ravages of time and nature.

Naomi took out her camera and snapped pictures of the bomb crater from all sides, walking in a spiral, moving further out from the center with each circuit. Then she turned her lens on the damage to the house.

The house loomed over the site, its brickwork dull and faded in spots, in others completely hidden by overgrown ivy and various vines, including a wisteria that covered windows, leading Naomi to imagine the lavender shadows inside. The south east wing of the house was nothing but rubble where a bomb had fallen on it over half a century before. From what few records she'd been able to dig up –she was depending on the owner to come up with family archives to fill in the gaps—the house had weathered all manner of destruction and repair over the centuries. Once an abbey, it had been half burned out during the Dissolution and had been transformed into a country estate during the Reformation. Then war—and peace—had taken its toll as armies turned the grounds to mud and wealthy owners turned the mud to new improvements, forever changing the view.

It made sense to her that the house would still be in disrepair. With so many of the great houses lost to the wars, the families left without heirs, their fortunes gone, the houses were often abandoned or sold off in parts. To take on such a large building and restore it, bring it into the twenty-first century, wasn't just daunting and expensive but, in some cases, a practice in insanity.

But that there was still a plane in the garden. That didn't make much sense. Wouldn't taking it away have been part of the war effort? Or at least the post-war cleanup?

So far out in the country, though, maybe no one cared.

She turned back toward the open gate to the enclosed garden, her camera at the ready. As she approached the plane, its tail reflected the sun so brightly she had to shade her eyes with a hand.

[Though Tony is now the heir, in this draft he still enters the scene being described from another point of view. This choice still led to a distance, which was to change in later drafts, where Toni (a woman) appears before the house and speaks in firstperson point of view, creating immediacy.] The American arrived after lunch.

While Naomi was taking measurements of the parterres, she heard a voice and then a rather tan man in his mid-thirties, wearing shorts and a blue button-down with sleeves rolled up above the elbow, trainers and a baseball cap, came around the side of the house. He was typing furiously on his phone. He finished his text, pocketed the phone and held out his hand to her. "Tony Hammond," he said. "Never met anyone in the estate restoration business before."

"Naomi Ellis, part of the front lines." She shook his hand, noticing the calluses along his palm. He didn't look wealthy to her, but then again she was used to slick

bespoke suits, silk ties, and pointy Italian shoes as income advertisements. Maybe they did it differently in America. “I’m just taking down some measurements and notes, but I’ll have some questions.”

“I brought what records we had. There wasn’t much, though. Just some old receipts, a few order forms and lists, and some old drawings. More like scribbles, really. Of a garden. Not *this* garden.” He put his hands on his hips and surveyed the immediate area, a sunken garden with crumbling stone steps and half-fallen down balustrade. The roses were so overgrown here that there was no indication that there were even flower beds along the walls, and the paths had long since lost most of their white gravel to decades of rain and storms. “Well, maybe this garden, under all of the weeds and brambles.”

“It’s more likely that the garden in the drawings is gone. Too many changes in what was fashionable over the centuries. There isn’t an extant Tudor garden in existence, actually. What we have here is mostly Victorian, made up in some ways to look like an older garden. There are a few parts that date before that—the 1700s—but you never know what we may find.”

He shrugged. “Isn’t the house more important anyway?”

“I like to think of them as a package deal. They were often altered simultaneously, so we can read the garden like we read the house.”

“Well, whatever. Seems a shame to tear down such a grand old place, especially since my family’s had it for so long. We’ve got to keep history alive, don’t we?”

Naomi gave a tiny nod. The retort she was about to give about how well the family had taken care of its history was cut off by the ringing of a phone. With that he was off, walking away along the weed-choked path, one hand lifted in a sort of benediction to Naomi and her work. “See you a bit later,” he called back over his shoulder.

She went back to taking measurements and making a list of tasks to be done, people to call, small details to remember. But while the practical part of her brain made lists, the rest of her dreamed. For Naomi, these grand old gardens were filled with ghosts. She couldn’t help but imagine the people who had lived in the house over the centuries, who they were and what they looked like (probably a bit like Mr Hammond, although in something more refined than shorts and trainers, she was sure), what the garden looked like.

