

THIS CITY IS A CLOCK

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation includes a novel, *This City is a Clock*, and a critical introduction, “Technologies of the Novel.”

This City is a Clock charts the construction of Edinburgh’s New Town and the development of the Scottish Enlightenment. The protagonist is a boy when the novel begins and has grown to old age by the final pages. As a child, he is put to work by the architects of the new town when they discover that he has unusual mathematical gifts. To them, his strange talent seems an emblem of the new rational order they are hoping to create. And the boy is eager to help them: he wants to be able to escape his impoverished background. His family is so poor that they live next door to a witch, and she terrifies him. However, the architects repeatedly run into trouble, their goals being opposed by a variety of vested interests in the city, and the boy discovers that the only way he can overcome these troubles is to go to the witch and ask for her advice. But each time she offers to help, the cost to him and the rest of the city grows.

“Technologies of the Novel” explores questions of craft, inter-generational artistic anxiety, and the development of the Anglophone novel over time.

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CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

Technologies of the Novel: an essay on anxiety, craft, and influence

Note to the reader: this essay is the critical introduction to my creative dissertation, the novel *This City is a Clock*. The argument presented here covers a large number of topics and connects together several historical periods. As a result, readers may (understandably) feel that it mentions too much in too great a hurry. Partly this is because I have elsewhere written full-length papers on some components of the argument (on Anthony Trollope's narrator, for instance), and I am imagining that those papers would join this text as chapters in a potentially longer work. I hope readers will treat the excessive number of claims in this essay as either a scholar's sketch of a broad idea, or as a creative writer's explanation, offered in a slightly more informal mode, of how he sees literature, the novel, and the artistic climate in which he works.

Technologies of the Novel

“It is, indeed, always *dangerous* to be placed in a state of unavoidable comparison with excellence, and the danger is still greater when that excellence is consecrated by death... He that succeeds a celebrated writer, has the same difficulties to encounter.”

—Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler No. 86* (qtd. in Bate 3)

"Life is vulgar, but we know not how vulgar it is till we see it set down in his pages."

—Henry James, from his review of Anthony Trollope's *Miss Maisie* (qtd. in Michie 11)

When my work as an aspiring fiction writer feels particularly difficult, I find myself only further disheartened by the memory of the late Victorian writer George Gissing. Gissing offers a disturbing lesson to those of us who believe that writers can improve their craft through study, or who assume the progression of the Anglophone novel is comprised of a linear accumulation of approaches and techniques. Gissing lived after the great Victorian realists, those famous and popular novelists such as Charles Dickens and George Eliot; Gissing always struggled to sell enough books to support his expenses, and

even his most popular work, *New Grub Street*, was not read on the level of, say, Dickens's most successful novels. Gissing, however, had the example of Dickens to learn from. He admired and studied Dickens in great detail, and wrote a book-length appreciation, *Charles Dickens: a critical study*. And yet, when one opens the early pages of *New Grub Street*, it reads nothing like the opening of most Dickens novels. There is nothing of the rhetorical scope of *Bleak House*, and none of the striving for pathos and sympathy of *Great Expectations*. To a present day reader, *New Grub Street* seems much more contemporary, more "literary" than most of Dickens's novels: the reader finishes the first scene of *New Grub Street* unsure what the novel is about, or who is the hero of the story is supposed to be. Narrative tone, alone, seems to suggest who to admire, and who to disdain: the first major character we meet merely announces, "with cheerfulness" (Gissing, *New Grub Street*), that someone is "being hanged in London at this moment." Additionally, as the novel progresses, the book's subject matter seems captivated by rather narrow issues of art and artistic authenticity, questions which would have seemed very out of place in *Oliver Twist* or *Middlemarch*. The puzzle, therefore, is this: Gissing was talented and prolific. He desperately wanted to make a living from his writing. And he minutely studied from childhood a writer, Charles Dickens, he loved and considered "so original in subject and treatment, so wonderfully true in observation" (Gissing 7), who *did* successfully make a lot of money from his books. Why, therefore, is Gissing's work so very different from Dickens's? Why couldn't Gissing simply have imitated, just a little more closely, his model?

To tell one writer to copy another may seem, on first glance, perverse advice. After all, novelists want to be unique, to stand out from their peers and predecessors. Additionally, it is commonly said, and with good reason, that a writer can only write his or her way. One could not ask Gertrude Stein to write like Billy Collins, or demand that James Baldwin change his prose style to be more like Raymond Carver's. However, it is possible to deduce, from a writer's choices on the page, what sort of *reader* he or she is imagining, and the interests, patience, and deductive powers of such an imagined figure. The "implied reader," to use Wayne Booth's term, is to an extent discernible in the author's published text. A work of epic space opera, for instance, implies that its reader can keep track of a two dozen protagonists, and a similar number of futuristic technologies; a reader of a crime novel, the text implies, is able to detect subtle clues and psychological wrinkles. So while it makes no sense to complain that Gissing's work does not *resemble* Dickens's, it perhaps *is* reasonable to point out that Gissing's implied reader is, in comparison, a much more rarified creature. Gissing's novel suggests a reader who is willing to wait for many pages before discovering which characters to support; someone who is reading carefully enough to detect the purpose of a scene in a small shift of tone or emphasis. Strangely, however, this implied reader is also much more focused in interests than the one who read *Bleak House*. Gissing's implied reader can keep track of only a few characters, and dislikes meeting a broad range of society, caring more or less exclusively about the concerns of working artists. Of course, this implied reader may have reflected Gissing's actual public: a great amount of time had passed between *Bleak House* and Gissing's novel, and perhaps during that time external factors (such as literacy rates,

technological change, availability of books and rival entertainments) had altered the nature of the British novel reader, and Gissing was merely adjusting to meet their demands. Indeed, in his study of Dickens, Gissing himself comments that a “social revolution” separates their periods (Gissing 1). However, Gissing's popular and critical achievement relative to Dickens, both in his own time and since, suggests that if he believed he was adjusting his work to the requirements of a new age, he was not fully successful at doing so. Because of Dickens's example, Gissing had been given a detailed picture of the reading public, one that for all Dickens's foibles and limitations, seems to have remained accurate through multiple centuries and countries, but despite all his careful study, Gissing could not use that model in his own work, writing instead to a radically different sort of human being.

The example of Gissing is interesting because it suggests a problem in the development of the novel, a barrier between the transmission of techniques and motifs from one generation of writers to another. Much of creative writing pedagogy assumes, reasonably enough, that carefully reading the works of the past is the key to a writer's self-improvement; working novelists, even in their most iconoclastic modes, continually place themselves within artistic lineages, claiming a place in a specific tradition. One thinks of John Barth, for instance, commenting in “The Literature of Exhaustion that “...the question seems to me to be how to succeed... those who *succeeded* Joyce and Kafka” (Barth 67). Gissing's example encourages us to ask whether this self-image that writers have, of being swaddled in the texts of their predecessors, is actually true. To put the question more generally: how available are the techniques of fiction writers of the

past to the fiction writers of today? Or, in other words: to what extent are living novelists able to imitate, learn from, and develop the methods of their predecessors? My argument is that the barriers between artistic generations are much higher than usually understood. This claim, of course, requires some explanation. If writers are, in fact, *not* returning to and re-working the canon of past literature, then something rather strange must be going on.

The topic is of particular personal interest to me as a (living) fiction writer. I have just completed the second draft of a historical novel, which I am submitting as dissertation of my PhD, and, as a result, that manuscript is the product of not only the usual imaginative work required to create a work of fiction, but also the scholarly study I have carried out during my degree. Additionally, during my research, I have studied novels by Walter Scott and other eighteenth and nineteenth century novelists for guidance, as my own book is set in eighteenth-century Scotland. Yet I still feel, artistically, at the end of all that study, immensely far from the great examples of the past. This is not a question of quality, but of category: my work seems absolutely far away from the writers I have studied. I find their implied readers very difficult to write to, and even to imagine. Indeed, while reluctant to make pronouncements about what other writers should do, on a general level, I now feel more than ever that to try to "write like Walter Scott" would likely be a disastrous proposition today.

In this essay, I will offer a theory to explain the artistic and psychological gulf between the completed novels of the past and the practices of writers of the present day. To put it simply, my hypothesis is that novels are generally constructed via the help of a

specific "technology of the novel," a historically-specific school of thought that offers the writers of its time a set of methods for writing a book, giving those writers pre-made views about the nature of the novel form, the nature of an author, and the nature of a reader. Such "technologies" are hard to see because they exist as a set of assumptions, shared to lesser or greater degrees by the artists and critics of a particular period: they are preserved as letters, diary entries, craft of fiction textbooks, syllabi, critical remarks. These "technologies" offer writers a training not only in technique, but, perhaps more importantly, they also offer those aspirants a vision of what a novel is supposed to be, and what a successful novelist is supposed to look like. They advise writers on who their reader is, and how that reader wishes to be addressed.

These ideas about the novel, although they may be hard to put into words, are sufficiently precise that they prevent a later period's novelists from assuming the stance (both to their work and their readership) of a writer from an earlier period. While they survive, these technologies of fiction can persist over decades, and, as long as the technology prospers, it is taken up and developed by one novelist after another. One thinks, for example, of the methods of omniscient narration developed and refined from Austen and Scott to Eliot and Trollope. However, when a given technology collapses, its attributes are not merely discarded by the writers of the next generation, but sometimes even forgotten, pushed out of consciousness, as though as though that method of writing books never existed in the first place. It is possible to show, for instance, that the Victorian writer Anthony Trollope deliberately and systematically used his omniscient narrator's presence to *do something* to his reader, provoking the reader's interest through

repeated rhetorical manipulations and moral exhortations, but it is literally not possible to explain that technique via the modern day terminology of "craft," because craft not only lacks the capacity to explain those old, narrator-centric techniques, but, as a school of thought, craft also lacks the inclination, the artistic outlook, to perceive the novel form in the way Trollope perceived it. A fallen technology's attributes may be accessible to a historic later period only via parody, ridicule, or glaringly incomplete homage.

My theory is heavily indebted to the scholar of artistic anxiety, Walter Jackson Bate, and his seminal but largely forgotten work, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*. Like Bate, I will present evidence of artistic barriers and limitations which working artists half-unknowingly administer on their own psyches. I will also mostly adopt Bate's qualitative evaluations of different artistic periods, his preference for a more populist outlook in art. However, my own experience as an aspiring author has led me to question the emphasis that Bate places on "anxiety" as a central term. I feel personally too indebted to the skills taught by my own period's technologies — such as the mastery of "craft" which creative writing offers to would-be authors — to want to see it primarily as a negative response to the artist's "burden of the past." Here in the busy twentieth-first century, the past seems very far off. Additionally, I also have found, over the years that I have discussed his theories with scholars and lay people, that Bate seems to deal poorly with examples of *success* in writing. His praise of non-anxious artistic periods is perhaps less illuminating and persuasive than he thought it would be. (Bate, for instance, saw the Romantic poets as heroically non-anxious — at least when compared to the anxious Shakespeare-fearing English eighteenth century, and the anxious Tennyson-fearing

Modernists of the early twentieth). Perhaps this is because, as Bate might respond were he to read this essay, I am so deeply swallowed in anxiety and belatedness that I cannot imagine a non-anxious existence, that I am so far removed from the sources of Anglophone literature (Shakespeare and Milton) that I am too fearful to imagine a return to that original power. But, putting those doubts aside, I prefer to re-frame Bate's conception of anxiety in a more positive, and, I hope, more productive light. If something makes good writing possible, perhaps it deserves to be elevated from psychiatry. Hence my premise of "technologies."

Before going on to discuss Bate's theories, and how they clarify George Gissing's dilemma, it feels necessary, given that this discussion focuses on anxiety, inter-generational artist contests, and mis-reading, to mention Harold Bloom's much more famous work, *The Anxiety of Influence*. While I personally find Bloom's readings of individual poems to be rewarding and insightful, my project intends to draw very little from his specific theories. Bloom's idea of artistic anxiety is a wholly hermetic one, a process going on deep within the minds of only the greatest Western authors, and one that is sealed off from historical (and even personal) concerns. Bloom's anxiety of influence is necessarily Freudian and biographical, because it requires the living poet to read and be moved by earlier poets, but, strangely, this anxiety is mostly presented as an unconscious force: a poet's actual attitude to Shelley or Keats is not important. As Bloom has many times asserted, the anxiety of influence appears in the *poem*, not the poet. While their contemporaries might reasonably have assumed that Wallace Stevens or Elizabeth Bishop were responding to the events of their lives, to the shared concerns of the day, in Bloom's

vision, this is all a false surface, ultimately irrelevant, a mask under which thrives the poet's true interests: the invisible battle being waged with the writers of the past. Such a model of anxiety is gleefully elitist, because only the best writers of each generation are worthy of it; it also renders moot the study of the criticism and intellectual moods of a writer's period, because such moods cannot interfere with the great artist's subterranean struggle with the predecessor.

Bloom's framing of artistic anxiety is rhetorically powerful but, I think it is fair to say, difficult for scholars who are not Harold Bloom to use. The critic is turned into a narrow kind of gnostic "knower," someone who can simply divine in *The Waste Land* a struggle with, say, Walt Whitman. Walter Jackson Bate's theory, in contrast, opens up anxiety to everyone, which is why I have found it a more productive framework. In Bate's conception, critics, scholars, and essayists help to frame an age's primary "anxiety," and minor authors can often be more profitably studied as examples of it than major ones. Anxiety, for Walter Jackson Bate, happens on the surface, right in the open, and rather than being carried out in secret, creative and scholarly types discuss it endlessly, if one knows what to look for.

Two other theories of generational disjunction, artistic influence, and mis-reading are also worth mentioning here, as they have been invaluable in the formation of my ideas. Fredric Jameson's *A Singular Modernity* presents, in compact form, an anxiety-like theory of the shift from the "high" modernism of Pound and Eliot to the "late" modernism of Stevens, Beckett, and Nabokov. Jameson is curious as to the reduction in the breadth of topics and subject matters in the late modernists (Wallace Stevens writes about fewer

things than Eliot, for instance), and he is specifically dismayed by late modernism's lack of obvious political commitments (Stevens's work is not explicitly engaged, in comparison to the revolutionary dreams of Eliot and Pound). Jameson proposes, to explain these changes, that high modernism changed into late modernism by a process of derivation. The original modernists, working in wholly new fields, "without models" and without "any pre-existing social role" (199), finding themselves, as a result, alone, were able to entertain and explore all kinds of radical possibilities. It just seemed a natural extension of their mandate to catalogue the changing world they saw. The *late* modernists, however, Jameson says, had no such innocence: "Nabokov is unlike Joyce first and foremost by virtue of the fact that Joyce already existed" (200). Because they loved the original modernists, a late modernist such as Nabokov was able to derive from the example of someone like Joyce the true essence of modernism: the essential autonomy of art and the artistic mind, "art about the creation of art" (198). That was what, Jameson claims, the original modernists were really about, even if they did not know it. Having derived this insight, tragically, the late modernists could not then bring themselves to write about politics, social concerns, or a transformed world, because they had figured out what their art was "really" supposed to be about: the play of the imaginative mind itself. Jameson even ties this political quietude to a technical facet in the prose of late modernists such as Nabokov and Beckett: the importance of the sentence as an aesthetic unit: the beautifully-designed sentence is the model of a purely autonomous, purely imaginative world.

This theory which, at least in *A Singular Modernity*, Jameson presents with regrettable brevity, is fascinating because it suggests that little chronological time is needed for one generation of writers to change utterly from their predecessors. The change, too, may well be unconscious: the late modernist generation may well have considered themselves to be continuing the ideals of Joyce, Woolf, Barnes and so on, just as, a generation later from them, a writer like John Barth believed himself to be continuing Nabokov's mission. But at each stage, the preceding generation's work has become impossible to duplicate. Simply by reading what has come before, and "deriving" the central message within it, novelists are unable to write like the authors they most admire.

Jameson also makes the provocative claim, in *A Singular Modernity* and elsewhere, that scholarly members of English departments are just as prone to this sort of generational shift, this blindness that arises from a careful study of the past. The make-up of present day English departments, Jameson has repeatedly claimed, also has to be understood as part of the inheritance of late modernism. In the mid-twentieth century, the critics who had been young when modernism was high took over the academy, and these victorious scholars gave themselves the task of explaining James Joyce to man, presenting their students with a philosophy and a history that made modernism central. Despite all the changes to English as a discipline since the mid-century, that "pro-modernism" conception of Western literature has never been abandoned, Jameson claims, and, even today, the entire curriculum has to be viewed in this light (even the historical periods that, on the surface, have nothing to do with modernism). One can see potential

evidence of Jameson's claim in the way that surveys of the novel, such as Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* and Eagleton's *The English Novel*, frequently end up with *Ulysses* or *Finnegan's Wake* serving as the final entry in their sequence, as though the high modernist novel is the culmination of centuries-old trends. Jameson even makes the outrageous claim that the "canon is simply modernism" (210): the canon is not, as we believe it to be, a collection of the best books ever written, but, instead, English professors' attempt to create a lineage for modernism. The canon that we know, in other words, is an alternate history of the novel, one that was imposed during the mid-twentieth century, in order to explain modernism.

(Even more bewilderingly, Jameson then remarks that post-modernism mistook the canon, this late-modernist creation, for modernity as a whole, and thus post-modernism's revolution, he implies, was based on mistaken grounds from the start.)

Jameson's theories make writers (and scholars) seem very isolated from one another. One generation may find its predecessor generation, even if they admire that generation, simply inexplicable. In contrast, however, *Dickens's Hyperrealism*, by John R. Reed, postulates a close and competitive relationship within a generation, specifically between the Victorian realists: Dickens, Eliot, Trollope, Gaskell, Collins and others. Reed, working off Jerome Meckier's thesis, claims to detect an "arms race" in the best novels of the period, a collaborative struggle to continually "overcome the version of realism of their contemporaries" (Reed 56). Each time one writer brought in a new device, a new way to win readers over, his or her rivals tried to adapt the same technique and push it further. The heights of Victorian realism, therefore, were not the result of one solitary

writer's genius, according to Reed, but rather the results of a collective of writers, all of them sharing similar (or at least mutually compatible) ideas of what their readership was, what a writer was supposed to be doing, and how a novel was supposed to work.

Both these theories, Jameson's and Reed's, however, focus only on one specific artistic period. However, Walter Jackson Bate's theory of anxiety and influence, developed in *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*, presents a general theory of art, one that can be applied to any medium and form. Bate's theory offers more or less testable hypotheses, and can be adapted as easily to 18th century poetry as to modern-day creative writing. Unfortunately, Bate's ideas seem to have forgotten, perhaps because they bear such substantial similarities to Harold Bloom's, even to the point of sharing key terms such as "priority" and "belatedness" (Bloom did cite Bate in *The Anxiety of Influence*, but one may feel he did not cite him sufficiently). Bate's ideas, however, I believe, are far more useful and productive than Bloom's.

Bate begins his study with a question: why did English poetry, in the 18th century, change so drastically from its predecessors in the 16th and 17th centuries? To put it more simply than Bate does: why were the blank verse paragraphs of Shakespeare and Milton replaced by the highly regular rhyming couplets of Pope and his contemporaries? On the surface, the eighteenth century style developed because Restoration writers came to admire "neo-classicist" ideals of art, ideals developed in Augustan Rome which had long been written about and praised by English critics. Before the restoration, however, working artists had, in practice, mostly ignored the dictums and frameworks of the school: after the restoration, those dictums became the mainstream premise of serious art.

These "neo-classicist" ideals, which placed central emphasis on "decorum," on the importance of being "correct," constituted an abrupt break with English poetry and drama's past, and yet this new school was accepted with eerie speed and conviction by English poets. As Bate says:

there is no other instance, after the invention of printing, where you find a settled group of literary premises and aims imported almost bodily, adopted with such dispatch, and then transformed into orthodoxy, or near-orthodoxy, for so long a time (a full seventy or eighty years)... (17).

Bate proposes that there had to be a reason, below the surface, for this radical change. And what makes the shift in artistic culture seem even stranger is that it was not demanded by the reading public. Despite the continual refinement of neo-classical standards throughout the eighteenth century, the older style of poetry remained more popular: *Paradise Lost* was apparently the most beloved poetic work of the century, going through "over a hundred editions" (22). The kind of poetry which we now associate with Dryden and Pope was never a popular success, and the shift from the older conception of poetry to the newer one had nothing to do with changes in the public's reading preferences. Bate is explicit on this point:

... the neo-classic mode, in its stricter and more organized sense, was not a response to a general and popular shift of taste that it is sometimes described as being, but rather an elitist movement in which the incentives were primarily applicable to the condition of the writer himself (22).

Those writers took on new expectations of their art for *their own benefit*, in other words, not for the benefit of their readers.

Before we can make sense of this decision, Bate argues, we first have to understand the enormous anxiety these eighteenth century poets were facing. Their predecessors were simply too good. Bate suggests that from the ascension of Elizabeth to the fall of Cromwell, England went through a golden age of literature, “unrivaled since the most fertile days of Athens” (Bate 16). Writers such as Shakespeare and Milton, as well as the best of their peers, presented later generations of writers with a body of work that seemed too good to imitate, and too broad in interests and subject matter to develop. Shakespeare had written, it appeared, about everything, and he managed to do so in a way that the general public loved as much as the literary elite. The same was largely true of Milton. The appeal of France's neo-classicist ideals, therefore, was not that they were a continuation of Shakespeare's art, nor that they were required by readers. The opposite, in fact. Neo-classicism appealed *because* it was different: “It gave the English poet a chance,” says Bate, “to be different from his immediate predecessors while at the same time it offered a counter-ideal that was impressively, almost monolithically, systematized” (18). In the Restoration period, it seemed impossible to be as good as Shakespeare, and so, if these poets wanted to write at all, they needed to change the definition of “good,” and thus open up a new area for competition. Pope, for one, spoke openly about how this shift in technique was central to the viability of his artistic project: “there was *one way left of excelling*; for though we had several great poets, we never had any one great poet that was *correct*...” (qtd in Bate 31). Minor eighteenth century critics

and poets, Bate says, liked to talk as though their age was the best there had ever been, surpassing even the classical period, but the great minds of the period understood that they were making the best of a bad situation. Both Dryden and Johnson made statements to the same effect as Pope's, with Dryden speaking of Milton and Shakespeare as "the giant race, before the Flood." And the problem seemed, as the century continued, to only be getting worse. Eighteenth century thinkers wondered why, if England had adopted classical standards for its verse, no English rival to Homer and Virgil had emerged: instead, modern poetry seemed to be about a much smaller range of topics. However, until the end of the century, with the rise of a new movement, Romanticism, these poets and scholars had no option but keep developing the artistic methodology they had inherited.

Anxious art is therefore self-destructive. In order to combat anxiety, writers gladly adopt new restrictions — restrictions devised and promulgated by contemporary criticism and scholarship — of what their art must be. These conceptions, while productive for each specific artist, because they allow that particular artist to overcome anxiety and write, are *on a macro-level* limiting and restrictive, both for the types of art that a generation of writers can produce, and for their potential audience. After all, these more restrictive demands are demanded by artists, not by readers, and while readers will do their best to adapt, there is only so far they can shift. There are simply fewer people, both at the time and today, who would rather read Pope over Shakespeare, or who would pick up a Gissing-style novel than a Dickens-style one. And while Bate begins his study with the eighteenth century, he argues that early twentieth century Anglophone poetry suffers

from a very similar problem. Modernism, which Bate tends to call "formalism" in *The Burden of the Past*, is just as anxious as Restoration neo-classicism, only less honest about its intentions:

We have seen the same thing in twentieth-century formalism. Despite the enormous critical effort to ground it on premises and values that human beings generally—or at least the more educated—are said to be in need of appreciating, the fact remains that the essential appeals of the movement have been to the artist or to those who professionally consider themselves his guardians. (23)

In other words: we all have the suspicion that normal people would rather read a poem by Tennyson or Keats than Eliot's *The Waste Land*, but, if we are educated, we learn to suppress that impulse. But Bate says that our first impulse was right: Keats really is the kind of poetry that people tend to enjoy, and with good reason. Anxiety about "not sounding like Tennyson" has damaged Eliot's poetry, and while that doesn't in any way make *The Waste Land* less valuable for intellectual study, it does make it a less capacious form of art, less relevant to the non-professional reader.

All of this may seem depressing to living writers — and to the scholars who care about the health of contemporary writing. It is uncomfortable to think that we writers have taught ourselves to focus on technical demands and restrictions that readers don't care about. It is even more uncomfortable to think that we novelists have adopted these conventions not because they make our art better, or more original, or more authentic, but because we are simply anxious about our ability to compete with, say, Woolf and Hemingway. However, the full extent of the problem, Bate says, is even worse. Anxiety,

in Bate's model, is *cumulative*. As each generation acquires new restrictions on their art-making, the previous set of restrictions are not abandoned. Instead, they pile up, making that art increasingly difficult for the average person to follow.