Thinking about lost gardens led Naomi to think about her own garden. Two years earlier she had bought a small house, semi-detached with its own front and back garden

on a lovely street at the edge of Lewisham, far enough outside of London to be able to afford it, but close enough to be able to get to the city quickly. Much to her mother's shock, she hired a crew in to landscape the back garden. The front was mostly paved in, but she'd chosen some small trees and shrubs to replace the overgrown rose bushes. They had clean lines, didn't tend to go scraggly, and would be much easier to take care of, she knew.

"The gravel is too bright on this path," her mother had said to Naomi, her hand held up to shade her eyes. "And why no flowers? A nice bed along the wall here, to soften the hard edges. I could do you a lovely delphinium, some foxgloves, a real cottage garden."

Naomi shuddered. If her mother had her way, she'd cover every inch of the yard with frills and blooms, making it look like the chintz couch Naomi had always hated as a child. Flower beds were beautiful in the make-believe world of the past, but overfussy, messy, and old-fashioned in real life. So she steered her mother inside and distracted her with a nice lunch. Which, of course, her mother commented on as well.

#

Tony Hammond hung up his phone and took notice of where he was. He didn't see the Naomi woman anywhere and wondered whether she'd left.

It was a bit past noon and he could feel the sun beating down on the back of his neck. There were no benches that he could see anywhere—he made a note to tell Naomi that benches and shade would be good ideas out in the open for when visitors came to his house. But in front of him was a garden door, painted green to blend in with the vines that climbed up and over it.

He inspected the handle and hinges on the gate. They seemed sound enough, he thought. Things were just built better back in the day. His job as a lawyer was to look at the details, the myriad small things that were wrong, or that could go wrong. Where others would see the house and, of course, the crater where part of it used to be, he knew better than to be blinded by the overwhelming beauty and history of the place. Tony appreciated fine craftsmanship from when men were in close contact with the materials of life—wood, iron, glass, gold—and he appreciated how much such things cost.

[By this draft I had changed Tony from quasi-National Trust rep to heir, but I still did not know his life outside of these moments; as a result, it all feels rather sketchy and vague.]

Family legend had it that Elizabeth I had slept here once, so Tony hoped to get a decent price for the place. He had visited some historic homes in the States himself, to get an idea of how they worked, how many visitors they had. But since his father's death things had been so hectic with the taking on of a new partner, to loss and addition of new clients, as well as dealing with his mother and her insistence on staying in her home alone. He couldn't afford to put the hours into digging through old family papers beyond an afternoon spent with his mother going through his father's home office. Even taking a few days off to fly to England to see the place for himself had eaten into his already packed schedule, and he'd be working weekends for the next month to make up for it. But, right now, he felt his neck getting sunburned. Wasn't it supposed to rain all the time here?

[Tony's experience in the garden where it tries to lure him in is identical to the draft in Appendix A and has been cut for space.]

[Tony's backstory is beginning to develop as he walks around the garden. Much of this was kept for the final draft.]

This garden looked more like the sort he was used to from visit's to his aunt's when he was young. She was always so proud of the vegetables she grew out back of her house, and Tony had helped her one summer to weed the beds and keep the rabbits away from the tender plants.

It wasn't that the kitchen garden itself was in any worse shape than the rest of the gardens, just that the mess of it seemed an insult when Tony remembered how much time it took to keep even his aunt's small plot weed free. The brickwork would require extensive repointing in many spots and complete replacement near the door that led to what looked like a small house built into the wall. Espaliered fruit trees still stood frozen, arms outstretched as if caught midway through arrest. A few skins left from rotted pears and apples littered the dirt beneath. Otherwise, the garden beds were bare of anything resembling an edible harvest, unless one's appetite included dandelions, nettles, and the bones of small rodents, presumably left by foxes.

Beyond the east wall of the kitchen garden Tony found the old stables, close enough for easy transport of the manure so vital to the vegetable beds, and a large glasshouse, most of the glass shattered.

When he first drove up to the place it hadn't seemed so bad, but up close the damage to the house and grounds was overwhelming. His hopes of unloading it quickly were dampened. And he hadn't even seen inside the house yet.

When he reached the end of the path beyond the stables that led to the woods, he backtracked and inspected the grounds to the west of the house. The sun was beginning to set, stretching his shadow behind him, making him pull his hat down a bit to shade his eyes. It was so bright that he almost missed it.

[The labyrinth is still in this draft but was taken out not soon after. I chose to delete it because, as I explain in Chapter Four, it distracted me and I got caught up in wanting it to be the "answer" to the garden's magic. I also deleted it because I resisted the garden-maze-as-time-travel-device trope found in so many children's fantasy novels.]

The labyrinth.

Not a maze, like he had seen in photos at some of the other National Trust houses, but a meditative labyrinth etched into the sod and outlined in white gravel. Or, it had once been. Most of the gravel was long gone, only a few small drifts of it here and there to indicate it had existed at all. And what was once close-cropped sod, soft and green, was now sharp-edged grasses. There was a slight rise to the labyrinth, the center higher than the outside edges. Naomi was there, standing in the center, a black silhouette inside the shining white mandala of the sun.

Tony moved toward her, ignoring the intended purpose of the labyrinth and stepping over its pattern of twists and turns.

"It's random," she said. Most labyrinths were split into quadrants, directing those threading it to cover the four sections, the twists and turns symmetrical. It was, after all, there for contemplation rather than entertainment.

Halfway to the center, Tony studied what he could tell of the pattern. He couldn't suss out halves let alone quarters, and there was no mirror-image that he could see. His shadow stretched to the labyrinth's edge, the sun draining all green from the ground and the gardens, setting it all a harsh gold. The few intact windows left in the house reflected the light back at him, filling his vision with blue and black spots, blinding him for a moment.

When he turned back to Naomi, she was gone and the sun hovered above the earth crowning the labyrinth. He walked to where she'd been and he became the dark silhouette and the sun his corona. Tony half expected to feel some sort of power surge

or even a tremor, something to indicate the importance of the spot. But there was nothing. And then Naomi's voice came to him out of the light.

#

[The dream about rats was related to the vision of the tail under the Lady's skirts, which I deleted long after. By this draft there is no indication that Joan can read; her ability to read was written into a future draft and foreshadowed the appearance of Hitchen's book.]

Joan went home that night after re-weeding her Ladyship's special garden and dreamed about rats. Rats in her larder, rats in her bed, rats in her skirts. She woke feeling as if she'd not slept at all, but told herself she'd rather have a simple dream than to hear that voice again.

She returned to the garden with some trepidation, but she and the others were tasked with weeding an area on the opposite side of the grounds from her Ladyship's place of meditation.

Later that afternoon a row of three carriages rumbled down the main path to the front of the house. Joan was familiar with the Balfour crest, painted on the door of every carriage and even carved on the lintel over the front door. A mouse facing a lion, with a motto she could not read. The crest on the door of this carriage was larger, more intricate, and as inscrutable to her.

From the gossip that trickled from the house servants to the kitchens and then out to the garden labourers, Joan learned that her Ladyship's family—her mother and father, her brother and his wife and child—had traveled with a gift for the Lady. A visit such as this was an excuse for a celebration. The kitchen ordered extra fruits and vegetables for meals and flowers for the tables as well as the beds, floors, and trunks. Her Ladyship was especially fond of lavender, and extra armloads were taken in for the bedding and linens, nearly stripping all of the lavender bushes clean.

#

[The scene showing the conversation between the Lord and Lady in which they discuss the new sundial is identical to the previous draft and has been cut for space. It was several more drafts before that scene was cut completely.]

#

[In the previous draft Edmund Vale disappears at the very end of the previous scene. By this draft I had realised the need to write in another instance of the garden's magic before he is gone. This is the first time we see "temporally unstable" characters in the novel. It is also the beginning of Thomas Hill's existence as a vital character.]

The following morning Edmund Vale came to Joan again. And again the flower beds and paths behind the green gate were clogged with weeds. And in the center of it all stood the sundial, in the spot where Edmund had directed the other men to set it until such a time as a hole could be dug and it could be properly installed. But his Lordship and her Ladyship could not see the sundial's possible spot with the garden in such a state.