This belatedness is the source, according to Bate, of the high and low cultural divide that so many critics have worried about since the eighteenth century, the split between educated and popular readers. At first, each artistic tradition begins in a wild freedom, with great founding artists like Shakespeare, Handel, Defoe — and, perhaps, a J.J. Abrams or a Kim Kardashian — able to easily produce huge amounts of varied, high-quality material that the great majority of people can enjoy. Someone like Daniel Defoe, coming early in his form's tradition, can happily throw together new genres and premises, writing at a blistering pace that later authors would find incredible, and if parts of *Robinson Crusoe* are boring, and parts of *Moll Flanders* don't make sense (Ian Watt, in *The Rise of the Novel*, makes a brutal attack on Defoe's novel-structuring abilities, pointing out a series of inconsistencies in both books' characters and plots), it doesn't really matter, because both lay readers and professional readers are still enjoying the new form.

However, as the novel gets older (as any artistic form gets older), while the lay readers remain undiscerning, and will happily take in anything that is a good story, professional readers start to grow tired of the same technical weaknesses that they once accepted in Defoe. They make tougher demands on writers, such as "characters must be emotionally and intellectually consistent," or "the forward motion of a story should always be maintained." What they do not understand, however, is that by making these

claims on contemporary writers, they are inadvertently complicating and limiting the subject matters and authorial stances that such writers can hold. Once a writer accepts that a protagonist's emotional life should make sense, for example, writing a rambling novel like *Moll Flanders* gets harder. Inevitably, writers start to trim down the range of subjects they attempt to tackle. Readers are unhappy, because they don't get why today's books are so precious, and writers, ultimately, are also unhappy, because they can see that *Moll Flanders* exists, but they don't know why writing seems so much harder for them than it appears to have been for Defoe. Had Bate been able to encounter, for instance, Gordon Lish's evangelism about the prose sentence (Lish's elaborate pedagogy was based on the late-modernist belief that each sentence in a work of fiction should be a distinct art object, worthy of admiration and study), he would have likely pointed out that this view of prose inevitably makes certain scenes, certain topics, certain modes of fiction very difficult to pull off. No one could fault Faulkner's love of prose, and yet Faulkner has no problem writing a plain, functional sentence where he thought it necessary: such freedom is critiqued by the Lish school.

When I first read Bate's thesis, I was interested on several levels. I have always been mordantly intrigued by theories of artistic difficulty and failure; I have long been fascinated by writers such as Saul Bellow, someone who, despite his undoubted genius, seemed to rarely complete the same novel he set out to write. More importantly, I was immediately struck by the insights that Bate's theory seemed to offer into contemporary creative writing. While I feel just as tired as everyone else by the endless array of articles published in *The Atlantic* and *Salon* which complain about MFAs and fiction workshops,

and which make vague accusations about the state of contemporary literature, I have, nonetheless, always felt that something odd is going on in creative writing. I had sensed a problem, but I lacked any kind of comprehensive theory with which to focus my concerns. I had previously read Harold Bloom, but Bloom presented art as essentially a black box, a secret and subconscious battle carried out by a few dozen great minds each century. There seemed no way to connect Bloom's Freudian theories with the more sociological, Foucauldian-influenced work of a critic of creative writing like Mark McGurl. Bate, however, presents a Freudian mental model which an entire generation of artists share. And, in contrast to Bloom, he offers more or less testable hypotheses. Bate offers us both a research method (read everything that an era's artists and critics are saying about that art, no matter how minor or insignificant each text seems to be) and a list of problematic traits to look for. If writers seem to be fascinated by small points of technique, if they seem indifferent or hostile to a general readership, if they impose restrictions on their art that previous generations of writers were not aware of, and if they admire past writers whose example they (in practice) avoid in their own work, then it is likely we are seeing artistic anxiety at work.

And, given Bate's criteria, creative writing seems a very anxious form of art indeed. First of all, Bate's theories add a new dimension to Mark McGurl's discussions of New Criticism, and the early years of the Iowa Writers Workshop. What McGurl takes to be something new under the sun, the disciplined and regimented approach to fiction taught at Iowa, Bate's theory merely sees as a standard response to anxiety. In *The Program Era*, McGurl argues that the New Critics encouraged their students to adopt a more limited

version of the modernist authors they revered, proscribing the Henry James view of fiction as a universal model. And McGurl also describes how keenly Flannery O'Connor followed her teachers' advice: her stories seem composed with a deep allegiance both to "show don't tell" and to "third person close," two key tenets of the teaching offered by Gordon and Tate. Even in her earliest completed fiction, says McGurl, O'Connor is writing just as the New Critical textbook instructs: "... the scenically represented action is limited to the intimately recorded perspective of one character at a time, a mode which Gordon and Tate called the 'Technique of the Central Intelligence...'" (142). Hemingway and Woolf played with point of view many times in their stories, whereas O'Connor used third-person-close, the point of view approved of by New Criticism, "in every one of her stories without fail" (129). If we assume that the mid-century American writer saw high modernism as a source of tremendous anxiety, and that, as a result, New Criticism was appealing to them as a method for repressing and escaping that anxiety, then the regimentation and limitation at Iowa should be no surprise. The limitation allowed O'Connor to write something new.

Of course, it's obvious that some post-war Anglophone writers have broken these rules, and the example of one author (O'Connor) is insufficient evidence to condemn all of creative writing. However, while this current project lacks the resources to do a sociological investigation of the stories actually being written in workshops around the country, it is the opinion of this writer, based on his experiences in many short story workshops in several colleges, that at least sixty percent of the short stories handed in to workshops *do* follow the conventions set out above: the narration is filtered through a

single point of view protagonist, with the action is delivered in a closely joined sequence of scenes. The story's action is depicted as taking place in a coherent fictional landscape, a seemingly physical world external to the characters' minds — yet its action usually leads, in the end of the story, to some kind of new insight or internal breakthrough for the character, an inward change or moment of truth. This "epiphany story," as it is now known, is certainly not the *only* genre produced in fiction workshops, nor is it the *only* kind of tale published by the Best American series, but it does seem to be the default. It is Jamesian in its heritage: Henry James stories such as "The Beast in the Jungle" and "The Aspern Papers" appear to be its primary ancestors. However, as would be predicted by Bate's theory, this form produces a more limited range of stories than Henry James actually produced.

Secondly, if creative writing is an anxious art form, Bate's theory would also predict that its leading lights, its craft textbook writers and essay-writing authors, would encourage their fellows not to retreat from the discipline's limitations, its strictures, but rather to obey them more fervently. After all, if creative writers feel uncomfortable with the dominance of the Jamesian "epiphany story," one option is to reverse course, step backwards through the tradition, and find examples of fiction that breaks one or other of the form's assumptions: perhaps, for instance, locating in Charlotte Perkins Gilman and D.H. Lawrence a form of fiction in which interior action, emotional (and even sexual) struggle is prized over the depiction of a character's movements around a plausible landscape. But such a tactic is rarely what one discovers in craft of fiction textbooks.

Among the most canonical of craft essays is Charles Baxter's "Against Epiphanies." Few essays on the craft of fiction are remembered in detail: this essay, in contrast, has been discussed in creative writing magazines and has generated craft essays in response; I personally have heard its premise quoted by visiting authors as though they assumed everyone in the room knew the argument. And the essay is justly famous. Baxter combines a critique of our "relentlessly commercial culture" with a history of the development of plot, describing the shift from stories of action like *Romeo and Juliet* to stories of insight and discovery like "Araby." However, at the same time, the essay is also a perfect illustration of Bate's predictions about anxiety. Baxter, in person and via correspondence, is extremely gracious, friendly, and insightful, and so (speaking informally for a moment) it feels uncomfortable to use his essay in this manner. Yet "Against Epiphanies" offers almost too ideal an example of how Bate sees anxiety working on artists: the essay's admirable clarity makes it the best starting point for analysis, rather than the many less honest, less impressive examples that could be used in its place.

Baxter begins his essay by claiming that in "most anthologies of short stories published since the 1940s, insight endings or epiphanic endings account for approximately 50 to 85 percent of all the climactic moments" (67). He feels that these fictional insights and revelations, while they were once fresh in the hands of Joyce and James, have simply been overused. James Joyce wrote awe-inspiring epiphany stories, Baxter says, but we should not try to follow him: in our hands, they have become tired, overblown, "rotten." There is only so much bright illumination a reader can handle,

especially from less talented writers. One even gets the feeling, Baxter suggests, as though aspiring writers are creating these stories as a sort of signaling or identity politics, to illustrate their own cleverness and openminded-ness, as though students are treating their fiction as an extension of their resumes. Dismayed by the pretensions of the form, Baxter encourages writers to move away from the epiphany story, to seek other options.

It is significant, however, what Baxter does not say. He does not critique the epiphany story from a *reader's* perspective; the general public's opinion is not sought in the essay. Rather, it is only the author's own responsibilities to his or her art that are considered. Epiphany stories may be popular — they may get a writer applause at a reading, or the chance to be published in *Best American* — but such rewards are not important. The point is that authors should feel shame for repeating tired tropes, independent of their audience's response. In fact, Baxter advises that writers should, in order to avoid this unpleasant situation, create stories that readers will like *less*. He presents a three-stage historical model of the development of fiction, in which conventional story structures, which pleased audiences for “for over two thousand years” (63), full of exciting action and characters with “powerful desires,” was replaced in the twentieth century with a Joycean belief in the centrality of the mind. Epiphanic fiction, Baxter asserts, is inherently less popular than dramatic fiction, but rather than suggest writers try to go back, regain some drama in their work, instead he argues that they should continue developing the epiphany beyond the point of structural coherence, pushing it until the form becomes something new. Anxiety, after all, is always cumulative. Baxter concludes his essay by outlining some remarkable models for the

post-epiphany story (meta-fictional, minimalist, surreal), presenting them as a suitable avenue for contemporary writers to explore, even as he concedes that these models will *never* be of much interest to readers. Baxter is absolutely open that he is encouraging his fellow writers into a narrower field: “Anti-epiphanic writing has been and probably will always be a kind of minority writing...” (69). As fiction continues to limit its scope, moving from the dramatic to the epiphanic to the post-epiphanic, it will necessarily lose more and more of its readership, and much of its earlier range of subject matter, but this road is one that writers, in order to be authentic artists, must continue down, Baxter suggests, and as quickly as possible.

Baxter's is merely the best of many similar arguments: among the many essays written by creative writing professionals, there is a practically limitless supply of writers expressing similar stances and outlooks. Although not every craft essay seems to share the concern, hinted at by Baxter, of inauthenticity, of being a sell-out, of reproducing, on the page, something unpleasant in one's cultural surroundings (Stephen Koch's *The Modern Library Writer's Workshop*, for instance, displays a refreshing lack of interest in writerly angst), but *so* many craft essays do that it seems impossible to pretend this self-revulsion is not an inbuilt feature of creative writing. The discipline seems terrified, as a whole, by the idea that it is not actually producing real art.

A historically-minded critic might argue that this self-revulsion has a specific cultural origin. It is the result of the cultural paranoia which plagued the New Critics, their fears of the seemingly overwhelming influence of capitalism on art: creative writing, as a discipline, seems to have been set up, by the New Critics, with the specific

goal of elevating and secluding fiction from the marketplace. It is not at all true that creative writing invented the idea that writing could be taught: prior to Iowa, there was a thriving industry, in both Britain and the US, that attempted to teach aspiring writers how to write popular short stories and novels (one can find examples of these dusty old books in the Hodges library, with their amusingly didactic titles like *Only Two Ways to Write a Story*). The New Critics strove, successfully, to excise such reader-pleasing techniques from the study of serious fiction, arguing that they were "a bag of tricks," (qtd. in Dawson 79) and the New Critics promoted, instead, their more refined ideals of "organic unity," a premise which, rather than exciting and teasing readers, requires the public to approach a work of fiction with reverence, to get to the final page before fully making sense of its import. A rival scholarly movement, The Chicago School, attempted to intervene against the New Critics, arguing that fiction is primarily a rhetorical mode of literature, and which aims to *do something* to a reader, but (sadly) their ideas had far less impact. Therefore, even as creative writing has grown older, and the original textbooks of Gordon and Tate have long been forgotten, their original premise remains: a work of fiction is meant to exist as a cultural icon, an independent art-object, and although it may end up influencing or converting a reader, it should bear no trace in its construction of seeking to do so. Writers, however, want to be read, and the New Critical demand is, in its purest form, impossible to satisfy, and so creative writers feel a perpetual unease about their own work, never sure if they have sacrificed their imaginative freedom to the serfdom of the marketplace.

A Bate-minded critic, however, while generally agreeing with this history lesson, would argue, instead, that the deeper reason why writers were so grateful for these New Critical restrictions was their fear of competing with Hemingway. The reason why these ideals became (and remain) so attractive to writers was that they allowed aspiring authors to distract themselves from a true competition with the mighty modernists. And, if this essay were longer, it would be productive to study a number of creative writing movements and philosophies in this light. One could apply a Batean critique to general tenets such as "show don't tell," or "write what you know," or the dislike for outlining and advance plotting expressed by many craft essays, or John Gardner's "vivid and continuous dream" from *On Becoming a Novelist*, or the sentence-level aesthetics of Gordon Lish, or the idea that art must always be politically neutral (as expressed, for instance, by Robert Boswell in *The Half-Known World*). The more one looks at these statements with Bate's ideas in mind, the less they seem like helpful tips on writing, and the more like artificially-imposed limitations. They are techniques, it is true, but techniques which have mutated into unexamined philosophies, stances that limit. To construct a "vivid and continuous dream" means not writing like *Tristram Shandy*; to avoid outlining and plotting makes certain large-scale genres like fantasy and historical fiction very hard to do; to forever remain politically neutral means not writing like *Beloved*. This not to say — not at all — that the actual teachers of creative writing obey these precepts mindlessly. The praxis of the praxis is always more substantial than the theory of the praxis. But it is possible to observe a distinction in the field between insights which are presented (by teachers) as ad-hoc tips, one-off ideas deployed to help a particular student's story, or as a teacher's

private methodology, and, on the other hand, the formal parts of the discipline which are presented as actual knowledge, as generally known facts, as rules which inform the workshop environment. There, in that latter half of the field's praxis, something "anxious" certainly seems to be going on.

"Craft," at the very least, is not the universal set of techniques one might imagine it to be: instead, it is (using Bate's theories as a guide) an attempt to avoid an encounter with the great writers of the past by, at first, developing and codifying the Jamesian idea of the short story into a general concept of fiction, and then a process of finessing and whittling that concept down into narrower and narrower avenues, seeking out more and more rules with which to disqualify the writers of the past and complicate the work of writers in the present. That, at least, is what Bate's theory would suggest, and if it is correct, given that almost all literary authors today have undergone their training in a creative writing setting, this implies something very troubling about the health of present day fiction. However, such a conclusion, although easy to offer, increasingly seems to me to be a little hasty. While I continue to find Bate's ideas intriguing and useful, I have come to feel they present an incomplete picture.

Part of this change in view is personal. Now that I have completed my dissertation, and completed it very much to the expectations with which I began the project, it seems tricky for me to continue to point out limitations in the school of art I have studied so long in. To be more specific: it is hard to have given readings where the audience laughs at every joke and still feel that one is trained in a methodology that is disconnected from everyday readers.

A second problem with Bate's theory is that genre fiction often seems just as anxious as creative writing. Bate's theory of belatedness would imply that present-day genre fiction, and the craft textbooks that support it, would be a far less anxious field. After all, genre writers have fewer great names to look back on, and little incentive to write unpopular books. Their readers should be far less professional, and therefore their guides and how-to's should surely be absolutely different to those of "craft's." However, when one reads a seminal work on the writing of genre fiction, such as Jack Bickham's *Scene and Structure*, a book that offers a complete method for writing a thriller or simple dramatic novel, one finds a much more similar picture than one might expect. It's not that *Scene and Structure* reads like an extension of creative writing: it seems equally as anxious, only about different things. Whereas craft essays tend to focus on the author, and express great concerns as to his authenticity, seeing him as a creature so frail that merely by jotting down a plot outline on a sheet of paper, he will ruin his chance of writing a "real" novel, *Scene and Structure* acts as though it is the *reader* who cannot be trusted, not even for a moment. The genre writer must be forever alert, because "readers can at any moment," Bickham points out, "stop believing our story." The genre fiction reader is so mechanical, so overdetermined, that his reactions can be predicted line by line, yet is also he is so fickle that a book's author is allowed no freedom at all, *even within the sentence*. The plot structures Bickham describes must literally be followed phrase by phrase.

Here is Bickham, for example, giving an example of bad writing:

Consider this transaction:

(Stimulus) Joe threw the ball to Sam.

“Sure is a nice day!” Sam said.

Now, some might think this is fine, because the reader will assume that Sam caught the ball. I’m afraid that many, many readers, however, will not make that assumption, and a tiny tickle of disbelief will begin far back in their brain somewhere –the obvious question: What happened to the ball???

The rhetorical pressure on the reader must never slacken. Bickham's book is impressively detailed, containing remarkable techniques that any writer, no matter how literary, could find useful, but underpinning those methods is a view of the writer, the reader, and the novel that seems as restrictive as anything one could find in *The Writer's Chronicle*.

What is also fascinating about *Scene and Structure* is that it presents this vision of the author and her work with almost no justification. Just as Charles Baxter felt no need to explain why authenticity and freshness were so vital to his fellow writers, Bickham appears to assume that his conception of writing is simply the way things are. One would never suspect, reading Bickham, that Jonathan Franzen's novels sell very well.

There is one solitary point in *Scene and Structure* where Bickham tries to justify his view of the world, and the only evidence he deploys is the off-hand remark of a schoolchild.

... readers today are more hurried and impatient –and jaded by swiftly paced television drama; they want condensation, speed and punch. (This was nowhere more vividly demonstrated to me than in a recent conversation with a high school senior. He was moaning about having to read *A Tale of Two Cities*. Asked why he

was experiencing difficulty with the book, he said, “It’s boring!” So, if readers today can think *A Tale of Two Cities* is boring, we’d all better learn the fastest-moving, tightest methods of telling a story that we can discover.)

With this lone schoolboy's complaint ringing in our ears, the readers of Bickham's textbook race off to learn about scene construction, desire and frustration, and a dozen other complications.

In other words: just as one would expect with Bate's theory, we are presented with a writerly predecessor (Charles Dickens) who Bickham considers a great and admirable writer, but as soon as we have been instructed to share that admiration, Bickham explains that we should never try to write like Dickens ourselves. We must instead write very differently, and we must now learn an entire apparatus of techniques to do so. As a result, rather than seeming freer than his literary fellows, the genre writer seems just as tied down. This all seems too familiar: everyone is starting to look a little anxious.

Thirdly, Bate's general theory has a problem with success. It is one thing to point out periods that seem very anxious; it is a different challenge to explain why some periods seem *less* anxious, or anti-anxious, and, here, Bate is less persuasive. Bate's ideal writers, in *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*, are the English Romantic poets, Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth. Keats, in particular, is shown waging an inspiring battle to reclaim lost poetic techniques, struggling to return to the example of Milton and Shakespeare, to widen poetry's stance and diction. If such heroics are required for even a brief interruption in the slow weakening of poetry, then Bate is surely implying that the tide of anxiety is nearly always rising. Things in literature always get worse. However, on

the contrary, it is easy to think of a whole host of artistic techniques that have been, to put it plainly, introduced successfully. Hemingway-style dialogue has become the norm: despite Virginia Woolf's warnings, the average person is now fully able to read a page of uninterrupted conversation. Meta-fictional and other postmodern tricks from the 1950s and 60s are now deployed with absolute confidence in a mainstream television series like *The Good Wife*. James Wood's *How Fiction Works* presents the long history of the technique which Flaubert invented, the narrative scenic flow of a walking observer, the *flaneur* meandering about a city and observing in free indirect discourse many things happening at once. Wood is a committed late-modernist, and so he presents this history as as a decline, mildly lamenting how a once exciting method has become fit for the likes of John Le Carré, but perhaps this decline should cause for celebration, not dismay: thanks to Flaubert and his successors, fiction has been expanded, and no awkward philosophy has grown up around the technique, no bizarre limitations have been attached to it. It is free for everyone to use.

To be fair to Bate, it is worth pointing out that his theory offers another possibility for what appears, at first, like success: Bate proposes that the high-low cultural divide may progress to the point that it *seems* like the battle has ended, but only because the "low" end of the spectrum has been eliminated. It might be true, for instance, that no serious painter today paints like Constable, or that no contemporary composer sounds like Beethoven, but this might simply indicate that the general public has grown tired of being lectured and disdained, has moved on, and no longer cares about oil-paints and cello sonatas: the elite audience is the only one that is left. In a wealthy, densely

populated society, relatively tiny cliques can (perhaps) maintain even the most obscure and overly-sophisticated cultural practices — lots of people, apparently, attend air guitar tournaments — but Bate would not count this as success. Such an artistic death-in-life is not the same thing as every social strata of Shakespeare's London attending a performance of *Hamlet*, nor is it churches across England ringing their bells to celebrate a fictional character's wedding. In other words, the prevalence of what were once avant-garde methods in a given art form may simply indicate that the art has lost its public, its relevance, and that the impending disaster that Bate predicted for literature has, for that particular form, already come true.

Yet, despite these Bate-inspired doubts, it still seems possible to be optimistic. There are periods in the history of the novel where it seems clear that the form is being improved. We may, in fact, be living in one of those periods right now. And by "improvement," I do not simply mean the awkward mainstreaming of the avant-garde, but rather a genuine deepening and development of central techniques (this is a possibility that Bate's theory is perhaps too pessimistic to accept). There does seem to be at least one long period of improvement in the English-language novel, one that Bate's theory would struggle to explain: the development of the omniscient narrator of the English Victorians. To describe that sequence, we have to go back to Charles Dickens and George Gissing. Gissing's troubles make more sense if we understand him as one of the early writers to come after the end of a long period of growth in the English novel, someone who, when he looked back at Charles Dickens, was looking back on a completely different tradition to his own.

It is hard to describe, even to perceive, this period of growth because its techniques, its vision of the reader, and its conception of the novel is so different to that of my own. The Victorian approach to narration has been so mocked by modernists and parodied by post-modernists that its efficacy can be hard to spot, and even harder to translate into the language of craft. However, a criticism of an unfamiliar thing can sometimes open it up to study more easily than praise. In his seminal study of English fiction, *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt makes an interesting comparison between two forms of fiction: the dramatic, scene-based novel, with its events focalised through a protagonist's point of view, and which presents a run of largely unmediated action, and the more heavily narrated novel, in which the reader is guided and spoken to by an omniscient narrator. Both types of novel existed in the eighteenth century, and Watt uses *Clarissa* and *Tom Jones* as his examples of the two schools, arguing that *Clarissa* shows that the first school is superior. Richardson's dramatic method, says Watt, produces a deeper, more engaging read; the narrated method distances readers from the novel's story. Worse, the narrator tends to bleach out the vitality of his characters: the author tends to cheat, making the plot turn out in a way that supports his narrator's beliefs. Watt presents, as his evidence, two similar scenes from *Clarissa* and *Tom Jones*: placing them side by side, he skillfully points out the greater vitality and complexity of Richardson's work. It's hard to argue with Watt that the dramatic is superior, *in this instance*, to the narrated. However, Watt then goes on to make a series of general claims about the novel, claims that are absolutely disproven by the historical record. Quoting modernist thinkers such as Ford Maddox Ford, who famously asserted that no Victorian novelist "cares whether you believe in

their characters or not” (qtd. in Watt 286), Watt argues that “Fielding’s garrulity,” although a “popular practice in the English novel,” has been “condemned by most critics” (286). He feels that Fielding’s “opposite tradition” (280) of the novel, with protagonists such as David Copperfield who are “less convincing as characters,” is not “typical of the genre.” Such claims, however, make no sense. The Victorian novelists, after all, were very popular. People waited on the docks of Boston and New York, as the story goes, waiting for the next installment of *Little Nell* — these readers do not seem to have minded that a narrator was speaking to them. They seemed to have cared about Nell, even if Dickens did not.

Two things appear to be happening here. Firstly, it seems appropriate to treat Watt's study, *The Rise of the Novel*, as, at least in part, an ideological campaign on modernism's behalf, part of the "modernism-isation" of English departments that Fredric Jameson outlined in *A Singular Modernity*. Watt has curiously laid out his historical story of the eighteenth century so that the good qualities in the early novels lead neatly to the work of James and Joyce, and the bad qualities (omniscient narration, haphazard plotting) are quickly defeated. Just as Jameson might have predicted: "the canon," in *The Rise of the Novel*, really is "simply modernism." While Watt would likely deny this, it seems only inevitable that Fielding must be cast down in order for modernist (or modernist-like) ideals of fiction to be raised up. Just as "neo-classicism" arose in Restoration England, a "neo-modernism" appears to have been constructed in mid-century England and America, a theory of art derived (with questionable accuracy) from the example of the modernists. Watt's history of the novel is set up to prove the validity of a small collection of

modernist ideals — dramatic scene-based storytelling, a seemingly indifferent and largely silent narrator, everyday realism, a "serious" authorial stance to the work — and his account of the novel helpfully provides a lineage for the modernists that stretches back to Austen and Richardson. It is, of course, to be expected that this modernist-derived idea of fiction is narrower than the actual fiction of the modernists: it seem might seem bizarre, on the face of things, to see in modernists such as Joyce, Woolf, and Barnes the successors of the sort of plain, homespun realism that Watt champions in *The Rise of the Novel* (and did James Joyce ever "believe in" the events of *Ulysses*?), but such simplification is normal, maybe even necessary, for this kind of work.

However, perhaps more intriguingly, at the same time that Watt seems ideologically biased in favour of drama over narration, it is also true that Watt seems qualitatively right about Fielding. The narrated method, in eighteenth century literature, *is* weaker than the dramatic method, at least where Fielding and Richardson are concerned. What Watt ignores, however, is the possibility that the narrated method of novel-writing might improve over time. It seems very possible, contra Watt, to construct a history of the Victorian novel in which omniscient narration grows and develops in effectiveness and complexity, taking Fielding's beginnings of a method and building on it through Austen, Scott, the Brontes, and on to Dickens, Eliot, and, at last, Trollope. As Wayne Booth demonstrates in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Jane Austen shows how to make a novel's narrator take a moral position that critiques her characters; as Terry Eagleton argues, in *The English Novel*, with Walter Scott and his fellow historical novelists, the novel becomes able to present "social forces" in dramatic form, learning "a way of representing

abstractions like nation and culture, church and state.” The method is growing, in other words, as writer after writer develops it. And it is possible, at the end of this sequence of authors, to see Anthony Trollope expertly deploying his narrator in novel after novel, using the narrator's commentary to manipulate his reader scene by scene. Trollope's narrator argues with his reader, pleading with her to view the action in the exact way that leaves the action in suspense. Work by scholars such as Amanda Anderson shows how Trollope uses the contrast between his narrator's moral world and his characters' troubled existence to create tension and suspense: her research, in effect, refutes the claims that Watt makes about the narrator-heavy novel (that the narrator merely repeats the moral import of the events depicted): indeed, it is the narrator which enables "the relation between character and critique" (517).

What is also noticeable about these narrating novelists is that they seem to have shared a similar world view. Their conception of their roles as authors, their readers, and the nature of writing and the novel, while not identical, seems common enough to allow the sort of artistic "arms race" that Reed describes. This is not to claim that they perceived no differences between themselves, nor that they even liked each other. But there seems to have been a common stance among the Victorians which allowed them to write adventurous, complex novels which they assumed the general reading public could enjoy. On a technical level, it may be that their very narrators made this stance possible, that an active, interventionist narrator like that of *Middlemarch* or *Jane Eyre* helps to guide a non-professional reader through what would have otherwise been a morally ambiguous, sprawling text. Such a narrator implies, after all, that there are things in a

novel that need to be explained, contrasts that need to be spelled out: it is a method of writing that allows for the creation of complex fictional worlds and the expositional framework to help readers understand them. Such a method assumes that readers enjoy being talked to, that meaning can be laid out, however, and so it is a stance which craft-trained authors may find uncomfortable. It also assumes a level of readerly patience that genre writers, operating in the mode of Bickham, may not be willing to risk.

This combination of technique and outlook is what I have been calling a "technology," a method both of writing a novel and a way for an author to understand what she is doing, a way to make sense of her role in society, her relationship to readers and the marketplace.

The question then becomes: if the early and mid-century Victorians built up such a remarkably complex, effective, and popular methodology of the novel, why was this methodology so decisively abandoned by authors such as James, Hardy, and Gissing in the latter years of the nineteenth century? And it seems that this "technology" was not simply dropped, but that the very awareness of its existence was lost. Henry James was disturbed and fascinated by Trollope, and his commentary on Trollope's work displays a great deal of vexation, as though James senses that Trollope's fiction is *doing* something to him, making, he says, "the reader's ear tingle and his cheeks to redden with shame," (Michie 11) but he seems not sure how this crime is being carried out. James laughs at Trollope's talkative narrator, asserting that it ruins the reader's experience, never wondering if that ever-present voice is, in fact, the creator of the very effect he decries. And so, while the easy answer to the question is that the Victorians stopped narrating

because Flaubert, through the genius of *Madame Bovary*, showed them how to tell a story without a narrator's intermediation, this seems an insufficient explanation for the absolute break between one novelistic period and the next. One also feels that the change was too glaring a shift for it be entirely due to social and cultural change. One might certainly accept that by the 1890s, the English novelist faced a different readership to the novelist of the 1850s — I have not yet done enough historical research to know how valid this hypothesis is — and yet, even if cultural change and the availability of other techniques (principally Flaubert's) encouraged writers to alter their view of the novel, these outward changes may well be authorial excuses, covering up their true intentions. I would offer the hypothesis that one reason that a "technology" collapses is that it comes to work too well: it becomes so advanced and so complex that new writers simply cannot continue in the same tradition. *Great Expectations* and *Middlemarch* presented the novelists who followed with such an intimidating example that, in order to write anything at all, those writers searched around for reasons not to write like Dickens and Eliot. They had to find a new way to conceive of their work, even if it meant limiting their audience.

(In this specific case, it may well be, too, that Anthony Trollope personally bears some of the blame. While alive, he seems to have repelled his fellow authors with such force that it is not a surprise the writers who followed him repudiated his methods. And although Trollope, as a narrator/author, obsessively wrote from the point of view of a self-proclaimed "gentleman," as a living artist he was somewhat a vulgar character, deploying the grand apparatus of the Victorian narrator with the low ambitions of a director of a soap opera, as well as listing, in his post-humous memoir, the exact amount

of money he had made from each of his books. It seems possible that he helped ruin the name of the Victorian-style novel, sending younger writers in search of a more admirable ethos and techne.)

With this theory in mind, it would be interesting to examine Henry James as the most successful proponent of the "technology" that followed the Victorians (with Thomas Hardy fitting much more uncomfortably in that mode). Like Gissing, James relinquishes the older methods of the English novel, and he develops a very impressive theory of fiction around his own approach, a theory that was taken up by others after his death and turned into a comprehensive picture of fiction. But James does this, in part, by shrinking the scope of the novel. In order to tell a scene-based story which builds up to an epiphany or moment of truth for its protagonist, with minimal commentary from the narrator, there necessarily must be fewer characters than in a Jane Austen novel, and certain broader social questions become hard to depict. Terry Eagleton, in *The English Novel*, chooses a stray comment by James's secretary, Theodora Bosanquet, to sum the author up: "When he walked out of the refuge of his study and into the world and looked about him, he saw a place of torment, where creatures of prey perpetually thrust their claws into the quivering flesh of doomed, defenceless children of light." Eagleton seems to admire this quality in James, as though it shows that the prim, outwardly conventional author understood how rough and horrible life under capitalism really was (and is). But Eagleton does not appear to notice that such a view, if it really was James's, makes political action and the opportunity for social change very difficult to present in fiction. If people are divided into "creatures of prey" and "children of light," then there is no clear way to

design a novel that is about society as a whole. There is only the (usually tragic) growth in the child of light's own consciousness and awareness, the awakening to his or her own nature and situation which is seen at the end of *Portrait of a Lady* or *The Beast in the Jungle*.

That, then, is my theory. On the one hand, readers may wonder if this argument is overstating the extent to which individual writers are creatures of their historical situation. The author shares that concern. All the study attempts to do is to isolate particular periods in which a shared vision of fiction seems to have helped many authors produce good books. And we creative writers, inheritors of a pedagogy that dates back to the 1940s, should perhaps be friendly to the idea that cultural climates exert an effect on individual writers. Without wishing to reiterate tired claims about MFAs, and how they produce writers who are all the same, it is striking, when one reads Mark McGurl's account of mid-century Iowa, to see how similar the proclamations of the very first teachers of creative writing sound to those at work today. One might feel that were the New Critics to be restored to life tomorrow and set teaching workshops in colleges across America, their manner might seem a little strict for the contemporary scene, but their essential premises would seem wholly familiar. In such an environment, one may feel more than usually confident to speak of the power of historical periods, of the influence of traditions.

However, on the other hand, this conception of "technologies" is just as interesting when a writer seems to be mis-using it, or is attempting to do something unusual with the methods that a technology offers. Saul Bellow, for instance, is a writer who has long

confused me, and I have always struggled to offer a theory for the strangeness of his novels. Bellow is, on a certain level, a model of writerly success, winning the Nobel prize, being invited to the White House, earning critical acclaim and a place on the bestseller lists. And yet still, I feel as though very few Bellow novels seem to work the way their creator wanted them to. Some, such as *Humboldt's Gift* and *Henderson the Rain King*, appear to be advancing a set of ideas, and yet it is never clear to the reader what those ideas are. Others, such as *The Adventures of Augie March*, appear to be intended as Dickensian novels of society, and yet the reader may be forgiven, at the end of the book, to remember no characters other than the protagonist, and him only as a voice. Bellow, for all his success, seems to have wanted to have written different books from the ones he actually completed. He created amazing, lyrical, and ingenious novels that don't fully work: novels of ideas without ideas; novels of society without people. And this was not caused by a failure of intellect, or a desire to be opaque. Bellow's nonfiction — his letters, essays, and speeches — display a quite different writer, someone who was more than capable of outlining a political and cultural manifesto.

It seems to me, now that I have written this essay, that Bellow's problem, if he indeed had a problem, was that he was trying to write Victorian novels with the "technology" of a Jamesian late modernist. He believed a novel could play a central role in society's progress, and he set out to include a great many ideas about contemporary culture in his fiction. However, he assumed he had to write fiction via the array of techniques developed by the critical advocates and artistic successors of Henry James. As mentioned above, the Jamesian method is particularly poor at evoking ideas and cultural critiques:

the lyrical prose distracts the reader's attention; the "dramatic" scene-based delivery makes it hard for the reader to see the events as metaphors; the intense focalisation through a single main character strips vitality and clarity from the surrounding fictional world. It does not seem coincidental that, of Bellow's novels, the one which, this reader personally feels, "works" the best, *Seize the Day*, is the novel, among Bellow's entire oeuvre, which best fits the Jamesian model. In that short book, there is no social commentary, no allegorical argument. The story simply depicts a solitary man's decline into absolute despair, into a state of bleak and terrible epiphany, and it does so flawlessly. In *Seize the Day*, for once, Bellow is not fighting his instruments.

To conclude. Firstly, this theory suggests that the past is much less important to writers than is generally thought. Often, the past may be a sheer invention, a small selection of authors, texts, and techniques collected to tell a story about the values of the present. It is in the present that a writer learns to understand herself, her peers, and begins, through instruction, formal or otherwise, to learn how to connect to readers: it is in the present that her teachers offer a story about the history of the form.

Secondly: how has all this discussion of the novel helped me better understand my own work? Firstly, it has made me feel a lot more comfortable about my own education. Since I entered the creative writing field, several years ago, I have felt dissatisfied with the discipline's peculiarities. I still feel dissatisfied by them, but I now suspect that peculiarities of some kind are inevitable in any writing tradition. I might personally feel that the steps that the New Critics took to shield fiction from what they saw as the

corruption of the marketplace were excessive, and misguided, but I am much more sympathetic, now that I understand it better, to their intentions.

For this particular novel, my dissertation, I have from the start felt that a pure reliance on creative writing tendencies would not produce the specific kind of book I wanted to write. I had to consciously alter my stance towards the reader, in order to create the kind of "populist," magically-infused historical fiction I had envisaged. In particular, I had to develop a specific technical element, one that many advance readers have commented on: the novel's omniscient narrator. Most of the novel is narrated in third person close, via a single focalising character, the narrative style that the teachers in my MFA expertly trained me to use. However, at times, a more omniscient voice steps in and offers historical commentary on the setting and the action: this is, still, very much a creative writing style of omniscient narrator, one whose presence is signaled mostly by a small shift in narrative tone, and whose prose blends into the novel's forward action. This narrator is more like a Woolfean or Joycean narrator than a Victorian one: it seems to have come to me from within the methodology of creative writing, or as an extension of that methodology, rather than being a true break with the present..

I also had to seek out tools and techniques from genre fiction which I suspected creative writers had, in their on-going struggle for authenticity, suppressed and ignored. I went looking for the "bag of tricks" that Tate and Gordon removed from the syllabus: I also discovered, to my sorrow, that writing a genre-esque novel was no easy thing, and I tried to study fantasy novels and crime novels to see how such stories should be

structured. Looking back, much of this work was instinctive, automatic: writing this essay has helped me understand why I approached the project in this manner.

As is probably clear from the tone of this argument, at the end of my PhD, I find that I have developed a much greater sympathy for the British Victorians, the developers of the nineteenth century's sprawling, narrated novels. Austen, Scott, Eliot, and Dickens seem immensely admirable to me in their intentions towards their reader, and their goals for their books. It is amusing that I, a British writer, had to come to Tennessee to discover this. While an open stance towards the reading public risks, from a New Critical perspective, the co-option by the forces of consumerist late-capitalism, and also risks beggaring one's talent in the hope of catching an impatient and jaded public, even if these dangers are real, they seem like problems that require fresh answers. In the many decades since Dwight McDonald railed against the dilution of high culture, either the enemy has won, and capitalism has swallowed the avant-garde, or the nature of the challenge has changed. Regardless, here in 2016, merely repeating New Critical mantras about art seem like dead-ends. If modernism was ever going to transform us, it would have happened by now (perhaps it already has).

However, the argument of this essay indicates how difficult it would be, even if it were advisable, to literally recapture the stance and worldview of a Victorian author. Readers *are* different now, and my own education surely makes me irreversibly literary, far too concerned with the regard for authenticity that I have in this essay gently mocked. This is surely true of me even as, among my creative writing peers, I try to strike a more plebeian note. My partial solution, for the writing of my novel, has been to imagine, and

essentially create, a "high road" of literature, an elevated but also popular novel form, one that existed in reality in the British nineteenth century but which has, in our present moment, been split into two incompatible halves (literary and genre fiction). The Victorian novel arrives in our time divided into two, mutually bewildered camps: I have tried to re-join the current age's two "technologies of the novel" in order to write my book.

THIS CITY IS A CLOCK

A novel

by

Daniel David Wallace

“The meanness of EDINBURGH has been too long an obstruction to our improvement, and a reproach to SCOTLAND. The increase of our people, the extension of our commerce, and the honour of the nation, are all concerned in the success of this project...

The examples set by the capital, the nation will soon follow.”

—Proposals for carrying on certain Public Works in the City of Edinburgh (1752)

“Every work designed for mere amusement must be expressed in language easily comprehended...”

—General Preface to the Waverly Novels, Sir Walter Scott

BOOK ONE

1770

Chapter One

Now the witch would come. Hand McLeish watched the door at the end of the landing, ready to push his sister away, tell her to run down the stairs. Only a short stretch of gloomy corridor kept their homes apart, the two small residences that shared the top floor of Tallow's Land. Although it was a weekday afternoon, the usually noisy building had fallen still. Hand could hear no one moving on the floors below, no one bartering on the lower landings, no feet climbing the five flights of dirty stairs. Through the hallway's thin window, Hand could see nothing but fog. The only evidence of Edinburgh's fifty thousand souls were the wafting reek of fireplaces, the oddly subdued hubbub of the high street, and the momentary rolling of a barrel. Close by, a pair of seagulls cawed and shrieked, and then were gone.

Hand gripped his little sister tighter.

She smiled at him. "A wee bit cold out here."

"Don't worry. Maw will call us soon."

"Why can't we meet daddy's friends?"

The men inside were not their paw's friends, but Hand didn't tell his sister that.

Although he had been sent out while the debt-collectors visited, Hand could still hear his maw's voice through the door, her tone sharp and brittle. It was strange how she and his dad were the only ones talking, while Freddie Thomas and his helpers kept silent. Hand heard his dad speak, a placation offered in a jovial, wheedling tone. Whatever he said, he only made Hand's mother cry out, a wail of frustration.

He wished he could help her. They just needed money, that was all. If the family could earn a little more money—Hand did not actually know how much his parents owed, but he felt sure it could not be substantial—if they could just earn some money, they could pay off these debts, and move to a better house. Move away from the witch.

“How are we going to pay?” Hand's mother asked. “How can we ever make back—”

His mother's voice was drowned out by the men. Hand's paw was trying to sooth her, encouraging her to sit down. And now Freddie Thomas was speaking, too, murmuring something that, by his tone, seemed both regrettable and delightful. As the men went on talking, Hand's mother let out a sob, just one, refusing to weep. Her cry pulled at Hand's ribs, yanked at him like they were attached by fishing cord. He could see it, how he would walk in with a bag of silver coins. Conversation would fall away as he shook the bag in his palm, counting from it everything his dad had borrowed, telling Freddie Thomas never to return. His mother's grateful face. The next day they would pack up their things, tell the landlord they were gone.

The walls creaked. Hand stared at the entrance to the witch's home, hearing nothing. He saw no shadows moving under the doorframe. If she came for them, he would push Abi away, tell her to dash down the stairs.

His sister seemed to guess his thoughts. “Don't you worry about Granny. She's all right.” The doorway creaked again.

Hand did not know how his sister had grown up so innocent. It was true that in the six months they had lived beside her, he had not seen Granny Wynd do anything terrible. In fact, only twice had he caught a glimpse of her, a huge woman with an immense mass

of hair. But there was no doubt she was something mighty and strange. During the day, the whole city came to her: a great many Edinburgh ladies climbed the filthy spiral steps of Tallow's Land to ask her advice, requesting secret help with God knew what; children carried up her daily portions of bread, butter, and butcher's meat. Hand smelled tea brewing in her fireplace, a luxury his family had long ago given up. And at night, so the story went, she crawled out of the window and walked along the walls of the nearby homes, peering in, laughing at the sins people committed behind closed doors. Or she flew down to Greyfriars in search of a grave to rob. The local boys claimed that Granny Wynd made little helpers from the parts of dead men. They said she constructed her children from a mix of bloody ingredients, pounded together in a cauldron.

They liked to say that Hand was one of her sons. They claimed that she had made him in her pot, from the entrails of a horse and a hanged man's thumb.

"Granny's all right," Abi repeated. "She found my doll, didn't she now?"

Hand smiled, his throat dry. "How is Moira?"

"Cold."

The presence of Lady Moira, the bald doll that Abi always carried with her, did not reassure Hand. Little Abi did not know this, but her cloth doll, a weary faded thing, was named after an actual woman, a lady whose head had been shaved the morning she had entered the Tolbooth Prison. The whole city had waited to hear of that woman's release, everyone convinced of the government's mercy. Moira had been guilty only of loving Scotland too fondly. But that had a generation back, when England had felt less confident in the two nations' union. Those same well wishers and supplicants had filled the streets

on the day that Moira had taken her last walk in the sun, and when the executioner's axe had swung, most of them had cheered.

Abi had found the doll in a forgotten box somewhere. Moira might be cheap and plain, with only blue stones for eyes, but Abi kept her constant by. Even when their paw had the money to buy her something better, a grand doll hand made in Venice or Peking, she still wanted Lady Moira. Yet on the day Hand's family had been forced to leave their old house in Blair's Land, the day that the last of their coin had run out, the doll had gone missing. No one had noticed its absence at first, not until the cart carrying the family's possessions had reached their new lodgings in Tallow's Land. Everyone knew Hand had something of a gift for finding mislaid items, so his maw had asked him to go back, visit the house they had just abandoned, and see if he couldn't track that doll down.

Hand had run back to Parliament Close, looked through the empty rooms his family could no longer afford, and when he was sure the doll was not there, he swept through the alleys and along the high street, checking every inch. He did find Moira: the doll had ended up in a water channel at the road's edge, soaked with sewage and scraps of meat, where it had caught a stray pig's eye. The pig was small, but its eyes had a dull, cruel look, not recommending approach. And Hand had arrived too late: only by Moira's dress could you tell who she had been. Half of her stuffing was scattered across the gutter, darkening in the muck.

So they had told Abi that the doll was simply lost, and she had cried about it on the first day and gone silent on the second. On the third day, however, she had knocked on Granny Wynd's door and gone inside for a chat. A little while later, Abi had emerged

with Moira in her grasp, the doll looking exactly the same as before, the same worn out dress, the small blue eyes of stone. Granny, she explained, had been able to find her Moira. Hand's brothers weren't concerned, guessing that Granny Wynd had simply bought a similar-looking doll. But Hand knew better. Seeing Moira intact was like seeing the sun set twice in one day.

The landing's creaking grew louder. Footsteps were coming closer, and as the noise rose in volume, its direction became clear: someone was climbing the building's many stairs. A man's sigh at the penultimate floor allowed Hand to relax: he watched Calum, his older brother, complete the walk up, the building complaining under his feet. Calum was not a strong man, not in mind or body, but Hand always felt safe around him, a comfort that even the closeness to Granny Wynd's door could not dent.

Hand was not surprised to see, however, the defeat in his brother's eyes.

"I tried," Calum said, his face pale with the day's cold.

"Nothing?" Hand asked, scared to think how their mother would react. He had not really expected Calum to find work: his older brother had great trouble holding a position, and, in hard times, always seemed the first worker to be cut. Still, Hand had hoped.

"I went talking to everyone. But to get work, you have to know somebody. It's these fixed teams. They try out a new team only when someone messes up a job." On the other side of the North Loch, there was supposed to be great need for the able bodied: everyone talked about the rough strangers arriving in the city, the men coming over from Ireland, up from England—from even farther away.

“Did you meet Laird Farweather?” Abi asked. “Was he friendly?”

Calum looked at their sister with gentle, blinking eyes. “No, I did not. Didn't even see him. I tried.” Calum put down his roll of tools. He wove his fingers together, showing Hand what he meant. “It's all—it's all locked in, you know? Everyone is already in place.”

Calum was not very good with words, but here, he was correct. Hand knew the sentiment to be true. As Hand walked up and down the high street, passing by the mouths of the alleyways and the closes, he could feel the day's pattern, its many cycles of activity and rest. It wasn't perfectly regular, of course. But below the fights and arguments, the surprises of the weather, the delay of a merchant's goods or a fisherman's early return, the city's life was robust, tightly bound. You couldn't just ask people to make space for you. If you pushed, they would push back. He could almost see it, the curving lines of routine and passage, Edinburgh's inhalation each morning and its slow breath out each dusk. Circles upon circles, a daily wheel of habits and recreations, none of them susceptible to an outsider's request. Unless you surprised them all. Hand paused, startled by this thought. He had never thought to surprise an entire city before. Surprise it, force a change. Probably, it could not be done. Not unless you were Granny Wynd herself.

Their front door opened. His mother stood there, her expression fierce with despair. In the grey light of the afternoon, her cheeks shone. Behind her emerged Freddie Thomas, tall and angular, eyes pinked and glaring. His two friends made for the stairs, but Freddie did not. He crouched down in front of Hand, exhaling stale wine.

“Leave the boy alone,” said Hand's maw.

Freddie ignored her. “Hello,” he said. “I heard you're a lad of some parts. That's interesting to me.”

Calum shivered, trembling, and his voice cracked when he spoke. “Hey. My maw—she asked you to leave Hand alone, all right?”

Freddie's glare was brutal. “Calm down. I just helped you and yours escape begging at the gates of St Giles.” His pale cloud eyes seemed to lack all depth, all essence. They were as simple as stones.

“I hear,” Freddie went on, “that you've got a talent for counting things, for keeping up with what's what. We might be curious about that.” The Thomas brothers, Freddie and Arran, were the most awful criminals in Edinburgh. Even the Devil was afraid to walk the high street at night, in case Thomas brothers were about. Or so people said.

“Hand is not interested,” said Calum. “But—well—thank you.”

Freddie Thomas twitched. He took a breath, a frightful sip of air, as though preparing himself for an unpleasant but familiar task. Calum was lanky and tall, long of arm, but he was skinny, with little muscle on him. He blinked and stepped back, letting go of Hand's shoulder, and Hand felt his brother's departure as a tightening in his thigh, a chill sea-wave. Freddie Thomas seemed on the verge of leaping up, ready to do some awful damage, his shoulders drawing in, but then something caught his eye. He started, leaning back.

For the first time, a sign of life flickered in Freddie's face: an actual feeling. Fear.

Hand turned, following the man's eyes. Behind him, Granny Wynd's door had opened. Just an inch or so, not enough to see inside. No one had turned the handle, it

seemed: the door looked to have fallen ajar all by itself. But Freddie Thomas was already rising to his feet, his gaze on the stairs that led down and away.

“How you lot stand to live here,” he muttered, “I’ll never know.” He waved an irritated arm, urging his friends to go ahead, make haste.

His departure did not make Hand's mother any happier, however. “Lord. Lord, have pity on us.” When Abi asked what was for supper, she just ordered them inside.

Chapter Two

The next morning, Hand left his home to seek out Laird Farweather. This would mean leaving Edinburgh for the first time in his life, but Hand saw no better way to find work. He did not know what jobs he was equipped to do, but the builders of the new town had to need some kind of help. So he had to go.