So Joan spent the rest of the day pulling weeds, being particularly careful with any that had gone to seed, their fuzzy white heads threatening to reseed the whole of his Lordships hundreds of acres.

Nothing moved in the enclosed garden. No birds sang, no bees buzzed, and no sounds from the rest of the garden—sounds of horses pulling carts or men digging or moving tools here and there—could be heard. The other women were far on the other side of the house, and Vale had left. Joan was alone. But she felt watched nonetheless.

She bent to her work and forgot for a while the voice, Will's suspicious looks, her Ladyship's new appendage, and her daughter's cough. Amy had come down with a fever late that spring. Her Ladyship, having heard somehow about the sick child of the orchard keeper, had sent treatments from her own closet. But Amy's cough had worsened until her parents feared that she would die. One May night while a storm raged outside their small cottage, Joan and Will had prayed over the little girl's bed.

After midnight, while Will paced, Joan felt herself nodding off in spite of the hoarse coughing coming from the little girl. Her head fell to her chest and she felt the room open up, as if the walls had disappeared. Joan thought to be afraid of this feeling, for surely it was some sort of bewitchment. It was not long after she had first lost an afternoon, and she stayed ever vigilant against it happening again.

Then an idea came to Joan. An idea but no voice. She stood up, stepped past her husband, and threw the door open to the rain.

"What are you doing, woman? Don't you know that the night air will poison the child?" Will said.

"It's warm and moist," she answered. "It will be good for her lungs."

Will scoffed. “Keeping safe from the dangers that float in the dark air is what will be good for her.”

He moved to close the door, but Joan stepped to block his path. “No,” she said.

“You want to kill another child?” he asked.

Joan shook herself free of the image of little Ned’s head flopping back on his neck. But sending the memory away wasn’t as easy as that. Being bent over the dirt all day gave her plenty of time to think, to dwell on her problems.

A small sound came to her from across the garden, and she waited for the head gardener to appear from behind the gate and ask whether she was done.

After a few minutes she realized that she still heard the noise but that the man hadn’t appeared. Still the birds didn’t sing. All was silent except for the scrabbling noise, similar to the sound she made when digging with her little knife.

Joan put her knife down and sat back on her heels. She was alone in the enclosed garden. She’d never rested here, never seen it as a calming place. For her it was work, a place to be kept perfect, unlike her small dooryard at home where the chickens scratched at the dirt and she hung clothes to dry in the sun. What would it be like to have others do for her, she wondered. The ache in her knees told her that it would be very fine indeed to have someone—or many someones—cook and clean and care for the animals and gardens, and even dress her hair.

As she gathered up the pile of limp, lifeless weeds, the sound came to her again.

Across the garden, behind a row of potted trees, were a pair of boots. He was on his knees, one hand on the edge of a pot, fingers digging into the soil around the tree, the other hand holding up a woman’s skirt. She was exposed from ankle to rump, her skin by turns white and ruddy from where he’d grabbed her.

The scratching, scrabbling sound Joan had heard was the scrape of the woman’s shoe tops on the gravel. The violence of their actions—rutting Joan thought of it—should have resulted in more noise. Grunts, moans, sighs, the slapping of flesh on flesh. But except for the gravel being disturbed they were silent.

Joan watched, her apron twisted tightly in her hands. To move would be to alert them to her presence. But she’d been in plain sight the whole time. She was unsure whether they’d been in the garden when she’d arrived or had snuck in while her back was turned.

She had no idea who they were.

They weren’t servants, she was sure. Perhaps they were guests of the house, or the guests’ servants.

With one final thrust the man sagged over the woman's back. She peeked back at him and smiled. And with a tenderness at complete odds to the scene, he smoothed her skirts back down, caressed her face, and landed a chaste kiss on her cheek.

They stood and faced Joan. She bent her head, not seeing them, and in turn not being seen. She didn't hear them walk away, didn't hear the gate open and close.

The woman's hair had been white, a giant froth like soap suds. And her dress the colour of a freshly opened rosebud, draped artfully over a pair of hoops that stuck out from her hips, was like nothing Joan had ever seen.