He didn't ask his mother if this would be a good idea, because the family needed money and she might say no. He didn't ask Calum to accompany him, either, because he had the feeling Calum would be more harm than help. Still, he was terrified make the journey alone, to walk clean out of the city.

Edinburgh stood on the crest of a high hill ridge. The castle, the churches, the high street, the workshops and the markets and the university halls—along with the *lands*, the tenement towers in which most of the city's population slept—were crowded together on the heights. Other cities, Hand had heard, leisurely spaced their districts around a river bend, or sprawled across a plain. But such nonchalance was impossible for Edinburgh. Edinburgh had grown up too close to the English border, and through its long existence, the inhabitants had never been sure when the next army would steal up, occupying villages and trampling the fields.

During Hand's short lifetime, he had met no one old enough to remember those bloodier days, but despite the decades of peace, Edinburgh's streets persisted in their caution. Although there were a now few new districts to the south of the city, Hand had never visited them. And like him, most Edinburgh people, no matter the finery or ruin of

their furniture, lived in one of the many lands—houses of seven or more floors that, the locals believed, were the tallest residences in the world.

Hand had heard many times about the city's plans to build a new town on the other side of the North loch, but he had never paid much attention. From certain spots on the high street, he sometimes saw the digging on the high ground that faced the city beyond the loch, the old fields and park land ripped up, the constant passage of carts carrying stones and beams. He had assumed, however, that this activity would be temporary. In his mind, everything north of the city was fields and farms—and always would be. There was a world outside the lanes he walked, perhaps, but he had no reason to care about it. He was glad that fishermen and shepherds chose to live there, so that Edinburgh continued to be supplied with oysters and goats, but he felt no more involved in their lives than he felt involved with the rising of the sun each morning.

The dangers of the journey, therefore, daunted him, made him shiver. In a straight line, the site of the proposed new town was not far away, and a man might stand on the castle's wall and from the new town's site be easily seen, waving a flag or, at night, flashing signs with the aid of a lantern, but the loch prevented easy access. In ancient times, the rulers of the city had flooded the hollow, creating a liquid wall to stop the English encircling the city and attacking from the north. Since that time, the loch had become a latrine and dumping ground for Edinburgh's inhabitants, who threw their waste and scraps at the sludgy, dark waters. Shimmering unwholesomely in the sunlight, the loch stank so bad that pregnant women were warned not to get too close. Not even the worst lunatic would dream of crossing it. So any traffic between the city and its planned

new town either had to leave by the west, at the Lawn Market, and go around the base of the crag on which the castle stood, a route that was supposed to be haunted by marshes and vagrants—and which Hand believed to be mysterious and probably fatal—or would have to go the opposite way, heading away from the castle down to the bottom of the high street, going out through the old Canongate. From there, one would clamber down the hillside to the point where the loch thinned down to nothing, where it could be crossed. And then the ground rose again, and would have to be climbed.

At the Canongate, Hand paused, sure that the bored guardsman would stop him, prevent him from risking his life out there, in the countryside, but no one even looked his way. In the hollow where the loch thinned out and sank away, teams of men worked on the beginnings of a bridge, a grand bridge intended to span the gap between the city and this newly imagined town, but the scale seemed too large for human beings to master, and it seemed likely to Hand that the project would never be completed.

The clouds had parted over the Firth, and the water shone in the morning's sunlight. The palace and its grounds stood a fair way's off, facing the city's high castle from the bottom of the slope. A cool wind picked up, sighing over wooded hills. Small children tended vegetable plots. To Hand, the entire landscape looked wretched and appalling. It made no sense. Life was behind him, in the city, and he saw no reason at all why people chose to live out there: even if they were wealthy and could have their servants bring all the food and water they needed, who would they talk to? How would they cope with the distance from everything?

A steady straggle of fellow journey-makers, however, both men and women, kept Hand from feeling too afraid. The path became wet and boggy near the bottom of the hollow, and Hand's feet stuck, and at one point he needed a grown man's help to get himself free. His clothes had already collected mud and grime, and he hated to think what his mother would say when she saw him. The breeze, rushing in from the sea, was half-way pleasant, at least until the climb to the top of the hill began, where the wind rose up in a terrible roar, buffeting Hand's tired shoulders, tripping him on the stones and the jagged ground. The sun blazed in his eyes. Worst of all was the silence, the lack of people and voices: it was deeply unnatural. Did people actually sleep out here, with only the wings of bugs for company?

At last he gained the top of the hill. He had arrived at Laird Farweather's building site, tired and hungry, with no clear plan. And as he wandered around the site, the scale of the work left him bewildered, halfway hopeless. This new town would be huge. The northern parkland was mostly gone, replaced by churned up mud and heaped stone. Vast mounds of extracted earth rose above his head. Between those heaps stood a great many tents and wooden shacks, and Hand peered into tents in which tools were arranged by type and size, stacks of mallets and rakes laid out in careful lines. A pair of small old homes, one with a broken-in slate roof, huddled quietly side by side, as if they hoped to avoid being noticed. A good way off to the east, a square, proud palace stood all by itself among the destruction, a prim, newly-built residence for some nobleman or master of trade, but it appeared to be empty. Indeed, the late morning felt slow and vacant, and those who lugged carts or pushed wheelbarrows did so without haste.

Despite the chill, Hand saw butterflies fluttering about, as though they searched for the wild flowers and tall grass that had, until now, flourished for ever and ever on this spot.

No one seemed to be working very hard. Men talked and joked to each other with strange accents, and for a time Hand was unsure if any of Laird Farweather's followers were Scots. He looked around for a wealthy-looking man in a wig, but saw no likely candidates.

“Hey!” To Hand's shock, a black man had spotted him, and had beckoned him over. The man was dressed just as shabbily as the other workers, and his arms were caked in the same dry mud and dust, but he was an African. Hand had seen a fair number of men like that in Edinburgh—and Indians and Chinamen, too—but he had very carefully made sure never to speak to a single one of them. Unfortunately, there was no way to pretend he hadn't heard.

“Who you working for?” To Hand's surprise, the stranger sounded just like a normal person. He sat on the last remaining part of a low, broken stone wall, and his face was dry and cracked, his cap stained with mud and dust.

“I'm looking for a job,” Hand said.

“You don't look that large, lad. No offense, but you don't seem one for carrying and lifting, not much.”

Hand nodded. He was not tall, and never had been.

“I'm all right at counting, though,” he said. “I can keep track of things, my maw says.”

The man, unimpressed, gestured at a long, high tent some way off. “That’s where the lads are today. Master Cavenar, himself, is keeping an eye on them.”

Hand nodded, said thank you.

“If they are feeding the lads,” called the stranger behind him, “bring me back something, all right?”

The tent was noisy with eighteen yelling, mud-stained boys. They were seated around four circular tables, which gave Hand the suspicion that this was a school of sorts, but rather than focus on the slates set out in front of them, the boys were jostling each other, or putting their friend in a headlock, or arguing about something intelligible. The lesson, whatever it had been, had been long forgotten.

The tent was large and high-ceilinged, and from the tautness of the walls, and the solid poles that held it up, it appeared to have been constructed with great care, as though its owners expected it to stand for some time. At the far end of the tent, a boy and girl sat on high-backed chairs, supervising the chaos. These two, both clean and immaculately well-dressed, watched patiently as their charges brawled. The girl looked about Hand’s own age, the boy a few years older. Although they might be the same age, or thereabouts, as the other children, the way they were dressed, the way they calmly regarded Hand’s arrival and rose to meet him—they seemed like fully grown monarchs.

The boy looked to be the friendlier of the two. He was round of face, and plump in his waistcoat, his long-tailed jacket a complex mix of gold and midnight blue. He wore a sword at his waist and his wig was modest, cut short and tightly curled. He seemed amused by this situation, quite unconcerned by the noise of the room. The girl was

slender, with something unnervingly particular and clear about her mouth, her eyes, giving Hand the feeling that he had already been measured, observed from front to back. She was more simply dressed, her clothes lacking the obvious expense of her companion's, but her eyes bore an enormous intelligence, a bright and sharp alertness, and Hand worried that when she spoke, she would without effort reduce him to tears. She held open the book she had been reading, not wishing to lose her place.

“I'm after Master Cavenar,” Hand said.

The boy pointed at his own chest, as if accusing himself of a crime. “I am he. Call me Tyler if you like. This is Lizzie. Lizzie Farweather. Her father is the master of this great endeavour.”

Hand stood, looking at them, utterly lacking any idea what to say. This was Laird Farweather's daughter.

“Are you employed,” asked Lizzie Farweather, “by someone in this camp? Do you need feeding?”

“I want to work,” said Hand. “I'm ready.” He was hungry, but he didn't want to lose this chance to talk to Master Cavenar and the daughter of Laird Farweather. He had been lucky to arrive when they were just sitting and waiting.

“Do you have any skills?” Tyler asked. “Can you measure out a room? Have you ever mixed stucco?”

Hand glanced from the boy to the girl. “Mix what?”

Lizzie looked at Tyler. “He doesn't present himself very well, does he?”

"I'm good at counting things," Hand said, awkwardly. "My maw says I'm not bad at all at it. Knowing the time and everything."

"I don't understand," said Tyler, "exactly what that means. Can you explain?"

"Oh!" cried a rough young voice, as heavy footsteps approached Hand from behind. "Oh, he's a genius, is our Hand!" Hand flinched as he was slapped on the back, surrounded by three boys coming over from the other side. They jostled him, pushed him, laughing.

"You best be careful, my lord," a red-headed boy said. Hand had known this lad in school. "Hand is a dangerous one. A liar. That's why he got thrown out of our class. For lying."

"I did not," Hand said. "I never lied." He had always disliked this boy, who came from a destitute family, but who always claimed he was about to inherit a great plot of land.

Tyler seemed unimpressed. "You say the child lied? What's your evidence?"

"Evidence? Lord! He lives next door to Granny Wynd. What more do you need? You don't want him talking to a fine lass like Miss Farweather. Oh no! Cut him open, you'll see. He has weird blood. He's not made like the rest of us."

"Who," asked Lizzie, "is Granny Wynd?"

"A witch," another boy, tall and dark, answered. "A grave-opening, soul-stealing, devil-lover."

"I just want to work for you," Hand said, quietly, looking at Tyler.

“Devil lover? Oh, don't talk about his mother like that,” said the redhead, laughing. “He loves his witchy maw, Hand does.”

Hand loathed these bullies. His family was desperate. He had earned audience with two grand lairds, and for no reason at all, these fools were ruining it. How could they be so stupid, so cruel?

“You can't blame him, though,” said the taller boy. “He's got to love the witch. That's his purpose. It's how he was made.”

Another boy gripped Hand's shoulders, and shook him. “Why? What did Granny make him from?”

“Why,” said the redhead, “she cooked him up in a chamber pot. She poured in some spices from China, a bucket of horse's blood, and a hanged man's thumb.”

“Aye,” said his friend. “That would do it, I'd imagine. That would pull it off. But where did she find the chamber pot?”

“She nabbed it from a whorehouse, beset by plague.”

“Enough,” said Tyler. “Enough of this talk. It's dangerous to talk like this, don't you know?”

The boys retreated, going quiet, but they still smiled, feeling proud of themselves. Tyler Cavenar was right: this sort of talk was risky for everyone involved. In the kirk that Hand's family attended, the minister never spoke about Granny Wynd directly, but the man had many times stressed in his Sunday lectures the temptations of the darker powers. Hand had heard a dozen or more descriptions of witches and sorcerers hanging from the noose, their infernal master abandoning them at the final hour. The congregation loved

these stories: they would go silent and still as the minister described the first steps of black magic, the seductive charms and illusions that the devil's disciple would cast as she bartered away her soul. They liked to sigh and cry out as the sermon narrated the ruin of the witch's reputation and manners, how her mind grew slovenly and bestial as the law's final punishment approached.

To accuse a witch was no light matter.

Hand stared at the boys, trying to make them afraid. But his glare only made them laugh harder. One boy mimed cutting off his own thumb with a pair of scissors, dropping it into a cauldron to be mixed. "Murderer's Hand!" the redhead cried, his cheeks brightening with the effort. "That's you! Murderer's Hand!"

"What caused you to be removed from your school?" asked Tyler, as calmly as before.

"Yes," said Lizzie. "I don't believe in any of this talk about magic, or spells, or witches. I don't believe a single word of it. Tell us what really happened."

"The teacher—" said Hand.

"He told lies," said the redhead. "He tricked our teacher."

"I did what he told us to do," Hand said, his hope worn out and gone.

An unfamiliar boy spoke up, someone Hand had never seen before. "He knew about the time. Whatever the time was on the school's clock, Hand knew."

Tyler watched Hand curiously, as though hoping to discern something remarkable about him from a close examination of his face. Hand looked away.

"Are you good at arithmetic?" asked Lizzie. "That could be useful."

“I don't know,” Hand said.

“Do you know what a chess board is? Have you seen one?”

Hand nodded.

“Does everyone know what a chess board looks like? Good. Here is a test for you all.”

Lizzie glanced at Tyler. “My tutor set me this challenge. Let's see who can solve it quickest. Picture an empty chess board. Imagine I place one penny on the first square of the board, the bottom left square, and then I place two pennies on the next square along, and then four on the square after that, and then eight, and then sixteen, doubling every time: when the entire chessboard is full, how many coins, in total, do I have?”

The lads went quiet, their faces scrunched up in thought.

The redheaded boy asked, “If we get it right, do we get a kiss?” He was a grubby, knock-toothed character, with a broken nose. Hand could not believe he would ask such a thing. But Lizzie was not outraged.

“Let's see how quickly you can work, first.”

The boys huddled into small circles, whispering numbers to each other, counting on their fingers. Hand had no idea what the best way to count so high would be: he had not managed to stay in school very long, thanks to the dispute with the teacher, Mr. Frederick. The parish lessons he had attended, afterwards, had spent almost no time on calculation. Hand did not have a sense of the best way to guess each square's number, and he had no friends to discuss the problem with.

“Are you working on it?” Lizzie Farweather asked.

Hand could only blink. He did not know how keep track of all the numbers. However, he could, at the same time, just about hear the whisperings of many hushed voices. He looked around: it was a different sound to the chatter of the other lads, the calling of men outside. The whispered seemed to be coming from nowhere at all.

A chessboard appeared in his mind's eye. The voices told him that the piles of coins on the board were like houses on the high street, each with many people inside. A chessboard, after all, was a very simple city. Just as the high street had its patterns, its sequences and series, its layers of people and motion, this mental puzzle, too, this imaginary chessboard, was built on rules. He saw the empty squares of the board, and then the spaces filled up with ticking, whispering clocks. Look, they told him. It isn't that hard.

He raised his hand.

“Yes?” Lizzie asked.

Hand said a very, very long number beginning with 18. Boys around him laughed as Hand added more and more digits to his figure, jeering at him for including so many, but Lizzie smiled, pleased. The boys in the tent swore, shoved each other.

“It took me,” she told Tyler, “a lot longer than that to work it out. And a lot of scribbling in a book. Rather remarkable. Now,” she added, turning back to Hand, “imagine that the last column of the chessboard has been cut off. There are only seven columns of squares, not eight. Start doubling the coins again, from the bottom left-hand, but now you have fewer squares. What's the new total? A real prize, for you, if you can work it out.”

“She's going to kiss you if you work it out,” the redheaded lad said.

Hand blinked. His head felt faint, and the whispering voices seemed more uncertain, their comments fading in and out. He felt, suddenly, very tired.

The door to the tent was thrown open, and a pale, scarred man in a black jacket entered.

“Lads,” he said, “you need to get home, the lot of you. We're done for the day.”

He walked over to Tyler and Lizzie. “Mr. Cavenar. Miss Farweather. We're handing out no more food, if that's all right. Work is stopped. Completely. We have to wait until we're allowed to start up again.”

Tyler and Lizzie both looked shocked. Hand was troubled to see them so disturbed. They seemed like lawyers who had just received news devastating to their case. He wanted to ask the girl, Lizzie Farweather, if his trick with the chessboard had been a big surprise. Did Mr. Farweather want to hire him to count things? Perhaps he had a talent other lads did not.

He tried to hang around as the other boys were escorted out, and listen to their conversation, but one of the soldiers gave him a shove, and he was forced to head out into the sunlight, forgotten by the two glorious, brilliant children inside. He stood in the bare mud, among the fluttering pennants, hungry and lost. On the far side of the hollow, Edinburgh, standing above him on its crag, seemed very far away.

The scarred man emerged from the tent. He pushed a few small coins into Hand's palm.

“She wanted you to have enough for a good meal. Now go. Get yourself home. There is a very bad man coming to visit us. You don't want him catching sight of a wee one like you. Trust me.”

Hand's mother stared at him when he came home.

“What in the Lord's name have you been doing?” His face was filthy, and he looked like he had waded through a knee-deep bog.

“I tried to find work.” He showed her the pennies he had been given.

“Did they pay you to wrestle a pig?” She inspected the coins, and pocketed them.

“Don't tell your father what you earned, all right?” She looked away, staring at the room's one small window. Hand's paw had gone out to a friend's house for dinner, meaning that he at least would eat decently. In the smaller of the room's two beds, where the children took turns to sleep, Abi murmured under the blanket, fretting.

“I don't know how we're going to eat tomorrow,” Hand's mother said. Her tone was absent, cold, as though Hand wasn't there. He longed to help her. But there was no way to get work in the new town. So he would have to make the city itself work for him. After all, he was back in the city now. He was back among the patterns and routines he knew. He could almost hear whisperings around him, advising how it might be done. If he could surprise the city, trick it, then maybe he could change the rhythms of the day, and bring his mother help. The voices he heard confirmed his hope, advised on how it could be done.

Chapter Three

Hand hardly slept that night, and in the morning's dark he slipped from the bed he shared with his brother. When he opened Calum's bag of tools, unwinding the roll inch by inch, an escaping clink made his brother groan, urge him back to sleep. At the foot of the bed, Hand paused, wishing he could ask for Calum's help. To surprise an entire city—he didn't know if he could do it. The family needed food, that was that. He had no choice.

He had a guess how he could obtain a good meal. If he nudged the morning habits of the city just right, he could bring his mother a fat, heathy chicken to roast. He could almost see the plan working, each step falling into place. But a worry in his stomach told him this level of nudging was a task for two people, even three. He might be caught, arrested, if he tried to do it himself.

But his mother needed help. Hand extracted two tools from the roll, a trowel and a knife, and squeezed out of the front door. The landing was deep in gloom, the stairs barely visible, and for an unsteady instant, Hand felt sure that Granny Wynd was hanging over him, the hem of her dark dress all but brushing his hair. He ground his teeth and continued on, and when he looked back from the lower landing, there was no one behind. On the fourth and third floors of the building, candles were already alight, and their glow guided him the rest of the way down.

The day was steeped in fog and few people were about. Although the sky remained dark, and the tall buildings on both sides kept out any glimpse of dawn, there was still more light than Hand expected. Up ahead, where the lane met the high street, brighter

wisps of mist shone as they drifted past. The cold breath of the morning was not quite as sharp as usual, either. Had he misjudged the hour? Hand didn't think so, but he worried he would not have enough time.

He ducked out of the mouth of his close, and emerged through the low passageway into the high street. All down that immense thoroughfare, windows glinted white. The town was rising for its daily toil. Workers in the humbler trades were already departing, their hats pulled low, heads lowered against the cold. In the distance, Hand heard the muted ring of a bell. The throwing open of a cellar door, the stink of waste being tossed from high windows, and the complaints of horses. And in all directions came the chatter of families, the hum of home upon home, so many piled on top of each other. At first, no single person could be heard, but for a moment, the yell of a mother's voice overpowered the general murmur of talk. She was shouting for her girls to rise, get up, stop shaming her with their tardiness.

All this was good. Hand's plan relied on the city's extreme closeness of inhabitation, how it pressed so many people together.

Hand tried to steady himself, reaching out, hoping to get a sense of the day's waking rhythm. When would the wine shop begin its early morning cleaning, calling for fresh barrels? When would William the butcher go downstairs to open up his shop? Before, the city's life had always come to him in flashes, in sudden insights. Behind those individual routines and habits, there surely had to be an overall purpose, a grander pattern. Now, for the first time, he reached out deliberately, tried to pull that purpose into himself, but he heard only a great many people moving, an unordered collection of bodies moving this

way and that. The grand pattern had to exist, but although he strained his attention outwards, Hand wasn't sure if he had grasped it. Had the guards already opened the city gates? He paused, trying to judge from the flow of passersby. He wished he could send Calum down to check.

Nervous, unclear if he was making a terrible mistake, Hand walked up the high street, towards St Giles church and the Tollbooth Gaol. Once he had passed the close press of St Giles and the dingy stalls of the Luckenbooths, where the high street became narrow and cluttered, he entered the nicer, grander part of town. The road rose steeply towards the castle esplanade, and families that lived here were either rich themselves, or did exclusive business with those that were. Most establishments had fine entry steps and clean, bright signs. And for many of these families, the only choice for their daily meat was the butcher's that William owned, just off the entrance to West Bow.

It was now early Tuesday morning. And every Tuesday, down the high street, the owner of a wine shop paid a team of boys to run some barrels up from his storeroom in West Bow. About the same time, more or less, William received a visit from his farmer. William's was among the more expensive butchers, and he justified his prices by the freshness of his chicken and lamb. His farmer rode in each week on a cart laden with coops and cages. If Hand could shift things in the city just a touch, if he could prompt one thing to connect with another, he would be able to pick out from the farmer's supply the bird of his choice.

Hand waited for an even minute, watching the pale shine that now flickered in the butcher's window. He stayed to observe how William, a short man with little hair and

enormous shoulders, guided his front door open with both hands, lifting it gently over a rise in the cobbles. William, having got the door open, looked downhill past Hand, towards the stalls of the Luckenbooths. Not seeing his farmer, he leaned forward and spat the contents of his mouth on the stones. He disappeared inside and returned with a half-filled bucket, which he sloshed over the spot he had just spat on. William worked the stray water into the gutters with fierce sweeps, his movements animated by a peculiar force, a smile playing on his lips. William's eyes were deep-set and dark, giving away nothing of his heart. Some boys swore he never blinked. He would not be a pleasant man to anger.

Hand judged the butcher's schedule to be on time, as usual, and he went in search of Mr. Campbell, the outdoor clerk. Whatever the season, whether the day was as sticky as glue or the servant girls were slipping on the ice, Mr. Campbell worked outside, at the corner of his lane and the high street. Such an imposition on the city's foot traffic was not really legal, and so Mr. Campbell appeared at dawn each week-day, aiming to have finished setting up long before the town guard performed their first saunter through. The rest of the city woke to find him already in place, wrapped up in his immense Russian coat.

Some days, he even got a customer.

Hand turned into the lane, seeing Mr. Campbell attempting to unload his possessions from his front door. He ran to help the clerk, distracting him, picking up one box of papers and carrying it out to the street. Campbell waved for him to stop, but Hand ignored him.

Hand felt his late-running plan inch back to its correct schedule.

After laying out the boxes, Hand retrieved from Mr. Campbell's doorway the spare chair, the one meant for customers, and he carried that chair to the very edge of the pavement, smiling at the confused clerk as he went. When he had it placed, he knelt down and removed from his jacket the two tools he had borrowed that morning: his brother's knife and trowel.

Hand eased the knife's blade under the great stone of the pavement, the last full-sized one before the crossroads. He used the trowel to lift the long flat stone, then pushed loose sticks and shards of brick underneath, aiming to unbalance it. Now, when he rested his weight on one side and then the other, the stone tilted and swayed. Good. He waved goodbye and headed down the street, hoping that no one had seen what he had done.

He resumed his spot by the broad steps of a tobacco merchant, listening, reaching out. What was the city about to do now? Would the Irish sisters be leaving their house? Not yet. He looked down the high street, hoping to catch sight of the older lads who rolled the barrels, but he couldn't spot them. A trio of well-dressed boys went by, heading for one of the good schools on West Bow, their satchels and clean collars filling Hand with envy. Once, he too had attended school on West Bow.

Hand had the rhythm of the day pulsing in his ear. He had got it now. He knew, without needing to look, that St Giles Cathedral was waking for the day, that within its walls, the students who slept in the Gallows Kirk were brewing weak coffee for breakfast. He could sense the barrel-rolling boys coming, and he could picture them

telling jokes and jostling each other on their long walk up. They would pass these steps in less than a minute. Hand could feel where every little thing was supposed to be.

Here they came. Hand ran to meet the barrel lads, singling out the leader, the Mr. Fletcher's son, his legs moving quick to keep up with the larger boy's strides. Hand told him a story he had devised, about extra work needed in the Grass Market. He watched that boy listen, then enthusiastically repeat the gist of it to his friends. They sped up, grinning to each other, leaving him behind. Hand could feel his plan settling over the morning, like a web thrown over the city. Despite the cold, he smiled.

The sky was clearing now, even if the sun was still lost. The chimneys of St. Giles were smoking in full. A few passing women glanced over, disapproving of his loitering. Hand tried to calculate how he would keep up with the neighbourhood, the tick-tick-tick of the day. He still had more adjustments to make, and the Irish sisters were early risers.

Looking back the other way, however, Hand saw the butcher William standing in his shop's doorway, waving at the pony and cart coming uphill. At sight of that cart, Hand's ribs contracted in his chest.

The chicken farmer had arrived. The plan wasn't fully set up. Hand's sense of the city began to waver, his certainty breaking up. And when he turned to look, he saw that the Irish sisters' front door remained closed. There was no light in their bedroom window. The plan, suddenly, was going wrong.

Down West Bow, he heard several barrels rolling. The boys had begun. What was he supposed to do now?

The Irish sisters, Agnes and Evie, lived two doors down from the butcher's. Their house was a large old wreck, drooping over its own front door. The family had been wealthy a generation or two before, but the elderly sisters, its last two survivors, now earned a small living from their needles. On market days, they wheeled out a large, bulky contraption—something that might have once been a piano, or perhaps a special loom from a giant English workhouse. It now held all their fabrics and supplies. Whatever it had once been, so many extra boards and beams and containers had been hammered on that its original shape had been obliterated by extensions. On four sturdy wheels, the huge layered object seemed to lead the sisters through the city, demanding, despite their protests, that they assist it as it veered in this direction and that. It would be the perfect object to knock a loose barrel against. Too huge, Hand believed, to actually damage—but the impact would scare the sisters so much they would draw the entire street's eye.

The sisters were supposed to be awake, and hurrying out of the house. That was their routine. He had seen it often enough.

Hand could only sigh. He watched the Fletcher lad come laughing, saw the lads pushing their barrels up and out of the Bow. The Fletcher boy did his usual jump with the barrel, but he missed the paving stone Hand had loosened, landing safely, and before Hand could think of anything to do, the team had gained the high street, passing William's shop, turning down into the high street. Just like that, his plan was done. He had got the city completely wrong.

His idea had been based on a simple observation: the Fletcher boy was careless with his work. He rushed things. And running the barrels, he had a particular way of swerving

around the street corner, propelling himself with his left foot off the pavement as he turned into the high street. Hand knew that if he could adjust a few things, then the boy would slip, the barrel would get loose, rolling down towards the chicken farmer's cart—just at the moment when the Irish sisters would be leaving their house.

Hand watched William the butcher lift an entire coop on his own, six or so chickens in it, his huge arms mastering the weight. William turned sideways to squeeze the coop in through his front door, and while the chicken farmer seemed to be heading inside with him, carrying a much smaller basket—leaving, if only for a moment, his cart unguarded—the old man merely placed the basket by the butcher's door. William returned to the street, and the two of them chatted, with William doing most of the talking. Under his broad hat, the farmer's gaze was locked on the coins that William kept closed in his fist. The barrel lads came back, making haste, going to collect their pay from the storehouse. The city was properly awake now. In study rooms and schools, the sons of better families were opening their Latin books, ready to decline the first noun of the day.

But then, as Hand stood by the steps of the tobacco merchant's, cursing himself, accepting that his family would be begging in St Giles by dinnertime, he heard the barrel-rolling start up again. The wine shop must have given the boys a second run. They were coming back. The fog had thinned, and he waited, watching, until they went heaving, pushing, racing around the corner, calling at each other. Again, the Fletcher boy did his usual jump at the corner. He swung the barrel, propelling it with his leap, and he landed right on the stone Hand had made loose. The pavement shuddered, trembling like a wave.

The lad stumbled, slipped. As he staggered forward, he tried to catch his fall with one arm while lunging for the barrel with the other, but he succeeded only in landing on his face.

Hand saw the squat barrel bounce and jolt down the street, picking up speed. One of the lads tried to pursue it, soon giving up. People were pointing, ducking away, and the butcher and chicken farmer stopped their conversation. In the servants' entrance of one of the big houses, a woman stood and stared, holding on to the doorframe as if a gust of wind might blow her into the barrel's path. Now, at last, the city's motion was shifting. Hand bit his lip as he felt the energies of the day adjust, the street re-focusing on that freed barrel. A new thing had been made.

A clergyman strode out into the middle of the street, a young man who looked too slight to absorb the barrel's force. He crouched low, as if preparing to scoop a child into his arms. Both William and the farmer ran to help him, but the barrel smashed into the minister's hands before any assistance could arrive. At the impact, the barrel shuddered, jumping back, and the man cried out, twisting to the left, falling to one knee. The chicken farmer jogged over, taking hold of the injured minister's shoulder.

Hand hurried past them all, making for the farmer's cart. He unlatched a coop where a particularly sluggish-looking bird was hunched. As he reached in, the other birds backed away, abandoning their friend. Hand re-latched the cage, and, with the twitching bird in his arms, ran for the nearest alley.

He had done it. He had tricked the city.

Chapter Four

Hand carried the chicken the long way home. Washing lines crisscrossed over his head. A piano played briskly from an open door. Four floors up, a man leaned out of one window, flirting with the woman who leaned out of hers. Hand had to duck around a pair of water carriers, gaunt grey men emerging from an unfamiliar house, their back still bent low. Both men looked sorry at all the water they had not sold. A solitary Englishman was wandering about, seemingly lost, but when a printer came out of his shop to shout directions, telling him the way to Parliament Close, the visitor kept saying, "What? I'm sorry. What?"

Englishmen were like that, refusing to listen until you put on their particular accent.

The chicken remained quiet in Hand's arms. He was grateful for its loyalty. Thievery was a crime, of course, and Hand didn't think that stealing was a good thing, certainly not, but no one had seen what he had done. So it wasn't really stealing. He had distracted the city so much, it was more like he had found the chicken, not taken it.

How strange his luck had been! He had made a plan, the plan had failed, and yet the barrel had still got free. What sense did it make? The city had a pattern. That much was obvious: you could see it, feel it, just from walking about. The Irish sisters, for instance, always got to where they were supposed to be. Yet Hand had tried to make that pattern work for his benefit, and the city had surprised him. Something new had occurred. He had failed, at first, but then he hadn't failed. It was as though the town did not rest easy in its routine. The city, perhaps, had an energy as well as a routine, a force that pulsed

beyond his ability to hear, a fire and ferocity that rose up if its regular sequence were ever disrupted, weakened.

Hand had assumed that the city operated like Latin class. With the awful Mr. Frederick, if you used the wrong rule, you were in trouble, no question, and nothing good would come of it. But the city possessed more angles than that, more dimensions. You could be wrong, yet something new would still come.

Hand ducked around a horse and cart, passing through one of the narrowest alleys in Edinburgh, a gap little wider wider than his shoulders. The alley had once been wider, but now one of its lands slouched over. Something that huge should not lean so far: Swift's land, it was generally agreed, would shortly collapse. Its occupants, if they were at all loved or cared for, were perpetually being urged to leave. Few families within that uncertain tower, however, had departed, and the majority who remained refused to hear their building defamed. In fact, many were fond of praising their land's construction, the quality of its brick. One particular tradesman who lived in Swift's land, Hand had been told, liked to signal his honesty by touching his knuckles to a wall or doorframe, indicating, he apparently believed, the permanence and durability of his word—swearing on those same frail walls that let out a grinding moan whenever the gale rushed in from the sea.

“Give only short terms,” Hand had heard said among his father's acquaintances, “to any merchant who lives in Swift's.” That was the version of the joke shared in sober hours. Later at night, once the fire was roaring in the grate and the men's cheeks were

pinked with claret, the warning grew more precise: leave nothing in Swift's pawn shop that you wouldn't mind reclaiming with a shovel.

Hand turned out of the nameless alley and gained, at last, the side entrance to his own close. He was nearly home. To his relief, few people were about. If even one local figure saw him with the bird, by dinnertime it would have been whispered at the hearth of every land nearby.

Only once he was climbing his own building's stairs did Hand have to explain himself. Three women were resting on the fifth story landing, sharing two babies between them. All three mothers looked weary with the morning's work, but they grew alert when they saw Hand's chicken.

"Is that for your maw?" asked Mrs. Adams.

The question only appeared safe. If he said yes, the chatter would go up and down the land, every family tut-tutting about the McLeishes' new wealth.

"I wish!" Hand replied. "I'm bringing it to Granny Wynd."

The women seemed satisfied by this answer. "Glad you're looking after her."

But when Hand began to climb the remaining stairs, he heard one mother say, not quietly enough, "Better her boy does it than mine."

Before he opened his front door, Hand had already decided who would be inside. His mother would be there, of course, a smile on her face, her eyes busy with some light work, perhaps sewing up a hole in a shirt; Abi would be looking out the window, pouting from hunger; his father would be pacing around, grandly announcing some new plan to make money. They would stop their work, they would stare. They would be amazed by

the chicken he had brought home; their eyes would glisten. His maw would take it from him, hold it up and pronounce it good, and she would tell Abi to rouse the fire, bring over the knife.

However, when he actually went through the door, only his mother was home. She was hunched over a stool, bent around a cooking pot, scrubbing the inside with a rag. Hand was shocked by the room's cold: the fire was not lit. His mother's arms were wet, and there seemed more grey in her hair than he remembered. Her eyes, half-closed, said that she was already sick with the day.

She glared at him. "What's that?"

"I found it." The lie sounded false.

"What have you done?"

"We can eat it."

"Oh Lord. What have you done?"

"I got it for you. For everyone."

She closed her eyes. "Go lock the door, all right?"

The fear that she was angry with him made Hand's throat catch, dry out. Why weren't they happy? He had done it. He had brought the family something to eat.

His mother rolled the pot away from her knees, and, sighing, pulled herself to her feet with the help of the table's corner. She dried her hands, went to the door and checked it was shut. She took the chicken from Hand, her knuckles turning white as the bird tried to free its legs and wings. She was silent for almost a minute.

"Who's is this?"

“It's ours.”

“Where did you find it?”

“William. The butcher's.”

This did not appear to be the right answer. His maw stared at Hand with fresh urgency.

“William,” she said, “is not a good man. What did he make you do?”

Hand was confused. “Nothing. The chicken wandered away. So I picked it up.”

“You stole from William? Do you know how much a bird like that is worth?”

That was exactly why he had picked William out, because the man's business thrived enough to not chase down one stray chicken. But his mother's stare was so awful he couldn't speak. He was sure he could explain himself, make her see that the bird was fine to cut up and cook.

“Hand. You betrayed me today. That's what you've done. You betrayed all of us, didn't you?”

“No, maw!” He couldn't bear it.

“If they arrest you for this, if carry you off to the Tolbooth—how are the rest of us going to carry on? Are you trying to kill us?”

“No!”

“How is your paw going to talk to his associates if they know he has a son on a ship halfway across the world, never to return?”

No one knew he had stolen the chicken, Hand wanted to say, his heart burnt down to ash. That had been the whole point.

“Hand. I didn't think I taught you to be a fool.”

“I can take it away,” he said. “I can get rid of it.” He only wanted to make her happy. The stress of the morning, his lack of sleep, his hunger—they bore down on him, forcing him to blink.

“You seem to have a head on your shoulders,” she said, regarding him sorrowfully. “I always believed you had prospects. No matter how bad things are right now, I always guessed that you'd do all right. Because one day, we'll have money again. I'm sure of it. And when we're back on our feet, we'll invite anyone who wants dinner to come and feast—without watching how often they raise their fork. When that day comes, and we're sitting fat and happy, do you want us to be afraid, to be guilty? Should we worry every single time there's a knock on the door? Now you've done this, no matter how many years go by, we'll know that one day, someone will say, 'I know what crimes you committed when you were wretched. I know what you did.' Picture us at the dinner table, all of us gathered around, and then the city guard appear, drag you to one of the ships heading across the world. Because that's what I will be thinking about. Is that what you want?”

It wasn't what he wanted, but they had to eat. Hand didn't feel his mother was being fair. He would bet that every family of quality had secrets. That was how they got to be so fine.

“Can't I just take it back?” It struck him, for the first time, that he might be put in prison for this, or sent to the colonies. The horror made him shake.

“Promise me you'll never steal anything again.”

He nodded.

“All right,” said his mother. “You go now, take that thing to Granny. Ask her what to do.”

“Granny?”

“Yes. Granny Wynd.”

“I cannae.” Was she abandoning him to the witch?

“You should have thought about ‘cannae’ before you picked up that bloody bird.”

“Maw? Really?”

She turned away. “It’s all I can think of right now. Tell Granny what you did. Ask her how you can get out of it. Whatever she tells you, you’d better do.”

Chapter Five

As Hand stood in the corridor, preparing to knock on Granny Wynd's door, the chicken kicked and thrashed in his arms, as scared as he was. He knew he had done wrong, but this was a worse punishment than he deserved. Many women, both of quality and of not, were fond of chatting to Granny Wynd, but they did it in secret. They didn't blithely announce it in front of everyone.

Edinburgh loved to tell stories. Hand's friends believed in skeletal pipers who danced underneath the city's streets, their music wafting up through cracks in the stone. The entire road of West Bow was feared by every child, and Hand knew of adults who would not walk down it when the moon was out, in case they heard Jean Weir's insane spinning, the wheel that had not rested in the century since her death. Hand's old school teacher, Mr. Frederick, had been a particularly fertile source of legends and superstitions, able to document the existence of vampires, werewolves, and sea serpents from the lines of the Book of Genesis. But Hand himself had never seen a sea serpent, nor had he ever heard a ghostly spinning wheel. Walking up and down the city, he sensed the presence only of the living. If Major Weir really did ride his infernal chariot down West Bow, he left no trace on the city's life by doing so.

The same was not true, however, of Granny Wynd. She did not seem to be merely a tale. She paid for a real home. She ate real food. Hand did not know how to understand what she was.

He raised his hand to tap on the door, but his knuckles trembled too hard. The bullies said Granny Wynd was his real mother. Was it possible they were right? Hand wondered if, when he looked at Granny's face, he would see a family resemblance. Perhaps she would click her fingers and he would be forced to obey, bound by the magic that had created him. Picturing this, he sank down to a deeper experience of terror, a place in his mind without light or sound, but he had no choice but put forth his hand and knock.

"Come in, child." Her voice was a dry, low rasp, like she had just emerged from a smoke-filled room. Like it hurt her to speak.

Granny Wynd was younger than he expected: she was at most no older than his own maw. Her face was broad and strong, with a pointed, forceful chin, and her eyes were a brilliant and unnerving blue. She was sitting behind a simple round table, but even seated, it was clear that she was very tall—she would loom over his father, for sure—and very large. She made the rest of the room look tiny, even though it was the same size as his family's home. To Hand's surprise, she did not wear black rags, as he had always imagined, but instead a long inexpensive dress, a shade of charcoal or faded purple. Her hands, resting in front of her on the table, were solid and potent, the skin of her over-large fingers cracked and brittle. The local boys said that Granny Wynd could crush a shilling in her fist, or snap a pistol's barrel between her forefinger and thumb. Hand could well believe it.

Her room, however, was quite ordinary. The space was bare, with none of the clutter of Hand's own home, and the hearth was small. The bed in the corner had a military-style sleeping roll laid over it, and the most prominent book was a large, leather-bound Bible

on a shelf, into which dozen or more book marks had been inserted. In the back, a side area or alcove was obscured by a hanging sheet, but Hand had no idea if this was a doorway down to Hell or merely where Granny attended to personal matters. The only sign of discontent or danger was a small pile, beside the hearth, of four broken and blackened cooking pots, two of which had lost their handles. Hand saw no functional pots at all. But this might simply mean that Granny had every meal made for her.

“What do you expect for it?” she asked, her voice so low he had to step forward into the room.

He tried to reply, but could not. Her gaze, half curious, half bitter, forced him into silence. Now that he could see her more clearly, Hand sensed that Granny Wynd was contorted by a perpetual rage, a fury that had set deep furrows in her brow, led her to clench and unclench her right fist. He was thankful to sense he was not its target; that awe-inspiring anger seemed directed at nothing he could see.

She tilted her head. “Oh! Now I understand you. This is not intended as a gift.”

Hand nodded.

“You stole it, and your mother sent you here.”

He nodded.

“Give it here, child.”

Hand stayed where he was. “Will I lose my soul?”

Her laugh startled him with its strength. “Premature, perhaps? I haven't even decided if I will take the trade.”

He waited. This was, he knew from church, the kind of false half-answer that the devil often deployed. What had poor Abi promised, when she had stood in this room?

“I have no interest in buying your soul, Mr. Hand McLeish. Nor do I know how to do such a thing. When a person comes to me for help, I ask them for money, if they have money, or for help in kind, at some future date. If the asker is a mere child, I usually request nothing in return. Only that you do me the courtesy of looking me in the eye if we ever pass on the stairs.”

“What did you make Abi give you, in return for her doll?”

The question seemed to please Granny Wynd. “I have a weakness for young girls who lose the things they love. I was once a young girl myself, of course. Now bring me your stolen goods.”

Hand held out the terrified chicken, and Granny enclosed it in her massive hands, inspecting it.

“This is one of John Talbot’s,” she wheezed, showing Hand the branded mark near the chicken’s tail. He could only nod. Granny Wynd lowered the bird to the small table, forced its head to touch the wood, and traced an invisible line in front of its eyes. The chicken grew still, fascinated by whatever it saw there.

“What do you want me to do with it?” she asked. “Turn it into a pig?”

“They will put me in the Tolbooth.”

She snorted. “Your mother would not be happy with me if I allowed that to occur. Forgive me if I smile. I expected that you and I would talk, one day or another, but I had not thought the problem that you would visit on me would be so easy to solve. You didn’t

come for a love potion, or a curse, or a true divination. You just need a little money, don't you? Wouldn't a few coins solve this trouble?"

"Can you do those things?" he asked. "Really do them?"

Granny Wynd looked at him more closely. "Can I see what is coming in the future, you mean? Wreck a ship, no matter the skill of its crew? Speed a carriage's journey across the wintry moors? Create a cloying infatuation between lady and priest? Hound a soldier with the spectres of the friends he betrayed, leaving his mind a blank-eyed ruin? Are those the things you mean?"

Hand nodded.

"Yes. Oh yes, I can do all that. And more." Every clergyman in the city, Granny Wynd's rageful eyes seemed to suggest, would be found with his throat cut if she so chose.

Hand could not imagine, if he had such power, continuing to live in Tallow's land.

"Then why don't you?"

Granny heaved herself up from the table. She walked unevenly, limping, to the covered alcove at the back of her room, and eased the hanging sheet aside. There seemed to be a great many boxes and drawers on the shelves, and she opened one, sorting through its contents. She returned with a coin.

"I will help you, little Hand, by buying this chicken from you. Take the money to William, and say I found the chicken running loose. Tell him I would also like another serving of my usual order. Then you'll be free and clear, won't you?"

Hand could only stare at the tarnished, chipped coin. He was sure something terrible lay beneath its surface.

“This is a gift. My first and last gift to you, Mr. McLeish. It is free. Later, when you are older—when you are the master of this ruinous, chattering city—perhaps we can do business again.”

Hand retreated from her room. He saw no way, other than infernal trickery, how he could become the “master” of Edinburgh, and so he worried that he had, in fact, just sold his soul.

Chapter Six

After Hand took the money to William, and the butcher gave him a fresh package of salted beef to take back to Granny Wynd, three days passed, breezy, bright, and bare. Hand's mother, grown mistrustful, would not allow him to leave the house alone. Outside, the city bustled on, shouting, arguing, and wheeling great loads. Indoors, Hand could do little more than surrender to the ache of hunger, and the boredom of nothing to do. Poverty had never improved his relatives, but since Freddie Thomas's last visit, merely a glance or an ill-timed question would start a row.

Mornings were the worst: the family rose to the meanest of meals, just enough that Hand's mother could say she had fed them.

Hand's dad should have been the home's solution. He was friends with many men in the city's finer half; long before, when the family had lived better than this, he had held the horses for the Courts of Session. Those had been good days. And it seemed to Hand that at any time his father could go out and find another position, one similar to the one he had lost, but the old man managed, somehow, to keep himself occupied in the mornings without accomplishing very much. He grew short with anyone who asked what he was about.

"I can hardly do business before dinner, can I? Call on a man once he's eaten. When he's rested and feels all right with the world. Even the worst country couf knows that." This convenient philosophy enabled him to remain in bed later than everyone else, and to

depart from the house on short trips, one departure after another, until long past noon, with no one knowing where he had gone.

When the arguments grew bitter, Hand's mother would remind the room of their need: "We owe Freddie Thomas a god-awful amount. We all need to earn something this month. Each of us."

"Freddie," Hand's dad would reply, his eyes blinking, "is not that sort. He wouldn't show up and take the furniture."

"Aye. He would do worse than that."

The truth was, although no one would admit it, they spent the mornings waiting for dinner. Around one o'clock, their maw would announce who could go visiting, and who among them would have to stay behind. Few families would have turned the lot of them away, but Hand's mother refused to let her children get a reputation for beggary. The hours that came after dinner were the kindest, as the ones who had eaten came home, their faces rosy with contentment, and they made plans for work or investments. A feeling of hope slipped in with their return, the belief that this trouble would pass. In the afternoons, Abi went out to keep company with a local nurse, a Parisian lady who spoke neither English or Scots, and Calum sometimes found odd jobs that paid a few pennies. The afternoons were a pleasant time to be home.

As the sun lowered, however, the mood re-soured. Everyone knew that supper would be barely more generous than breakfast, and there was rarely any peat for the hearth. A recurring argument simmered up between husband and wife, one that always ended with Hand's father's victory, declaring himself eligible to visit his usual tavern.

“Just the one,” he liked to say. “Just one and I’ll be home.”

On the fourth of these slow and miserable days, Hand was once again forced to stay home at dinnertime. His mother's choice shocked him. He had been confident that it was his turn, that he would be allowed out to eat, and hunger struck and struck at him in disappointment. The miraculous children he had met in the new town, Lizzie and Tyler, seemed like memories of another life. His head throbbed, his tongue seemed to shrink in his mouth, and he picked at a fingernail until blood reluctantly welled. That chicken of William's. He could taste it.

These unsatisfying imaginations occupied Hand so jealously that he only slowly became aware that his mother was changing her clothes, putting on her best coat. The family stopped what they were doing, watching as she brushed out her hair and re-bound it.

“Lass?” asked Hand's paw.

“I'm going out,” she said. “I have a supper invitation from my sister's.”

“Why did you give us no warning?” he cried. “I am not fit for—“

“You're not coming.”

Hand's father shook his head, as if trying to push the words from his ears.

“You're no longer welcome to Sheila's, and you know it. I'm bringing Hand with me. He's behaved the best of all of you.”

“Hand. Listen here. Do not leave with that—with her, with that Delilah. She is addled. She flouts me.”

“You ignore him,” said his maw. “Just don't embarrass me.”

“Praise the son before the father? I never heard such absurd reasoning. Do you intend our family to become Edinburgh’s latest outrage? Did Isaac ask Jehovah if he, the son, might perform the sacrifice? If he might swap places with Abraham? Because this, Hand, this is what you are about to do. Boy, you are sacrificing me on the altar of your own self-will. You cut me as keenly as if you wielded the knife.”

Hand stared at his father, hurt and annoyed, feeling very unfairly accused.

“Come on, love,” said his mother.

His mother only had one sister, whom Hand and his siblings rarely saw. She lived on the sixth floor of a decent land, only a few doors down from the high street. Their rooms were not large, but this evening, twenty or so relatives crowded the noisy space, few of whom Hand knew by name. He took little interest in the adults, however, for the middle of the room was taken up by four tables of varying sizes and heights, all them bearing great plates of food. The soup pot steamed as a tall girl, a cousin of Hand’s, ladled a portion into another guest’s bowl. He watched the knuckles of meat and the carrot pieces tip over and pour. In addition, three triangles of cheese were laid out on a tray, one hard and dry, another creamy soft, and a third practically furry on all sides. There was also a pie, a cloth tenderly sheltering its crust, which Hand fully anticipated would be plump and rich in its core. Another dish, a peculiar sort of grain or seed, shone with the cubes of butter that melted upon it: this, he was informed, was rice, brought all the way from pagan China. He gratefully accepted a portion of it, not caring that much of it crunched in his teeth as he chewed.

“Don’t you embarrass me,” his maw said.

Although the meal was being held in the home of Hand's aunt, it was actually sponsored by her brother-in-law, and was intended to welcome back a school friend belonging to that brother-in-law, a man who had become rich in the colonies. Hand, his stomach praising him for the decision to try the rice, watched as the brother-in-law and the guest from Pennsylvania moved about the room, exchanging toasts with each couple. The man from the colonies, a burly short man with a pointed beard, wore an expensive-looking dark wig that he did not appear to enjoy, and he often reached to scratch underneath it. His face looked tanned from the sun, like a sailor's.