The next thing Joan knew she was in the orchard, picking up fruitlets from the ground as Will and his other men thinned out the apple trees. She stood up in shock and reached out to lean against the closest tree, dropping all of the apples that she couldn't remember gathering into her apron. She watched them roll around her feet and wondered how she'd ever pick them all up again.

#

The head gardener oversaw the final installation of the sundial and drew up plans and lists for new flowers to replace those growing in her Ladyship's garden the next year. She had asked for her garden to inspire thoughts on the impermanence of life. Flowers are nothing if not impermanent. But Edmund Vale's garden of short-lived flowers was never planted, for he disappeared.

It was a few days of people asking after Edmund and his Lordship sending down orders that went unfilled, or filled late and haphazardly, before anyone realized that the head gardener hadn't been seen by any one person.

"Perhaps he's gone to see his family. I seem to recall him saying they live only a day's journey away," one of the under-gardeners said when asked.

"Nah, he's got a sweetheart at the next estate over," claimed a maid.

When Edmund didn't reappear a week later, a search party of a sort was sent into the neighboring fields and woods to see if he'd come to a bad end, fallen in a ditch or caught in a poacher's cross-fire. But nothing was found. His rooms were clean but not empty, his coat still on a hook, his hat on a chair. His boots were gone, apparently on his feet wherever they may be. But a satchel was found behind the door. Edmund had, indeed, disappeared. Only Joan ever saw him again.

Over their supper one night, Will told Joan of his plan.

[This conversation between Joan and Will is the first appearance of Will's ambition, giving him a more rounded character.]

"I am going to see his Lordship tomorrow to ask for Vale's position." He said it without looking up from his plate.

Joan lowered her spoon. "You think that wise?"

"I think it the wisest course of action, to take advantage of Vale's running off like that. His Lordship is at a loss, and I know this garden. Been working it since I were an apprentice."

"Been working the orchard," Joan said.

"The orchard that his Lordship watches over closer than Adam himself. He's a rare one for apples, he is. So why not let me have the position, and the house that goes with it?"

"Because he has you to watch the orchard," Joan said.

[In the previous draft, Hitchen arrives the following spring. In this draft I moved his arrival to within weeks in order to condense the time span in this section of the novel to better control the narrative.]

Within weeks, a new head gardener arrived. One of the older under gardeners, the man in charge of the orchard, Will Cookstole, had appealed to his Lordship to take over Vale's position in the garden. In addition to an increase in pay and prestige, having Vale's house in the back wall of the kitchen garden, much warmer and roomier than the cottage he shared with his wife nearby, was an attractive feature. But Will's expertise was the orchard, and he had never been anywhere, he hadn't traveled or discovered new species to bring to the house. Vale hadn't, either, but his Lordship had new ideas. The talk at the last party had been all about whose head gardener had brought what specimen over the ocean. No matter that his support and purse would be needed for such an excursion. So Will's years of service were overlooked in favour of a man who had sailed to the Indies, had much knowledge of exotic fruit and spices, and carried the tattoos to prove it.

James Hitchens brought a satchel, two trunks, and a wagon bursting with boxes and parcels. The satchel contained small personal items, souvenirs from his travels, and a lock of his mother's hair. One trunk contained his clothes, boots, pistol, books and botanic treatises, maps, and drawings. The other trunk, heavier than expected, seeds and pressed flowers and leaves. But the wagon was his dowry. Instead of fine tableware and embroidered linen he brought cuttings and rootstock from foreign lands that were

guarded by swarms of sea creatures, where men covered in pelts swung from the trees and creatures the size of the wagon itself could impale a human on its teeth.

Lord Balfour considered Hitchens a bargain and a boon to his household. Hitchens considered Balfour a fool, but a rich one.

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[The scene with Joan outside trying to see the Lady at her embroidery is identical to the previous draft, so has been cut for space. At this point I still had not expanded Will's and Hitchen's roles and their actions are only told via thirdperson point of view through Joan.]

#

[At this point, I was still working on figuring out how the voices and Joan's reaction to them worked. Here she has a "black out" of a sort and has lost time. Working with this element was difficult and complicated the narrative, leading me to delete it soon after.]

She woke up over the fire. She was so surprised by finding herself there that she gasped, inhaling dark smoke and the acrid scent of burning fish. She coughed then and flapped her apron to dispel the smoke. Will grumbled something about tending to the pig and was gone, out the door. Joan stood in her kitchen and trembled with the shock of losing an afternoon. Or had it been a whole day? Oh, fish. It must be Friday if it was fish. So she'd only lost a few hours.

[This is the first draft of the Georgian section of the novel. It never got any further than this because soon Thomas Hill was created.]

1750

The garden came all the way up to the house now. Some mornings, the mist hung low, hiding the horizon with only the tops of the tallest trees breaking above the fog. These were the trees that had been allowed to stay or those that had been brought in to fulfill the designer's vision of the landscape. On those mornings, anyone inside and

gazing out the windows might be surprised to see a small herd of deer come walking out of the mist to graze on the lawns, as if magically born from the air itself.

Louise asked why the cows didn't come up to the house to graze as well.

"The ha-ha keeps them in their own field," the gardener answered.

Louisa had heard about the ha-ha. At the far end of the lawn seen best from the library windows, it was a wall sunken into the ground, all but invisible from the house side. The ditch behind it was too deep for the cows and sheep to climb or jump. When Louisa was younger she'd been forbidden to go near the far end of the lawn. In her five-yearold mind, she had imagined the ha-ha as something so silly the cows couldn't climb the hill for laughing. A drawing by her brother Henry had dissuaded her of this idea.

"But how do the deer get up so close?" she asked.

The gardener sighed. Answering a little girl's questions distracted him from the tasks at hand, but Miss Louise was the daughter of the Nth [rank] of [blahblah], and he had no choice.

"Deer are crafty creatures, able to leap tall hedges and fences to get at the flowers and fruit. But we gardeners and landsmen have put in special fences, double fences if you like, too wide for even the swiftest buck to jump. If you saw them of a morning that close to the house, well then there's a break in a fence somewhere. And, likely, your mother's best outdoor blooms are stripped bare."

Louisa thought of her mother's roses, and then thought of her mother's reaction when she heard about the deer. She suspected venison would be on the supper menu sooner rather than later.

[This is the first draft of the Victorian section. After writing this I realised that I did not want any one section to be told (completely) from the POV of the landowner.]

1855

Anyone visiting the garden from the past would barely recognize it now. The glasshouse that once brought forth pineapples to please His Lordship and important visitors had been joined by half a dozen others, all larger and more elaborate than the last. They were for growing exotics, those blooms and foliage that grew in the Empire's furthest reaches. England's climate may have been cold and rainy, but below the iron gingerbread roofs it was as hot and sticky as Bombay.

Frances May, Lady Randolph, directed her gardeners, all men of a similar height and stature. She wanted her specimens to stand out, not the help. Since her husband had decided to stay in the London house, Lady Randolph had taken up a hobby to fill her time. The governesses were there to raise her five daughters, Mrs Botkins was there to run the house, and Mr Botkins so efficiently ran the grounds that Frances had ample time to do what she wished. This far out in the country, who cared whether she dressed in plain muslin most days.

[Amelia, soon to be renamed Irene, sprung out of my head pretty much instantly. The closer I got to the present day in the novel, the easier it was to write the characters.]

AMELIA IN WWII

Amelia Beamer strode across the field, a shovel in her hand. She had digging to do. Her job was important—nay, vital. The country depended on her, the voice over the wireless said when asking for volunteers for the Women's Land Army. This army's troops were necessary to bring the country through this dark time. With her fellow soldiers, she was part of the front lines. A force of good. A force of right. A force of plenty. She was a Land Girl.

"That's good. Right there," Hal Duncan called to her. "Stop!" he yelled. "Now lift the shovel and put it over yer shoulder. Yer other shoulder, the right one. Yeah, like one a our boys. Now face into the sun, I want your face all golden. Beautiful. Okaaaaaaay, cut!"

Amelia slumped a bit, dropped the shovel, and waited. It had been her fourth take, and she knew by now not to move until Hal said to. Being yelled at once for walking out of camera range and slumping down on the tractor runner had been one too many times.

"Whatcha waitin for, Christmas?" he said, his voice hoarse with yelling, all the time yelling. "Yer done! Go to hair and makeup with the other girls and we'll do one more group shot before we lose the light. Hustle, girl!"