Hand was not encouraged to approach the esteemed voyager, and nor was he required to recite to him a portion of the Prayer Book. He stayed by the food table, relieved to be able to avoid the usual humiliations that adults loved to inflict on the young. The tall cousin, Rosalynd, was maybe four years his senior, and she assisted him in tasting small portions of the potatoes, their skins riddled with baked rosemary and thyme. When he finished those, she seemed pleased to cut him a few mutton slivers. He even managed to try a little of that dark, fur-covered cheese, and was shocked by its relentless cheese-ness. It felt like he was chewing a song, and he passed the slowly decreasing lump of cheese from one side of his mouth to another, not wanting to let it go.

However, as he ate his stomach full, he encountered a fresh problem: Rosalynd, his older cousin, was very difficult to look at. He was not sure if it was her blonde hair that kept forcing him to look away, or some other portion of her face, but to be on the safe side, he kept his eyes on the floorboards and answered her questions with an indistinct murmur.

“Will you be opening an office in Edinburgh?” he heard someone ask the celebrated guest.

“As yet, I cannae tell,” replied the stranger, scratching underneath his wig. “Such things are a bit easier in my own Glasgow. Edinburgh excels at making lawyers and laws, does it not? Both are things that tend to restrict trade.”

“Perhaps, when the new town is complete, you will be willing —” Laughter broke out nearby, and Hand did not hear the thought completed.

Rosalynd, whose lips seemed to be glowing even brighter than before, suggested he take a piece of pie for his mother, and Hand watched her carve and lift out a slice.

He went over to his maw.

“Don't eat too much, lad. We're not starving.”

His aunt Shelia sighed. “It's time.”

“I won't do it,” Hand's mother said. “I told you.”

“You will and you must. You have three wee ones to care for. Hurry yourself and ask.”

“I will not talk to that man, as kind as he seems.”

“Mary, please. Why else did I invite you here?”

“Even if he was my long-lost twin, like out of a play, I would never go begging like that. Better I walk into the next room and cut my own wrist. To ask a stranger for money, for —”

“He has a house in the colonies. A palace. They brought a picture of it in a frame. To him, a man with his fortune, the money you owe would be nothing. He could pay it off like that.”

“I did not walk out of my own house to be shamed. You don't mention nothing about me to him. Nor to no one.”

Hand's good mood sank. How much did his family owe to the Thomas brothers? If all the dishes and furniture in this room were sold, bartered, or pawned, would that be enough? Hand guessed that it would be, that this one supper, carried out for the benefit of a man who did not seem excited to be there, would more than pay off the family's debt. Money: it was everywhere but where it was needed. It swayed and pooled in the wrong places, accumulating in the meetings of judges and the carriages of the great. So close, and yet it remained out of reach. If only he could pick up the city and shake it, turn it upside down, let all its gold and silver tumble free.

Someone was calling the room to attention. The guests were moving to the walls, their conversations falling away. Women went over to remove the plates of food, and once they had cleared the tables, those too were lifted away. A slender and fashionably dressed older lady, a distant aunt of Hand's, was urging Rosalynd into the vacated middle of the room, but the girl resisted, looking down.

“What's happening?” Hand asked his mother.

“Don't you embarrass me.”

“There's going to be dancing,” said her sister, pinching Hand's cheek.

The older lady succeeded in coaxing Rosalynd into the open space, and began to clap a quick, firm beat. The room shuffled back, everyone watching Hand's cousin. She took a breath and straightened her back, seeming to grow by an inch or two. She gave Hand a quick glance, an assured, proud flicker of attention, and Hand felt his stomach twitch. He was already over-topped by the moment's intensity, and was not at all sure he could survive if she actually danced. The room joined in the clapping, and Rosalynd placed one foot ahead of the other, meeting the eye of every guest.

“Who's—who's she dancing with?” Hand asked.

His aunt whispered back, “Herself, it looks like.”

Rosalynd raised one arm, her palm open to the ceiling. She no longer looked like the girl she had been before.

Hand did not join the clapping. The steady beat, and Rosalynd's stillness in its centre. She was going to respond, somehow, to that regular rhythm, to flow free from it. How? He didn't know how she would try to escape from the pattern that the room was giving her, but the expectation made him shiver.

The clapping faltered. Rosalynd lowered her arms. The people on the other side of the room turned, startled, to look at the door. A thump hit the front door, an another knock. The guests glanced at their hosts, concerned, and Rosalynd retreated to her relatives, the heady intensity flown from her face.

The door was pulled open to reveal three soldiers. Their leader, the soldier with the scarred face, the man who had given Hand the coins, removed his hat, and asked to be allowed inside.

“We're looking for a boy. Hand McLeish. We were advised he would be here.”

Chapter Seven

Through all the room's commotion, Hand's mother kept a continual grip on his arm, but he couldn't tell if she was intent on keeping him safe or letting him know how badly he had let her down. The celebrated guest, the man back from the colonies, had placed himself at the door, and looked to be having a pleasant conversation with the leader of the three soldiers. And yet the guest had angled his shoulders in such a way to make entry, by any of the men outside, no easy thing.

At last, he looked back at Hand's mother. "They say the boy isn't in trouble. The opposite, in fact. They want to take a look at him."

"What kind of look?"

"There's a contest of some kind. It's over in the new town. Laird Farweather wants Hand for that contest."

"Test? What kind of test?"

"Mathematical, ma'am," said the soldier with the powdered face and the scars. "It's a mathematical test."

Hand met his mother's confused eye. He worried he did not have the mathematical skill they would be testing.

"Fine," she said. "Tell them to wait so Hand's brother can come along."

"No," said the soldier. "Laird Farweather wants the boy, and with some urgency. We had better take him now, or whatever the job is, it won't be there much longer."

"It's late. How will Hand get home?"

He smiled at this. “Mr. Farweather is the one asking. He can tell the city to open the gates if he chooses.”

The guest from the colonies said, “This is Mr. Montrose, a former servant of our government across the ocean. He's an honest fellow, capable. You can trust him.”

Hand tugged his mother's sleeve. “I can go. It's all right.”

“You even don't know where you're going.”

Hand was scared, but he had been desperate to help the family, and now he had a chance. “It sounds like they'll pay me.”

She regarded him doubtfully, then she looked back to Montrose. “I'm not sure what it is the Laird sees in him. But you can take the boy, if you promise to keep him safe.”

“I will do my best,” said Montrose, in a tone that suggested the matter might be out of his control.

At the door, Rosalynd passed Hand a wrapped piece of pie. The businessman from the Americas beckoned him close, speaking to his ear: “Be careful over there. Douglas, himself, is a good fellow. The Laird Farweather, as your people call him. But the men he struggles against? There is one in particular, a gruesome individual, Mr. Lane Waller. He's a very prestigious attorney, of old family. That fellow nurses a grudge like a poor man nurses a beer. Try not to cause offence to him, nor to anyone you meet. Keep your head down.”

“Why is he so bad?”

“He lives in Parliament Close, under the ground. And he goes anywhere he wants. He can't be stopped. If he ever pens your name on one of his documents, you're done for.

He breaks trials, he rewrites licenses and wills—sometimes for money, sometimes for his own entertainment. Keep your head down.”

Montrose delivered a firm push to his back. As the door closed, Hand got a final glimpse of the room, his mother staring at him in what looked like rage.

Montrose and his soldiers led Hand away. The men marched him down the alley without words. Outside Geddie’s Inn, however, their leader paused. He removed the slice of pie from Hand's grip, unwrapped it, and took a bite, considering.

“You’re filthy. You know that, don’t you?”

Hand was too scared to respond.

Montrose squinted at him a moment. “I hope we have the right bairn. This one seems a bit simple.”

Hand allowed the men to guide him into the Inn, a clean, wide place, within which a great many legal men were drinking in their official black. At Montrose’s request, a short, red-cheeked woman with tipsy eyes appeared, and she applied a damp rag and some soap to Hand's face.

“Some of our city’s finer inhabitants,” Montrose remarked, “like to talk about their brotherhood with the common man, but you and I know better, don’t we? We know that the common man needs a bath and a meal before he can be brothers with anyone.”

“What,” asked Hand, “does Laird Farweather want me for?”

“There's a fight going on.”

“Who's he fighting?”

Montrose consumed the remainder of the pie. “We had better hurry.”

They walked downhill, going out of the lanes, and through the Canongate, leaving the city entirely. Hand looked about in the gloomy light of the evening, dismayed.

They passed by the stench that was the North Loch, close to the roped-off areas where the foundations of the new bridge were being laid. This close, the heaps of rubbish and human waste forced Hand to close his leaking eyes, the stink a physical attack.

Montrose kept a grip on the scruff of his neck, keeping him from tripping on the boggy path. The soldiers led him to the same tent, the place in the previous week where he had met Tyler and Lizzie. Now it was lit by candles, empty aside from a long bare table where Tyler Cavenar and Lizzie Farweather waited. They sat close together, almost touching.

Tyler said, “You found him.”

“Aye,” said Montrose. “I did.”

“Strange. He does not seem, on first glance, especially gifted.”

“I agree.”

Lizzie smiled at Hand. “Wouldn't it would be safer to send him home? Tell Douglas the child could not be located.”

“Too late for that,” said Montrose, his voice soft. “Listen.”

Outside, a force of many feet was approaching, a noisy troop who all seemed to be shouting at once.

Lizzie said, “Hand. Listen to me. Listen carefully. My father is a great man, but he is also something of a performer. He likes to resolve crises with the aid of an unexpected tour-de-force. That’s why—”

Tyler interrupted her, still smiling, his tone easy and relaxed. “You, my friend, are intended to that tour-de-force. I don’t know how much news drifts through Edinburgh, but in case you haven’t heard, our city’s improvement has become stuck, lately, in face of some very potent resistance. One of Edinburgh’s most prominent legal powers is attempting to take control. Tonight, Mr. Farweather will need you to demonstrate your special talent. That remarkable talent, the one the other boys, your school mates, told us all about. The future of the city may depend on it.”

Hand felt terror tighten in on him, the terror of being judged and found lacking—what was he supposed to demonstrate?

“Let’s go,” said Montrose.

“I’d like come,” said the girl, sounding nervous, as though she already knew she would be refused.

Montrose said, his voice low, “I’m sorry, ma’am. You know I can’t let either of you get in harm’s way.”

Montrose led Hand outside, bringing him to an extremely tall man in an ornately curled white wig. This man was standing still and composed, deep in internal deliberation, surrounded by a whole gang of angry shouting types. Everyone else was exclaiming an opinion or demanding that someone else be silent and listen. Hefty workmen, mud and paint-stained, were exchanging lectures with a single small fellow, all

in military red. Four young boys, who Hand remembered from Mr. Frederick's school, were huddled off to the side, nervously watching the arguments. But Laird Farweather stood in silence, in the heart of the commotion and yet apart from it. He was unmistakably in command, his presence among this arguing body of gentlemen and workers so potent that no one dared cross the final few steps to reach him. Hand, however, was shoved into Farweather's invisible circle, to stand in front of his feet.

Farweather leaned low. "You're Hand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you like clocks?"

"I—I do."

"Good. Let's go."

They marched across the building site, with helpers waving and fluttering for Farweather to avoid the worst of the mud and clay. As they walked, to Hand's dismay, his old schoolteacher, Mr. Frederick, appeared by Farweather's side. What was Mr. Frederick doing here? Breathing hard with the effort of keeping up, Mr. Frederick still found the energy to look Hand up and down, disgusted. Hand's throat tightened as he felt that familiar revulsion once again examine him. Now he would be in trouble—for what, it wouldn't matter. It never mattered for Mr. Frederick.

"Lord Farweather, sir," said Mr. Frederick, "I believe my work for you has been exemplary. Such a record of service permits to issue you a warning. A warning about this dirty, ill-fated child. Do not trust him. Do not rely upon him."

"I'm no Lord, Mr. Frederick, and I am short on time. Is this your former pupil?"

“My lord. May I speak to you about the Book of Genesis?”

“Can Hand do,” asked Farweather, more firmly, “what the boys say he can do?”

The red-headed boy, Hand's former bully, piped up: “He can, sir! He can. We seen him do it. He can do it whether you help him or you don't.”

“The Book of Genesis, my lord,” said Mr. Frederick. “There, my lord, we read of an ancient race of giants. A lewd species of violent oafs, strong in body but lacking all decency of mind—with no trace of the creative fire that man is blessed with. As Genesis tells us, these crude giants fornicated with least discerning of human women, producing offspring. Unloved by God, the descendants of those giants either lack souls altogether, or, perhaps, possess shrunken, misshapen ones. Scholarship is unclear on this point. In truth, it matters little. They are vile, my lord.”

“This is fascinating, Mr. Frederick. Can I remind you, however, that I prefer to keep my mind fixed upon the contemplation of abstract qualities—spheres, weight distributions and the like?”

Farweather's words were drowned out by a burst of shouting from the men. “Break them! Bury them! Cut them down to size!” Hand looked around, trying to see the object of these workers' anger. They yelled as a group, a war-cry of outraged fury, and then subsided into individual promises of revenge, cursing the man who had delayed their work, many of them speaking in foreign accents Hand found hard to grasp.

“Giants, my lord. A race of giants. It is written, as clear as day, in Genesis. But after so many intermixed generations, we cannot easily distinguish their kind from the common run of humanity. They resemble the base stock so closely that they can pass

among us, unnoticed. They throng in the larger cities where their revolting, nocturnal desires may best hide. A gentleman, however, can sense their wretchedness, merely by the use of his God-given intuition. He will know a giant when he stands before one. He will perceive him and despise him.”

“Sir—” said Farweather.

“Giants, my lord. A giant such as this Hand, my lord, may possess, through animalistic, machine-like dullness, certain talents that a free-minded gentleman cannot match without effort. Hand, my former student—a vile name, is it not?—may be capable of a certain trickery, a certain meretricious agility of mind. When I discovered his true nature, I had to ban him from my school, expel him, simply to preserve the decency of—”

Without warning, Douglas Farweather stopped, the whole troupe seizing to a halt with him. Mr. Frederick had inadvertently carried on for another couple of steps, and having walked straight into someone else’s back, he turned to look at Farweather, nervously licking his lips. The mass of workers stared at both Mr. Frederick and Hand, their glares suggesting that they did not like to see their employer perturbed.

“Good news,” said Douglas. “You’ve convinced me about the existence of your giants.” With the words barely out of Farweather’s mouth, with no signal given that Hand could see, Mr. Frederick was grabbed and pulled away. Strong arms held the schoolteacher fast, despite his struggles. As he squirmed, his fine shoes dragged backwards through the mud, he glared at Hand in loathing. Hand was glad to see Mr. Frederick punished, yet the man's gaze was too hate-filled to hold for long.

“An unpleasant character,” Farweather remarked to the air. Then, leaning down, he brought his head close to Hand’s. “I regret you had to witness that man’s chatter, but you must put him from your mind. Regard the party ahead of us. We are about to have an altercation.”

Chapter Eight

Ahead, beside the wooden skeleton of a massive, not-yet constructed building, a group of the town guard stood watch.

Farweather said, “Do you see him, Hand? Yes, there he is. A cruel and stupid lawyer, our Mr. Lane Waller. But he is persistent, and surprisingly hard to move past. Tonight, I plan to outflank him. At the crucial moment, I am going to ask you to perform your special talent. And if I have set you up right—if I have laid the groundwork—your display will allow us to proceed. Do you have any questions?”

Trembling, Hand couldn’t speak. He liked Mr. Farweather, and he wanted very much to be of help. But he had no idea what his special talent might be.

Beside the town guard, a large stooped man, heavy in his chest and shoulders, bearing around his neck the weight of a lawyer’s grand gold chain, was directing two younger clerks. Those two were gingerly adjusting a row of wooden stakes in the mud, and the older man barked at them to move the line another foot.

Whatever the house or palace that would be erected here, it would be huge. Nearby, several planks covered a deep hole in the ground. The whole space seemed to be more ruin than town. But to Hand’s amazement, he spotted, the same giant clock that had once rested inside his school, back when he had attended Mr. Frederick’s class. It now rested on a cart, the fire of a nearby torch-pole illuminating its face. The clock was huge and ornate, intended to hang above a grand entranceway, and despite its size, its mechanism was unusually quiet. The special thing about the clock, however, was its extra, third hand,

thinner than the hour and minute arms, which measured out every second. No other clock that Hand had seen possessed this ability, and, according to Mr. Frederick, its second-measuring hand had been the flawed invention of a particularly brilliant local engineer. During his time in school, Hand had loved that clock. He found its faint ticking soothing, and had liked to bring his ear right up to its glass face. Something about the pace of that ticking, how it overlaid the action and bustle around him, seemed to cast the rest of the day in a more sensible light.

Mr. Frederick's criticism had been correct, however: the clock's accuracy was only short-lived. The one time Hand had been allowed to listen to it for a full hour, he could all but feel the winding down of its wheels and gears, the minutes never quite striking when they should have, the seconds popping up all over the place.

What this clock was doing here, in the new town, Hand could not tell. If it was to be lifted and placed over a grand façade, none of the columns or plinths on which it would stand had yet been raised from the mud. The three lawyers were paying it no attention, focused instead on that line of pegs, comparing their placement in the ground to the map they squinted at by torchlight.

Farweather's workers halted, muttering to each other. One spoke for the others: "They stop us getting paid. Now they're moving our markers."

The others were nodding, brisling. One worker, the black man who Hand had met before, announced to his colleagues, "I'd like to bury the bloody lot of them under the road."

This sentiment received grim approval in all eyes.

The older attorney, however, did not seem afraid. He looked straight at Farweather. He handed his papers to his youngest associate and strode forwards. Mr. Waller's big shoulders drooped, his jaw hung low, and the skin under his eyes sagged. His face looked unwell, perspiring despite the cold evening breeze. The beard on his chin, too weak and wispy for the long face that contained it, seemed only a remnant of whatever youthful vitality had once animated this man's bulky, broad frame.

"The new plans have been approved. It's the law," he said. "Understand? You will build to these dimensions or we will find someone else to take your place."

Farweather turned to Hand, jovial and relaxed. "We are raising him a new courthouse, yet he still isn't happy."

"A small courthouse with a stupidly wide road. We need more room—indoors." Hand did not like the feeling this lawyer gave him, and yet, now he had heard the criticism, he realised that he had been thinking the same thing. This new city of Farweather's seemed awfully spread out. It was like they were building a second high street, but without a second Edinburgh to go around it. Where would everyone live?

"The funny thing about a road," Farweather replied, "is that it's meant to be a uniform width. That's why it's a road, and not a cow path."

One of the younger lawyers pulled up a stake. The worker who stood closest to Hand yelled for him to put it down, and the others raised knives and clubs, shouting what they would do if he moved it. In response, the town guard stepped forward, assuming a protective line, outnumbered but looking unpleasantly willing to fight. A few of the guardsmen carried muskets, and several others wielded their long axes. They were known

to be violent and untrustworthy. Hand had never imagined that anyone would challenge them.

Waller said, “I don’t think you need such an oversized road. What’s the point? So the idle citizens, like that kettle-faced boy, can stand and watch me as I walk?”

One of the workers close to Hand yelled, “That’s our work, you old bastard!” The other men cheered and laughed.

Lane Waller waited until the applause had died down.

“Speak up, friend,” he said. “Please speak up. These aging ears didn’t hear you so well. Speak up again, and tell me your name. Tell me your name—and be assured that I also know the name of your bookie, to whom you owe two weeks’ wages. I know the names of the men who watch over the close where your children play.” The workers stared at him. “I also know the name of the publican in whose establishment you drink, and I know the names of every single employer who might one day give you work. I know the price of the cheapest pew in the church you attend, and I can make that price rise and fall at the merest mention of your name. No, sir, don’t look away! Come on, speak up. Tell me your name so I may write it down in my book. Speak! Speak up, if you think I’m bragging. Please. Threaten me again.”

The crowd of workers seemed to ripple, each man waiting for someone else to shout.

Farweather spoke. “No one is threatening you, Waller. This is a glorious moment for our city.” He approached Mr. Waller, gesturing for Hand to follow. “The council envisages a grand thoroughfare, on a scale unseen in European architecture. A street plan

embodying the soul of geometry and proportion. The council agreed that the people would benefit from—”

“The people? What good have they ever done, even for themselves? My father, and my father’s father, and his father’s father before him—Edinburgh has thrived only because we have protected it *from its people*. And the wretches, they know it. Day in, day out, they come to me with their catastrophes and feuds, seeking my help—forever, they beg my aid, just as their ancestors' begging occupied my father’s wearied hours, exhausted his last drop of charity, and sent him down to his final rest. If Edinburgh’s dirty inhabitants could ever raise themselves from indolence and lust, we Wallers would gladly throw off our office. But with each new generation, the city proves itself incapable, and so my family’s toil goes on. Listen to me, Douglas: if you design for the people, you design for chaos and ruin.” Waller clutched his gold chain with both hands, as if he might tear it apart. “This city’s architecture should reflect the natural order of being, the hierarchy of great and small. That’s what will make us respected around the world, not some ridiculous road.”

“Your family has done great things for Edinburgh. No one, I think, would claim otherwise,” said Farweather. “But I’m afraid you’re wrong about the people of this city. Yes, on a simple level of fact, you are mistaken. Even in the cheapest, most unfortunate homes, remarkable people are living and thriving. Take this boy, for instance. I believe that he can beat you in a test of intellect.”

Waller frowned, his jaw trembling with irritation and disdain. Hand looked up at Farweather, growing even more scared. What was Farweather proposing he do?

“Do you see that clock, Waller? Observe how it tracks even the smallest passage of time. Hand McLeish, here, is as accurate as that clock. He has an uncanny gift, which I will demonstrate to you. Let us make a bet. If you are more accurate than Hand, I’ll happily give your courthouse an extra three feet. If not—”

“I do not dignify the crowd,” Waller replied, “by competing with it.”

Farweather guided Hand to look at the face of the clock. Its second hand was ticking towards the end of the minute. Troubled, Hand wished he could maintain and operate such a device: it was in desperate need of winding.

As the second hand reached the apex, Farweather turned Hand back, facing away from the clock. He called out, “Waller—keep track of the time. But don’t cheat. We will wait a minute or so, then you and Hand will compare your count of the passing seconds. We will see who has the more mathematical mind.”

Waller came up close, his eyes burning down on Hand. “Time is irrelevant. The decision has been already made.”

Farweather was silent, his palms relaxed on Hand’s shoulders. They waited, and then, gesturing for Waller to look with him at the clock, he asked Hand for his estimate of how much time had passed.

Hand felt confused. Fifty-eight seconds had passed since they had looked away from the clock face, but he was unsure why was this important. In school with Mr. Frederick, he and his class had played a similar game, but when Hand had told Mr. Frederick his answer, Mr. Frederick had become angry. He had acted like Hand had cheated.

“How many—right now, Hand? Come on, tell us.”

Hesitantly, Hand replied, "Sixty-one seconds, sir." Farweather's grip released him, as if he had said the right thing. The Irish workers cheered.

Farweather was smiling. "This boy," he said, in a louder voice, "Seems to me an omen. To the scientific intellect, he is clearly a portent of our nation's future, indeed of all humanity's. Our children and grandchildren will have the mathematical wisdom to make those of us now living seem like the most brutal apes. Those grandchildren, Waller, will look at your idiotically uneven road and wince."

"I'm not that easily impressed," said Waller.

"This boy, Hand McLeish, is not only equipped with a talent that will be of immense use to Scotland's coming age of industry and science, but, to my mind, represents all the gifts among of people that are currently lost from sight. That's why we are building this new city. Not just to bring the families of quality back from their residences in London, but to also prepare a home fit for our own descendants. If you bungle my road, your grandchildren will look at you in horror. You will end your life a laughing stock."

Waller began a reply, but Farweather cut him off: "Hand. How many seconds have passed now?"

Still confused by the argument going on around him, Hand answered, his voice wavering, "One minute forty-six," unsure if this was what Farweather actually wanted.

Waller looked down at him. "You want to show off, child? You want to play games?" He gestured for the town guard to approach. Farweather protested, but the lawyer pushed him back, saying he would give this prodigy a real test, and Farweather's workers did not step forward in response. As the guardsmen tied a rope around Hand's

ankles, Douglas kept his gaze locked on him, offering him support. As the rope was pulled tight, Farweather's men shouted and cheered, saying that Hand could do it, that he would show the lawyer-bastard.

The guardsmen carried him to the covered-over hole, lifted away half of the planks, and then, to Hand's horror, lowered him into the pit. The earth was damp around him. His ankles ached where the bound rope bit. Then, as he hung there, they replaced the planks, closing him into the dark. Hand struggled, reaching out in the hope of relieving the pressure on his ankles, but the pit was too wide. He could barely brush its mud sides with his fingertips.

Despite the throbbing pain of the knot, the lack of light, Hand waited in reasonable calm for a full minute, convinced they would pull him out. The last two tests had been about that long. He waited for them to lift him free. But the minute passed without a quiver in the rope. His feet were being pulled away from his legs. The pain and the darkness bore down on him, and he could not stop the whimper that escaped from his lips. This awful test made no sense. Could people really not tell the time without a clock? Was Farweather being serious when he said Hand had a gift?

Perhaps he really was Granny Wynd's creation. Perhaps he wasn't a real human boy.