In her real life, Amelia Beamer had been a chambermaid in a small hotel in Chelsea. That was before she went to work in a tea shop and after a short turn taking tickets in a movie theatre. The movie theatre—the Lantern—was the closest she'd gotten to her real dream of being an actress in Hollywood. Audition after audition she'd

been told she was pretty but not pretty enough, talented but not talented enough. Then the war happened and suddenly she found herself changing sheets and cleaning toilets in between running for the shelters where she passed many terrifying nights sleeping with strangers in Underground stations. Her dreams of Hollywood were nearly snuffed out one night when a bomb hit the hotel. She'd been on her way home from an evening out with some of the other girls. Just as she came around the corner and onto the street where the hotel sat, the air raid siren started up. She turned and ran for the shelter [check—what shelters in Chelsea in wwii?] and the bomb's blast blew out ever window for blocks around. Amelia was mostly deaf for days, her hands and neck scratched and pockmarked from the shards of flying glass. She'd covered her face with her handbag and hunched down behind an alley wall.

One of the other girls, Martha, engaged to a boy in the RAF, hadn't been so lucky. Amelia didn't see her trip over an abandoned bicycle in the dark, didn't hear her call for help. In the silence of the aftermath, Amelia found Martha face-down, the back of her head smashed in by a brick thrown in the explosion.

A week later Amelia got word that her application to the Women's Land Army had been accepted, regardless of her lack of experience on a farm. Her mother had had a small garden when she was little, but beyond geraniums and marigolds, Amelia knew nothing about growing plants.

So she really was a Land Girl. Only she had barely had the chance to do more than walk back and forth across this muddy field. The same war that had killed her chances of getting to Hollywood had brought Hollywood to her in a muddy field. Hal had picked her and a few others out of a group of girls, saying she had 'the look'. She didn't think she looked much like a farmer; her uniform was nearly spotless, her hair shiny, nails perfectly clean. To show the folks at home—at home… Where was that now? Devon? York? London?—that even English Roses were working hard for the cause. Hal directed the make-up artist smudge some dirt along Amanda's cheekbone, on top of the pancake make-up that covered the tiny scars that were barely visible along her hairline where the handbag hadn't protected her enough. Aside from the mud caking the bottom of her brand new boots, it was the only dirt Amelia could claim to have worked in so far.

As the sun set, Hal had Ameila and the other five girls stand on their shovels and pretend to dig up the earth, put on gloves and pretend to fix the not-broken tractor, feed the draft horse (which none of them had ever so much as touched before today) and move in a line to herd a half dozen brushed and could-white sheep toward a picturesque

barn in the distance. Meanwhile, the Land Girls who actually worked this farm were busy off-camera and out of sight milking cows, hauling manure, pulling weeds.

"How about you pitch in, find out what a real Land Girl does, eh?" one had called out as Amelia walked form the make-up tent back to where Hal and his crew were setting up the morning shots. She thought of calling out, explaining that she was more than an actress, but the sneer on the other girl's face made Amelia feel that no matter what she said it wouldn't matter. She was here to be pretty, to cheer up the 'folks at home'.

The Women's Land Army representative who chaperoned the girls on the shoot pulled Amelia aside at the end of the day.

"Your assignment's come in," she explained. "I thought I'd wait to tell you."

"Don't keep me in suspense," Amelia said.

The representative took a sheaf of papers out of her bag, took one from the pile and thrust it at Amelia. "You've been assigned to work here."

Amelia looked around at the crew breaking down the lights and camera equipment. Beyond them, the girls who had heckled her earlier stood in a line, a phalanx hip-to-hip, grimy arms folded, hair tied up in dirty scarves.

"Wait, what about filming?"

"You won't be needed anymore."

"But I heard we were going to do a city shoot, back in London, show off the allotments in the gardens?"

"You signed up to work the land," the representative said. "Here's some land, and they're short a girl. Good thing you brought your bags with you. I'll have one of the men take it out of the truck before we go. Good luck."

And with that, the woman left Amelia. Left her to the farm, the horses and cows, the dirt and crops, but most frightening of all, to the Land Girls.