Hanging there in the darkness, hearing nothing from the people above, and unable to stop his panicked breathing, Hand understood that he was not alone. He could see nothing, hear nothing, and yet he could feel Granny Wynd far below, creeping like a spider up the sides of the pit. This was where she came, every single night, crawling out of her window to visit him here, where he was suspended in the darkness, utterly

helpless. She had been waiting until he was large enough to be worth eating. She crawled up, her feet gliding over the wet mud, her huge hands reaching to crush his bones, break his ribs so she could chew on them like strips of salted beef. Hand closed his eyes, not wanting to see even the smallest trace of her approach, heavy tremors wracking his body.

Above him, the planks were pulled away, and Hand opened his eyes, seeing in the faint light no one close by. There was no Granny Wynd clinging to the walls. He was lifted up and hoisted to someone's chest while the knot was untied. The town guard laughed at him, finding his scared eyes funny. The returning blood made his feet throb and itch, and despite everyone's eyes, he couldn't make himself stand upright, having to hop from one sore foot to the other.

Farweather and Waller were standing together. The guardsmen and workers were mingled together, too, waiting to see what he would say. The clock's face was covered by a blanket.

Farweather asked, "What time is it now, child? Can you tell us—in a loud voice?"

Hand blinked at him. "Five minutes past seven o'clock and six seconds." He was worried at his answer, because the big clock would actually say five seconds past the minute, not six. It was badly in need of mechanical help. But the blanket was pulled from the clock, and Farweather's glad eyes, and the cheering around him, told him it didn't matter. He had said the right thing.

Waller said, "This means nothing." He went to grab another stick from the ground, but Farweather's men moved on him, surged on all sides. The guard tried to respond, but there were too few of them, and the workers were close enough to seize the muskets from

their hands. The peg was tugged from Waller's grip, and the Irishmen, laughing, began re-measuring where the road's border would be.

Farweather squeezed Hand's shoulder. "Well done there. We will have use for you in the coming days. We have an entire city to build according to the highest philosophical principles." He passed Hand a silver coin and left him, going up to Waller, putting his arm around the lawyer. He guided Waller away, soothing the man's complaints, whispering to his ear. Waller, furious, thrust him away, but continued to walk by his side.

Hand stared at the coin he held. He turned it over, amazed to possess so much money without any warning at all.

The workers surrounded him, patting him on the back. "Good on you!" one cried.

"You taught that lawyer a wee thing or two," said the African man.

Hand smiled. They were proud of him.

"That's a lot of silver to be carrying, though," the first said, to murmured agreement.

"A shilling? You're too young to be holding that kind of money." Hand looked at him, scared. He pulled the coin to his heart, looking for a way out. They closed around him.

"Someone would just take it off you," said the African, nodding. "We'll keep it safe."

"I need it," Hand said. "I earned it."

"Lad, come on," said a voice right behind him, and who took hold of Hand's arms and chest. "The love of money will send you straight to hell." Hand was lifted up and turned upside down, to laughter. To his surprise, he found himself staring at Tyler Cavenar. He had come to stand just beyond the huddle of men.

“Put him down, gentlemen,” Tyler said in a quiet, proper voice. “Return him to his rightful angle.”

There was a dangerous moment of silence. There was no one else about, the town guard having followed Lane Waller away. Hand looked for Montrose, but didn't see him.

The night spun as Hand was placed on his feet.

“No harm meant,” said one worker. “Just a game we were playing.”

“Aye,” said Tyler. “Indeed.”

“You did all right, lad,” said someone else, ruffling Hand's hair with considerable force. They departed, glancing back in a less than friendly manner.

Soon Hand was left alone with Tyler. The torches continued to burn. The new town stood around them, a great expanse of mud and paving stone. Measuring flags shook in the night's breeze, and high up, beyond the hollow of the North Loch, the lights of old Edinburgh flickered in the distance, the candles burning in windows, and the smoking hearths.

“I'm envious of you,” said Tyler. “Being so heroic like that. My family would have brain fever if I tried it.” Hand had only heard of one family called Cavenar. They were supposed to be extremely rich.

The boy had a soft face and a plump belly, and there was something remarkable about every item of clothing he wore. His high leather boots, for instance, seemed not put out at all by the mud that had attached itself to them: indeed, those boots gave off the air of having been specifically designed for a walk through uncertain ground. The boy's

waistcoat was embroidered with many curving patterns, and that waistcoat's three bronze buttons bore curving patterns of their own.

Tyler Cavenar took off his left glove, undid the top button of his shirt, and used his bare hand to reach down his neck, under his clothes. He lifted out a money pouch attached to a cord, the sort that gentlemen wore against their skin. Hand watched in dismay as the boy proffered the pouch. Now Tyler would take the shilling for himself.

Tyler smiled. “You can borrow this—but I would like it back.”

Hand was confused.

“I don't think we'll be getting back into the city tonight. Montrose will find you a bed.”

Hand accepted the pouch, and slowly, disbelievingly, examined it, and dropped his coin inside. He slipped the cord over his neck. There was a clever draw-string that allowed him to pull the mouth tight, secure his shilling.

Tyler gestured for Hand to follow. “Tomorrow, I'll take you to meet Douglas. He will explain the full scope of our plans for Edinburgh—our plans for the entire world.”

Chapter Nine

Hand woke to the sound of the wind. The tent walls bowed in the breeze, and its doorway had become untied at the bottom, flinging up the loosened cord and its clasp, thumping the metal piece against the canvas at the height of each swing. Hand's face was cold, and he had slept with his legs curled up, facing away from the other sleeping rolls, his coin pouch turned to the tent's wall. No one else was awake. Montrose, his cot set out by the tent's door, snorted and twitched, constricted by a nightmare.

Pale, grim light shone from the gaps in the canvas, promising a low, gloomy day.

Hand had never before woken up outside the city. Men were moving about beyond the tent, but their small noise only called more attention to the overwhelming silence. The tent smelled of damp cloth and musty feet, but whenever the wind swept in, it brought none of the absolute stench of the city's mornings, the burning of fuel and the reek of discarded waste from the night before. He listened incredulously, reaching out, and finding none of the usual traces of people and their practices, none of the usual flirtation and trading. Just the wind, alone, acting on its own unknown rhythms, as though the entire life of mankind had ended in the night. Like a great clock had broken in mid-tick.

The silver coin, however, remained quite solid to his grip, still sheathed in Tyler's pouch. Hand's ankles still ached, and when he touched the welts the rope had left, the ridges of raised skin burned. Lane Waller's small eyes came back to him then, the lawyer's fury.

He had survived the pit. The guardsmen had lowered him down, but he had survived. What did that mean? He had some sort of ability, a talent that other people did not have. The thought made him shiver in fear. Had Granny Wynd given him that gift—perhaps when she had offered her help over the chicken? Hand searched his pockets, hoping he would find one penny or token hiding there, a little blackened symbol bearing the witch's curse. But the more he thought about clocks and counting, the more he recalled moments when people had been startled or dismayed by something he had said. Mr. Frederick, for instance, had set him the task of predicting when the school clock would chime, and the teacher's mood had grown ugly when Hand had continued to get it exactly right.

All those days when his mother had turned to him and asked him to tell her where a lost thing had ended up.

“Murderer's Hand!” The cry seemed so real Hand looked around, expecting to see his bullies in the tent. But there was no one but the four sleeping soldiers. Outside, only the sweep and murmur of the wind, the call of seagulls. He was not like other children. He did not know in what precise ways he differed, but he understood quite well that he had to keep it secret. He could see his life growing and maturing, finding romance with a young woman looked much like his cousin Rosalynd. He could imagine himself growing a beard and a confident manner, much like that of the guest from the colonies. But none of that would be possible if the city knew his secret. Farweather, perhaps, was foolish enough not to care, but no one in Edinburgh else would be so lenient.

He winced himself to his feet, his legs sore and his ankles complaining. He felt hungry again, and chilled, the damp of the night still clinging. He undid another clasp

from the tent's doorway, giving him enough space to duck through. He could be back in the city before his family had finished breakfast.

"You can walk around," said Montrose, "but don't go anywhere."

"I want to see my maw," Hand said, hollow in his stomach.

"You cannae, not till Douglas comes."

"But I need—"

"Nah, lad. No way. Edinburgh might not be safe. Depends how personal Mr. Waller took your performance last night. Stick by this tent, all right? Don't panic—the cook should be serving up something in a bit. Won't be as good as that pie you gave me last night, but it'll keep you going."

The dawn touched the camp only with great reluctance. Although Farweather's new town looked like it would be very long, east to west, almost as long as the stretch between the castle to the Canongate, it was not very wide. Hand discovered that he needed only a few minutes to walk through it, coming to the end of the measuring flags and road markers with the city's castle and tenements still quite visible when he glanced back. Ahead of him, beyond the boundary line of the planned excavation, the countryside stretched down and away, just as it always had. The Waters of Leith, the main river of the area, bustled underneath a mill's wheel. As he watched, the fields and lanes glowed from one finger of light, and then another. A patch of the waving Forth shone under the sun, and then the clouds moved, and the water once again subsided into gloom. The sheep flocks, the pigstys and the manor houses, and the stretch of ragged woodland that lay some distance to the north: they appeared quite ignorant of the city's great change.

Hand returned to the heart of the camp, hoping to receive breakfast. A considerable amount of time passed, however, before a pair of water carriers emerged from the road to the city, bringing on their backs the necessary ingredient for hot porridge. At that point, a cook set a fire, and the men and boys who emerged from the camp's various tents formed themselves into a loose but good-natured queue.

Across the loch, tiny figures crawled about Edinburgh's lanes, and from the castle's heights, Hand thought he could see a guardsman looking back. Did his family know where he was? His mother had to be worried to death. He had the shilling under his shirt, but had no way to get it to her.

Far off, on the eastern edge of the work site, another camp of men continued to work on the new bridge they were building, the bridge that would one day span the Loch. That camp alone, out of everyone on this side of the hollow, continued to toil. Hand now understood that the bridge was at the heart of Farweather's plans: the new town would need a good road, crossing over the hollow, to connect it to the high street. If only the bridge were complete: he could run across it and be home. He could lift Farweather's coin from around his neck.

He asked Montrose what everyone would work on today.

“Nothing. Lane Waller has locked down all work that isn't already promised.”

“When is Mr. Farweather going to visit?”

“No idea. Recall my previous answer?”

“I'm supposed to do nothing?”

“Don't you worry. I'm supposed to take you over to see Mr. Farweather and Mr. Cavenar, whenever it is they arrive.” The boy with the sword.

Montrose looked amused, as though he were accusing Hand of something. “Do you want to know why the Cavenars trust me?”

Hand could only look back, lacking the understanding that Montrose seemed to assume they shared.

“I never mention money,” said Montrose. “Not what I get, and not what I spend. Never. I act indifferent.”

“Thank you,” said Hand, hoping that he would come to understand the significance.

The morning warmed and brightened, and Hand's mood lifted with it. Hand found a tree stump on which to sit, and he watched people on the passageways and roads emerging out of Edinburgh, only mildly disappointed whenever the next new arrival turned out to be no one he knew. But the sky was fair, he had eaten, and he would bring money home. He did not need to worry. When he saw Douglas Farweather leading a group of young men, with Tyler Cavenar walking by his side, Hand got up, pleased.

“We are at war,” Tyler said. “Mr. Waller refuses to let a single man pick up a rock.”

“Why doesn't Mr. Farweather ignore him?”

“Ah. You assume that Douglas has more power over the city than he does. That's not how—you see, it's more complicated. Douglas is, on one level, one of the greatest architects in Europe, admired by anyone with merit. But on another level, he is simply a man hired to do a job. A mere artist under contract. These lads here are not his workers. Even the plan for the new town was drawn up by another man. Craig, have you heard of

him? Well, it is his design, Craig's, that we are trying to complete. If someone with real power tries to slow us down, or alter the plans, there's little Douglas can do."

"What about the bridge?"

Tyler turned, sheltering his eyes to look. "The bridge is different. One of Waller's chief men won the contract for much of that. So the foundation laying continues."

"Is Mr. Waller coming here?"

"Why would he? He has no need. It's wretched! If only there was some way to strike back at him."

Hand was about to ask if he could leave, go back to his mother, but Tyler gestured for them to walk, rejoin Laird Farweather's group.

Chapter Ten

A dozen workers moved into the nearest large tent, emerging with a great many crates and boxes. Douglas and his students moved into the now empty pavilion. A table was set out by Douglas's side, and one of the students unrolled a map upon it, securing the sheet's corners with four stones. Hand could not see what the map displayed, his view blocked by someone's back.

Douglas, alone, had a chair. Today, he dressed as a philosopher, a soft blue cap upon his head. It seemed to Hand another sign that he expected no work to be achieved.

“What,” he asked, “do we learn from the death of Socrates?”

The students appeared to be pondering this question with some intensity. Hand waited to hear an answer, but, as the silence stretched on, he felt someone should speak up. “He was killed.”

“Yes,” said Douglas, “Well done, Mr. McLeish. Socrates was killed by the state. He was executed by his own government.”

Hearing he had got the answer right, Hand glanced at Tyler with some anxiety, expecting to see either resentment or a smirk. That was how school worked, Hand had learned. But instead, Tyler met his eye with relish, seeming pleased for him. What sort of schools had this wealthy boy grown up in? One could sense, in Tyler's open, generous features, an endless series of earnest, respectful conversations, a lifetime of comfortable libraries to peruse.

“We see,” continued Douglas, “that despite Socrates’ great wisdom, and the legendary eloquence of his followers, Athens was unable to incorporate his wisdom into itself. Despite the presence of Socrates and Plato, two of the greatest geniuses the world has ever known, the Athenian state remained a violent, partisan, self-interested polity. We must not deceive ourselves about this. For any of us living today, were we to walk through classical Athens, the city and its populace would appear barbaric and backward. If you were to spend a day there, even if you were treated as an esteemed visitor and shown only the city’s best side, you would have by nightfall lost all reverence for the ancients. This is not to reduce the achievement of Socrates. He explored, more profoundly than any thinker since, man’s relation to other men. He discovered the mind’s troubled connection to the appearances and surfaces of this world. His Athens was one of mankind’s two golden ages: there is no question. Yet it remained fatally incomplete.”

Douglas paused. He regarded his class with warmth.

“What,” he asked, “was the other golden age?”

One boy raised a hand. “Shakespeare’s London, sir?”

This was not well received. “The Englishman is overrated.”

Montrose, standing by Hand’s side, gave him a nudge. “I would give my vote for Rome, Mr. Farweather, sir, if you asked me.”

Douglas did not seem to appreciate the remark. “Ignore that comment, each of you. No, not Rome. Take a fragment of Plato, tarnish it and cheapen it, and then hold it up to a candle. Observe that fragment’s long shadow— that is Rome. Rome survived by war. War, slavery, and fear. Rome advanced mankind only further into the darkness.” Having

said this, Douglas glanced at Montrose, as if to say: I respect your point of view, but there are children present, and so I must be firm.

Montrose shrugged. "They built some good roads, so I've heard."

"Rome was no golden age. It contributed one thing to humanity's forward march: the acceptance of the truth of revelation. The fall of its empire, which we should all be thankful for, allowed the second golden age to begin, the time of the monasteries and the cathedrals, the reviving fire of Martin Luther and John Calvin. Through them, mankind learned how to relate our imperfect life of experience to the eternal realities of divine inspiration. Thanks to the reformers of the Church, we saw how we might accord ourselves with the moral truths that Athens never knew."

As he spoke, Douglas's manner grew more lively. "If we remember our geometry, we might picture two axes, one horizontal, one vertical. Man, in his natural state, is in the position of the zero. The Athenians understood the horizontal axis, the training in inquiry and observation, the taming of the senses. The Reformers, in contrast, brought us to a correct understanding of the vertical axis, that of the divine. Yet both societies were, at the same time, deeply lacking. How can we compare the kings of Europe with the magnificent Socrates? Did Henry VIII or Emperor Maximilian possessed even one percent of Aristotle's genius? Of course not. The first of those two ages, then, knew man. The second, knew God."

Douglas looked around his class, pleased with the vision he had presented. To Hand's surprise, Douglas did not seem to be the sort of philosopher he had experienced before. Mr. Farweather seemed to genuinely enjoy explaining what he knew. Hand

actually wished that his father could have been present, as the talk of Socrates and human society would have quite tickled him. Hand's dad was fond of introducing the story of Abraham and Isaac into conversation, even if the situation was not, on the sight of things, appropriate: he would have found this particular discussion an almost too-rich field.

"Here," Douglas said, his proud tone resuming, "in Scotland, in our capital, we are building a new city. And cities have been built from the dawn of time. But never like this. We are building not just a new Athens, but an Athens as it should have been, a society that marries the vertical axis with the horizontal, where worldly and divine knowledge will flourish together. Our city will begin a wholly new age. Mankind will emerge, at long last, from the dirt of which he was made, and stand as his Creator intended him."

Outside the tent, the dry wind continued to blow. The land was bare, torn up by shovels, but nothing had been built to replace the grass and the bushes. The mice and hares had fled, escaping the destruction the city had brought. Hand could almost make out the energies of the long windy camp, the men growing frustrated in their tents, bored with the lack of action, doubting they would be paid. He could almost hear plans being formed, some arguing that they should dash back to the city, seek out whisky and women, while some argued against.

Douglas Cavenar handed his papers to a student and stood. The group left the tent, setting out on foot, with Douglas talking in private to one of the tallest students, his words too faint for Hand to overhear.

Tyler said, "Did you manage to look at the map?"

Hand shook his head.

“A pity. It's a beautiful design. Very simple. Three primary streets, with houses and their gardens between them. The city will be open to the north and south, so that men walking down Princes Street will be able to look across the loch, and see the heights of the ancient city.”

“How long before it's built?”

“Years and years,” said Tyler. “You and I will be old men, most likely, once the new town is fully made.”

“How did you know—” Hand stopped, his voice failing him. The students were walking some distance ahead, but Hand wanted to make sure he was not overheard. He wanted to ask about Lizzie Farweather, Douglas's daughter, but he worried that if he did, Tyler would laugh at him. He tried to think of a subtle way to raise the subject.

“Lizzie Farweather.” he asked, unable to think of a canny way to phrase it.

“Yes,” said Tyler. “I'm supposed to marry her.”

Hand blinked.

Tyler smiled. “It's key to the plan. Once the idea of a new town was accepted, and the design approved by the council, my father and the rest of the leading Cavenars knew that Douglas Farweather should lead its construction. Across Europe, he stands alone as architect and artist. Unfortunately, while Douglas is esteemed in Scotland and abroad, he is not rich. He has no income other than the rewards of his genius. So my father thought it might ease his move home, if we entertained the idea that I, and Lizzie, when we are old enough, will marry. My portion of the Cavenar empire would offer Lizzie—and Douglas—a very comfortable life.”

“Do you like her?”

“She's wonderful. A real genius for art and music,” said Tyler. “Still, it is a little embarrassing. Here you are, fighting Lane Waller, overcoming this and that. You are playing a direct role. What's my contribution to the cause? Some time in the next several years, I am supposed to have a wedding. It's not the sort of role you'd find in an epic poem, is it?”

Douglas and his students continue their march, crossing the entirety of the planned new town, pausing often to discuss features of the building site. Hand was not invited to take part in any of their conversations, and his excitement about the lesson faded. His mother would be scared for him.

One of Douglas's student remarked, “I cannot understand Mr. Lane Waller's actions. Is he opposing Mr. Farweather out of sheer envy?” The lad's eyes were hard to make out behind his glasses, their gold frames glowing in the sun.

Douglas replied quickly. “Waller is not envious so much as ignorant. He has no feeling for the transformational power of architecture. He would be happy allowing individual architects and engineers to feu the new town's lots and build on them as they please.”

“Does the city have to follow the map so exactly?” another student asked. “It seems like a moment's compromise could fix this dispute.”

“We humans are fallible creatures,” said Douglas. “We need to have a moral ideal demonstrated to our eyes before we can form its reality in our daily lives. We learn our best thoughts from art, and take our most resolute habits from the sketches of engineers.

This was the genius of the original design, the reason I and others chose to back Craig's idea. Its moral lesson. And yet the plan has already been corrupted and skewed.” He gestured to Hand. “Look at the map, child. Open it for him, someone.” Two students again unfurled the scroll. “Do you see how the plan calls for two churches, symmetrically bordering the new city? One to the east, another to the west?”

Hand nodded as Douglas pointed at one square and then the other, glad to be included. The map looked quite simple. Hand would never have been able to talk about it like Mr. Farweather had done, not in so much detail. It was just three long streets.

“Now,” Douglas said, “one of those two churches will never be built. Sir Laurence Dundas fancied the location for his own townhouse, and gained the permission to build there without the council fully understanding what he was about. Or, perhaps, certain councillors did know, but were paid to stay quiet. Either way, the plan’s symmetry has sustained its first blow. A palace will stand where a church had once been intended. If we keep going like this, we might as well hire a minotaur and have him run about the city, scaring the tradesmen and their wives. No. There can be no compromise with ignorance.”

A hundred feet away, below in the hollow, the teams of workers who were preparing the ground for the new bridge continued to toil. Six different groups of men were at work, pulling out loose stones and detritus from six deep square holes in the ground. From the low ground, where the teams were digging and carrying stones, two men, their faces grey with chalk and dry mud, were coming in his direction.

Chapter Eleven

Hand watched the pair approach: they looked dead tired. Their clothes and faces were caked with stone-dust, streaked in grey and yellow. Hand felt sorry for them, so he went over to the case of measuring sticks, opened it, and removed the yardstick that the men had come for. He ran up and passed it over.

The older of the two blinked, and blinked again, the skin around his eyes a maze of dusty furrows. He looked at the yardstick. He looked back at Hand.

“How did you know we wanted this stick?”

Hand was pleased to help. “Your team is behind the others, right? So—” He left the comment hanging: it was self-evident, really.

The younger one said, “That’s the boy from last night. The one with the skill for counting.”

The older nodded. “That’s him, indeed.” He smiled, revealing lines of naked skin under the dust. “You did good. I was proud how you didn’t blubber when they lowered you into the pit. If it’d been me, I know I would have.”

“Come on,” said the younger. “Time is beating us.”

The older man, however, continued to examine Hand. He looked as though he had been abruptly woken from sleep, having to push his brain around the simplest thoughts.

“How did you know,” he asked, framing the words, “that our team has fallen behind?”

Hand felt nervous at the question's intensity. This man was acting like he had done something special.

The younger man gripped the other's arm. "Let's go. Like the boy has figured out, we're behind."

The older patted the hand that held him. "I'm just curious to know, child. How come you can see we're the worst team?" The question was asked so kindly Hand felt he had to say something.

"Just—" He pointed at the line, the many arms heaving stones and swinging axes. "Everyone is moving through the different parts of the job. Loading the stone, then cutting it, then laying it. You're still cutting it long after everyone else is done."

His response was enough to make the two men depart. Hand didn't turn away, however, compelled by the feeling that the older man still wanted something of him. And as he watched, the older man did indeed stop. He spoke to his companion, making the younger man fling his arms up, annoyed. They argued briefly, and then returned.

The older man looked down at Hand. "If one team ever gets much behind than the others, that team gets let go. That's the rule. They decide at the end of the week, which is today."

The younger sighed. "It'll only happen if we keep wasting time talking about it." He moved to go, but halted, stiffening. Laird Farweather was standing nearby, watching the conversation. Hand turned: Douglas Farweather had overheard everything.

Douglas looked down the hill, inspecting the work of the bridge-teams. “Hand. Do you think you can advise these men? I would pay to see that.” Douglas's students glared at Hand, annoyed that their lesson had been disrupted.

The idea of payment warmed Hand's skin.

“You see that? He'll pay you,” the old man told him. “Laird Farweather just said he would. Why don't you come, take a look?”

Hand and Tyler walked with two men under the noon sky. On the way down to their pit, the younger man refused to look at him, but from the older fellow, he learned all about the team's troubles. They had fallen behind when they had lost their foreman at the end of the previous week. This foreman had angered one of Lane Waller's functionaries, and since then, he had been sufficiently frightened that he refused to leave his house. The team had been leaderless ever since. If, by sundown, they could not get back to parity with the other teams, they would be dismissed, and another foreman would be invited to supply a team to replace them.

Hand asked, “Which team is the best?”

The older man said, “It's not that simple. Two of the teams are led by men of Mr. Waller's. No one wants to go faster than them. Wouldn't be worth the danger. But everyone knows who's really the best. The third group from us, over there—see? They would be far ahead if Waller's lot weren't here. The worst part of it is, they're led by a deaf man. He's totally deaf. Can't hear at all. And yet they're beating every other team here. That's what makes this such total shite. We're being beaten by a deaf bastard!”

Tyler asked, “What's so good about the deaf man's team?”

“No idea.”

Hand stood over the pit, looking around while the two men rejoined their fellows. His team looked exhausted. He didn't know how to speed them up with the low strength they had remaining. The other five teams had already laid in most of the bottom layer of densely packed stone. His team had only managed about a third.

He looked at the best team, the one led by a deaf man, expecting to see some impressive acts of leadership from him. Instead, however, the deaf man was working away from his people, continuing to cut stone all by himself. He seemed to be ignoring his team. And they ignored him in return. The deaf man worked evenly, measuring and cutting, not looking up from his work. His arm sank and rose like the shuttle on a loom, regular and fatal. Their leader worked so quickly, Hand guessed, because he wasn't distracted or slowed, because he had given himself one clear task to carry out.

Hand shielded his eyes from the sun. He gathered himself more closely, going quiet, not paying any attention to the world nearby. He remembered the ticking of that great clock from his school, its arms click-clicking their journey around the day. Now he could hear its wobbly second-counting arm, never quite hitting the marks as it should. Tick-tick-tick, he heard the clock go, and then, growing tired of its imperfections, he pushed the sound from his mind, and let his head fill with another clock's ticking, one that only he could hear. This clock made no mistakes at all. It measured the day to perfection, dividing it into exact portions, the seconds precisely pattering out the final third of the current minute. Much more dimly, Hand could also hear other cycles, other rotations, time signatures he did not know how to name. Some of these frequencies were faster than

the standard measures of the clock, all but a buzzing hum, while others were more ponderous, vast empty intervals that would land, whenever they would next land, in gloomy thuds and hollow chimes. His clocks filled the air, made sensible the day.

Hand asked: if his team could borrow that deaf man, how much would it help his team? He was startled to see the difference. One man, undistracted, given a job that required no getting up and going around, who was forbidden chatter with his fellows, could do the work of almost three regular men. What if every task was done like that? And then, what if each of those tasks were made small enough that, in order to do it, a man could use the same movements and the same muscles each time? Hand smiled, his mind full of the ticking of his many nameless clocks. He could already see the difference on the pit's floor, the layer of stones filling up to near completion.

He approached the edge of the excavation. The whole team squinted up at him, everyone ceasing work. They were so tired that despite their fear of being dismissed, they seized any chance to rest.

Hand said, "I can help you. Follow what I say, and you'll catch the others up."

The younger man's head was sticking up out of the pit, his chin on the level of the earth, the same dusty shade as the land itself. "Okay," he said. "You show us your idea. But it had better bloody work, or I'll beat you into the dirt. You understand?"

"What's this idea?" Tyler asked.

Hand came back to the excavation. The clocks in his head were turning strong and clear.

Chapter Twelve

Hand explained his plan: they would work in pairs, with each pair carrying out a specific part of the job. He would need to see them working before he figured out the best allocation of tasks, so after the first twenty minutes, they should expect to be shifted around. But the end result would be a much faster, less tiring effort.

They all looked up at him, unimpressed.

“We tried doing it like that,” said one.

Hand frowned. He asked what had gone wrong.

“Half of us end up waiting around!”

Hand’s confidence flooded back. The method hadn’t worked because they had lacked someone to watch over the process and make adjustments, so bottlenecks had slowed the whole effort down. Hand divided them up and told them not to worry.

Watching the men work, Tyler’s face was bright. “This is excellent. Let me tell Douglas what you’re doing.”

“Please,” said Hand. “Don’t.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t want people to hear about me.”

“My friend,” said Tyler. “It’s too late. You are going to be popular with everyone, very soon. All of Edinburgh will want to meet you. I’ll make sure of it.”

“I haven’t done anything.”

Tyler merely laughed, suggesting a confidence Hand did not feel. Once Tyler had gone, Hand kept watching his team, seeing little improvement. The men worked slowly, not much better than before, their backs heavy with fatigue. Hand wondered if he would really be able to improve their work.

The work continued. Tyler came back, accompanied by the soldier, Montrose.

“Hand is in charge of all of this.”

“Really,” said Montrose. He did not look impressed.

“Is everything going well?” Tyler asked.

Hand didn’t reply.

“Oh,” said Tyler. “Well, I have been telling everyone about your success.”

Hand wished Tyler would reduce the intensity of his praise.

Montrose came to Hand’s side, and pointed at one of the middle teams, where a large, dark-bearded man was shouting at his workers.

“Careful,” he said, “of that fellow. He’s one of Lane Waller’s fists. He reports directly to Mr. Waller.”

The bearded man noticed their attention, looking back, and although Tyler soon left with Montrose, he continued to stare at Hand’s work site. He picked up a long-handled axe and walked over.

“Hey! You worthless wretches.” This man held the axe like he was ready to swing it. Hand’s team stopped their work, wary of him.

“How many extra people are you bringing along? That’s not the deal. Each team has to live or die with who they have.”

Hand said, "Just me."

"And what do you do, monkey?"

"I'm like the new foreman. To replace the one we lost. Everyone else is the same."

The bearded man shook his head. "Wretches."

Once the bearded man left, to Hand's surprise, the mood of the team brightened.

Now, no one talked, no one complained. Hand could feel the air change for the better.

"Remember," Hand called as he moved down the line, "Don't move any more than you have to. Just do the one task then pass it on. If you find it's taking you too long, tell me."

An hour later, the sun beating down on the hollow, one of Douglas's students walked over, scrambling down the hillside.

"Mr. Farweather," he said, "suggests you let your men rest. Give them a short break."

Hand agreed, embarrassed that he had not factored breaks into his plan.

The men lounged under the sun for ten minutes, eating a little dry biscuit, and then the old man, the one who had asked Hand's help, had them start up again. Now Hand could step back, sitting off to the side, watching. The men had the system learned now.

A couple of hours later, Hand was even more pleased when he went for a tour around the worksite, discovering that the other teams were no longer ahead. If he kept driving his men, with another hour remaining in the work day, they could surpass both of Lane Waller's teams.

"Where are we now?" asked one of his men, panting, his lips grey-stained.

“We’re still behind,” Hand lied, “Another hour or so—work as fast as you can!”

When the call finally came for work to cease, the men of his team did not fling themselves to the ground, but rather simply halted, too drained even to recline or fall. From the other side of the worksite, an overseer walked among the six teams, noting their progress. This overseer stopped a long time over Hand’s team, evidently surprised. In a curious tone, he asked if they had hired extra workers, and Hand explained that he alone had replaced the missing foreman. The overseer nodded, and departed. Hand understood from his team’s glad reactions that they had not been dismissed.

The older worker climbed out of the pit. “Look. Careful, now.”

From the next team along, the large bearded man was coming back, his pickaxe in hand. Behind him, the rest of his team stood and watched, their arms crossed. From the expressions of his followers, Hand understood that this one man intended to take on Hand’s whole team and give them a collective punishment.

The stranger glared at the last two men remaining in the pit. “You know who I am?”

Hand said, “You’re Lane Waller’s man.”

“I’m Deacon, and I’m my own fucking man.” He looked around, pointing his axe at one face and then another. “You shouldn’t have gone over me, you cretins. You go slower than my team! Slower! Why can’t you even get that right?” Hand’s men shrank back. Deacon loomed over the last man in the pit, heavy and enraged, and he smashed the blade between the fellow’s hands. The man let go in panic, falling back into the shadowed dirt.

A faint snapping sound disturbed the air. Deacon flinched, looking around. On the top of the hill, Douglas and Montrose were regarding the fight far below them, and smoke rose from the pistol Montrose had fired into the air. They were surely too far away to hit Deacon, but the point was made. Someone came up to Douglas and passed him a long, heavy musket, which Douglas handled expertly, raising it to his shoulder. He took aim.

Deacon swore. "Fools." He looked Hand up and down. "I would be wiser if I were you. We can't strike against sad little Mr. Mildweather, not directly at his person. But you? You're no one. We will wreck havoc on you and yours."

He departed, walking back to his team without backward glance.

Chapter Thirteen

Anderson's Circulating Library perched on the edge of the Luckenbooths, the strange pack of unevenly-sized homes and businesses that sat, along with the city's awful prison, the Tolbooth, in the heart of the high street. No one knew why the Luckenbooths had been placed in the city's busiest spot, nor for what purpose they had been intended—other than to make the high street even more crowded and disorderly at what should have been its most prestigious part, at the entrances to St. Giles and Parliament Close. Where the city should be at its finest, the Luckenbooths offered not only a warren of raucous, poorly lit stalls but also, if one looked up at the Tollbooth, a good view of the hangman's noose.

Despite these unkempt surroundings, Anderson's library remained Edinburgh's the best place for free-thinkers. One might hear more detailed arguments in one of the city's philosophical clubs, Tyler explained, but only from the same few dozen fellows, more or less, from week to week. And those clubs, Tyler indicated with a sorry eyebrow, declined most evenings into drunken sing-song and red-faced dispute, whereas Anderson's, being public, remained friendly to ladies and the young. The death of its proprietor, of course, had put the library in a troubled way, and an associate of Anderson's had lately been making noises about clearing away the books and re-opening the space as a coffee house or tavern, but Tyler felt confident that a buyer with more sympathetic intentions could be found.

Hand looked through the window of Anderson's library. Inside, a glorious range of people moved about the stacks of books, sipping their coffee or gesturing as they spoke. Hand was glad to be by Tyler's side, learning about parts of Edinburgh he had never expected to encounter, but he really wanted to be allowed to go home. Thanks to his victory with the bridge team, he now had several silver coins in the pouch around his neck, more money than he had ever seen in one place. He wanted to bring the pouch to Freddie Thomas, and fling the contents in the man's face, tell him the debt was paid. He wanted to enjoy the awful man's surprise as he paid back everything his family owed. But Tyler was already opening the library's door, holding it so Hand could walk inside.

The sharp bitterness of coffee and the glue of old books clung to the air. The damp library did seem in poor repair and order, with several towers of books and papers rising from the floor without obvious purpose. There were not sufficient chairs for all the guests, and men had littered the shelves with discarded coffee cups. Hand saw, towards the back of the room, the girl he had met on the other side of the North Loch: Lizzie, the daughter of Laird Farweather. Her back was to him, but the conversation she was carrying with three seated men required her to turn left and right, her face coming briefly into view. She did not speak like a child. She did not act like she expected adults to be interested simply because she was talking. She was holding her own, and despite the flashes of nervousness in her eyes, she remained charming and composed, her latest response provoking earnest laughter in her listeners.

Lizzie was, Hand understood, as he gazed on her through the window, a remarkable being.

Although Lizzie's conversation with the three large men was the loudest of the room, another two small groups were deep in discussion, and because Tyler was standing among some lawyer-looking gentlemen, listening to a man talk very quickly, Hand was not sure where he was supposed to go.

Lizzie made her chief listener shake his head. He was a very fat man with bright, delighted eyes. He was lounging back, his head resting on the chair's head rest, and he regarded Lizzie with deep fondness.

"But Mr. Hume," Lizzie was saying, one palm resting prettily on her hip, "How can it be true that objects no longer exist when we aren't looking at them? How do they remember to put themselves back?"

"That's David Hume," whispered Tyler, coming to Hand's side, his jaw tight, his eyes anxious. "Our foremost philosopher. Lizzie is always putting herself forward and overstaying her welcome—just like this. She expects her good looks to excuse her."

Although he said nothing in reply, Hand felt that Tyler was being unfair: Lizzie Farweather's looks were not the primary cause of her success. As she presented her philosophical point to Mr. Hume, the girl's smallest motion seemed filled with enormous intent, as though every piece of her occupied the room by conscious choice. Even the polished leather of her shoes, or the white ribbons woven in and out of her sleeves—if called to question, Hand felt, each item of her clothing would each be able to reply, consider, and re-order itself.

Hume responded, "Oh, I am on your side, dear Lizzie. That is exactly the problem the skeptical philosopher must face. It is certainly unlikely that objects do disappear when

they leave the field of our perception. The idea offends our very common sense. But to note that something is unlikely is not the same as disproving it.”

“But if our common sense is that —”

“Yes, yes, our intuition. That is the problem. All we can do, we discover, is to trust in the apparent solidity of nature. We are incapable of proving even the most basic facts about our experience of the world. All intellectual life depends upon this unthinking, mule-like faith.”

“Perhaps God remembers where everything goes,” mused Lizzie, resting her weight on one foot. “Then he puts it back just before we look at it again.”

Close to Hand’s ear, Tyler groaned. “God preserve me. She is trying to trap Hume on his own high ground, with no idea how foolish this is making her look.” In Hand’s view, David Hume seemed delighted by Lizzie, as were his companions. “Worst of all, she is attempting to outsmart him through the deployment of a naïve Deism. Excuse me.” He walked in front of Lizzie, prompting Hume to clap his hands in pleasure, exclaiming how tall Tyler had become. Tyler turned, gesturing for Hand to join them.

Hand nervously approached.

Tyler said, “This is Mr. Hand McLeish. He is a very gifted boy.”

Hume looked deep into his eyes. “I am sure he is.”

“Hand,” Tyler added, “has a genius for natural philosophy.”

“I am delighted,” said David Hume, “to make your acquaintance.”

Hume’s gaze was immensely compassionate and bright: two young eyes in an overweight and wrinkled face. Hand had no idea what to say to the philosopher, but it

seemed he was not required to speak. Hume already seemed to know his soul, any distance or difference between them vanishing like parting mist. Although Hume was physically in the same room as everyone else, Hand sensed that he walked in a much happier domain, a personal garden that he had uncovered through decades of enormously challenging study and thought.

“Because you are gifted, I want to impart some practical advice,” said Hume. “I have written a whole book on the subject, and when you are older, I would like Tyler to lend you his copy. This book will enlighten you in innumerable ways. But for now, I will condense its lesson into one brief sentence. Absorb this instruction and put it to good use.” Hume was on the verge, Hand understood, of saying something so profound it would change his whole life.

Hume beckoned him to come closer, and when Hand was standing beside his chair, he leaned forward, speaking right to Hand’s ear.

Hume asked, “Are you ready for my sentence, child?”

“Yes, sir,” said Hand.

“Speak English! English! Speak it, child. Speak English all your days.”

Hand, shivering and queasy, attempted to process this enigmatic demand. He had assumed he was already speaking English.

“You are a North Briton, child. So speak English! You must excise and obliterate from your mind all evidence of the Scottish tongue. I have written a dictionary for this purpose. It lists every troublesome Scots word that you must avoid. Ask Tyler if you may read from his copy. Lift from its pages all the words your instincts tend towards, and then

banish them from your daily speech, much as a theatre-goer puts his fingers in his ears when an immoral act comes on stage. Do you understand me, child?"

Hand nodded.

Hume's stern gaze softened. "The sooner you begin, the easier it will be. English, child. English. You will grow up into a dignified and decent adult. You will thank English for it."

Hand retreated, smiling in what he hoped looked like gratitude, his mind blank. He certainly had a Scots accent, but he did not know what made his voice different to an English one. Were Lizzie and Tyler laughing at him each time he spoke?

He looked around. The library seemed, now that he knew the truth about his voice, a hostile, cold place. He wanted, painfully, to be back among his family, at home. The small damp room where they lived seemed, suddenly, the safest place he could imagine. He glanced at the door, wondering if he could depart without anyone noticing.

He was not allowed the chance. He was seized upon by an older woman, finely dressed, with dark eyes and a rosy, kind face. She demanded to know if he was Master McLeish.

"We've heard the stories about you. Young Tyler has told us everything. Oh, he's a gentleman, that lad, is he not?" She and Hand watched Tyler talking to David Hume. "And to think he descends from cotton merchants! It is beyond belief. He is a true gentleman. Wouldn't you guess, by looking at him, that he was the lost descendant of royalty? Of course you would. Might you even believe that one of the Scots relatives of King Arthur walked among us?" Hand, not knowing who this lady was, nodded blankly.

He found himself continually glancing back at Lizzie, and he answered the older lady's questions without thinking too much about them.

"Tallow's Land? That's where you are staying? What floor?" She sounded annoyed.

Hand said, "One of the higher floors."

"Lord! That's not a good place for a boy to be staying, especially not a lad of parts. You can do better, if you have talent. It's mathematical, your gift? I think that was what Tyler said."

Hand smiled at her.

"Mathematics?" asked a man in a tan waistcoat, approaching. He walked with a swagger that implied that the whole world viewed him fondly, and his fingertips were dark with ink stains. He held two empty coffee cups in his left hand, and his vague, blinking eyes had the distant look of someone who had been drinking for hours. "How is your calculus, child?"

Hand smiled at this gentleman, very uneasy. He could tell that this man spoke particularly fine English.

"Is it counting?" asked the lady. "Are you blessed with the ability to count very high?"

"What is the cube root of eight thousand, one hundred and fifty-six?" asked the gentleman. "I have no idea what the answer is myself. Only, Reynolds has told me tales of savants," he explained to his friends, other well-dressed men who were drifting in, "who can calculate cube roots as easily as I lift a pint of ale. And I lift a pint very easily."

Hand said, "I don't know what that means, sir. I'm sorry. I don't know."

“Don’t know?” This appeared to amuse the gentleman. A girl came by with fresh coffee cups, and the man deposited his empty two on her tray, and extracted two more full ones for his own use. He gulped one down, peered down at Hand in polite confusion.

A slim gentleman with a sharp, cruel, bird-like face, his eyes enlarged by his thick round glasses, announced, “Boy claims he possesses skill at mathematics. Boy is tested. Boy admits he doesn’t know the answer. Boy, therefore, is revealed to be a liar.” The last word made Hand flinch. He had seen this gentleman passing in and out of the college. He was one of the teachers there, and Hand had often dreamed of taking a lesson with this man, learning whatever impossible facts about natural philosophy he taught. That this man believed him a liar made Hand's eyes sting, his throat dry up. He only wanted to be allowed to go home.

“Hold back with the harsh language, gentlemen,” said the woman with the dark eyes. “Lizzie, would you assist us?”

Lizzie Farweather squeezed through the circle of men. “Hand has a gift with numbers, and with time. Tell us, Hand,” she said, nodding at the man with two coffee cups, “what time Mr. Boswell’s pocket watch displays?”

Hand hesitated.

The bird-nosed man sneered. “Little liar never thought he’d be tested, did he?”

Lizzie’s voice was kind. “It doesn’t need to be exact.”

“Six o’clock and nine minutes,” said Hand, guessing.

The man called Boswell pulled out his watch. “Hmm. That is correct. Actually, I should probably be leaving.” The others nodded as they inspected his watch-face.

“If you knew it,” asked Lizzie, “why didn’t you answer?”

“It depends on how the watch is made,” Hand said. “Everyone’s clock is different.”

“How well, then,” asked Boswell, knocking back his second coffee cup, “is my watch maintained? How close is it to the true time?”

Hand wasn’t sure how to answer the question.

“The true time, child!” spat the bird-professor. “The time of Creation, as known to the Lord. The true hour, that which all our clocks constitute an imperfect copy.”

Hand looked up at these men, hoping for more of a clarification. Lizzie wanted him to impress them. She was watching, quiet and still.

“What use is it,” asked the professor, “to know what a clock says, but not what time is? What crippled intelligence is that?”

Hand examined the floor, feeling his eyes grow heavy. He did not want to cry in front of these men.

Hand heard Boswell say his goodbyes and depart.

The bird-man leaned low. “That gentleman is among our country’s best writers. Had you demonstrated your so-called talent to him, your name would be known across Europe. But you wasted the opportunity.” He seemed pleased about this. “A very standard child, indeed.”

Hand was left alone with Lizzie and the lady. “I’m sorry.”

Lizzie shrugged. “People are always asking me to perform. I hate it.”

The lady said, “We must get you placed in a better home than Tallow’s Land. It’s a rotten old building. Perhaps Tyler can advise.”

“Countess,” said Lizzie, “Hand has been well paid for his efforts. Douglas says very impressive things about him. He will soon be able to choose his own lodgings.”

The countess, if she really was a countess, waved a hand to dismiss this idea. “Life doesn’t work like that, my darling. Not everyone is like you and Douglas, free to explore the world. A poor man cannot simply stand up and leave his poverty behind. What I mean is: Hand’s parents must have incurred some trouble that keeps them in Tallow’s Land. I would wager good money on it. What is it, child? What is the crisis in your family?”

Hand could not meet anyone’s eye.

“Is it a financial problem? It surely must be.”

Hand remembered Montrose’s advice, to never mention money around the rich. He looked at the floor.

Lizzie said, “You don’t want to tell us, do you? I can understand that.” Her tone was cool and straight-forward, a complete change from the playful manner she had used with David Hume. “Bear in mind that I don’t have a famous name. Nor did I inherit a fortune like Tyler. My father and I have been wandering around different countries ever since I was a child, picking up commissions whenever he could find them. I have been running Douglas’s household since I was nine years old. I have negotiated with pests and cheats in English, in French, in Italian—and in Scots. I don’t call myself poor, but do I think I know what life is. Please explain your situation. We won’t judge. Why can’t you just take the earnings you’ve made, and use that money to find a better house?”

“We—we—”

She was looking right at him. “Look. It’s good to be careful about what you say. It’s good to be cautious. But you are among friends here. Don’t be so polite that you let this opportunity pass by.” The countess nodded, winking at him. Hand liked this noblewoman. She seemed kind.

Hand said, “We owe money.”

“See?” said the countess. “Just as I predicted.”

“We owe it to a bad person. Freddie Thomas. He’s been lending my paw money, to pay the rent.”

“Your parents borrowed money from him?”

Hand nodded. “I want to pay it back.”

“That’s wise,” said Lizzie, makes Hand grow warm.

I want,” he said, “to give what I earned to Freddie. I’m going to hand it to him. It’s not safe to keep it in the house.”

“Where does he live?”

“Boxer’s Close.”

“Lord!” exclaimed the countess.

Lizzie considered. “It might not be safe to bring actual currency to Boxer’s Close. I don’t think there’s a worse alley in all of Scotland. Will you let me help you? I will make sure your debts get paid off—without you getting into worse trouble.”

Hand nodded, delighted that this young woman was willing to talk to him, offer him advice.

“What are you going to do?” asked the countess.

“First, I will set Hand up with our banker, so he can bring Mr. Thomas a letter of credit. There's no need to be carrying real money around the high street. Then we'll send a message to the Thomas brothers, asking them to pick neutral ground for the meeting, somewhere outside of Boxer's Close. And then, when we go to meet Mr. Thomas, we'll bring my father's soldier, Mr. Montrose. He will be heavily armed. See, Hand? In a few hours, your family's debts will be entirely paid off. Simple.”

Hand felt his eyes go heavy again, but this time, he risked crying from hope.

“I want,” he said, “to throw the money in his face.”

Lizzie nodded. “I understand. But let's not actually do that.”

Chapter Fourteen

The plan, which in the circulating library had seemed a divine intervention, and which, in the banker's office, had still made good sense to Hand, now appeared, as they walked down the street to the pub that Freddie Thomas had chosen, a much riskier affair. Partly Hand's fear came from his acute sense of the city's attention, the eyes turning their way. Lizzie's upright manner and fine dress, combined with Montrose's weapons, obvious to anyone who took care to look, made Hand feel watched by the city like he never had before. And he worried that the Thomas brothers were dangerous, could not be trusted. The pub they had picked for the handover of the banker's credit, The Bakers Arms', was right on the edge of Boxer's Close, and Hand suspected a back door opened from the pub to the Close, an exit which would allow the brothers to flee to the safety of their headquarters whenever they chose.

The plan, however, could not be faulted on logical grounds: Hand carried no money on his person, so could not be robbed, and with Montrose guarding him, the Thomas brothers would be unlikely to try anything. All he needed to do was pass over a piece of paper, and hear from Freddie Thomas that the debt was paid. Hand asked his clocks if anything could go wrong: they did not reply, which he tried to believe was a good sign.

"We're being followed," said Montrose, deliberately not looking back. "A couple of Lane Waller's men. I'm guessing they're after me. They must be losing their patience with our faction."

"Do we turn around?" Lizzie asked, sounding perfectly unafraid.

“No, keep going. The pub is right there.”

Hand tried to calm his nerves, and took a long breath, trying to shake the feeling that at any moment, he might be knocked down by a pistol shot to his back, or pulled off his feet by a huge attacker. He should be able to keep track of the men moving behind them, but his attention was too scattered, too tired to concentrate.

The Baker's Arms seemed to be sinking slowly into the ground. It was squeezed into the lowest floor of a tall building set a little ways back from the high street, enclosed on its right hand side by another over-looming building, which blocked off most of the evening's light from the pub's front door. To enter the pub, one had to descend two steps down, the floor slumped moistly in the middle of the room. A tall man might have to bow his head to get all the way to the bar. The walls were dripping damp, the floor stuck to one's feet, and the men drinking in the pub's corners looked cruel and weary, like they might lash out at a stranger just to take a break from their own self-loathing and despair.

Freddie Thomas, alone, waited at a wax-stained table in the back. He seemed huge in the faint light. He refused to let Montrose approach, saying he feared a trick on the soldier's behalf, and ordered him to wait by the bar. Montrose took a stool by the bar's corner, watching, one hand in his lap, ready to draw.

Hand looked at Lizzie. “Wait with Mr. Montrose, please.”

“No, thank you. This isn't my first criminal.” She walked ahead of Hand to the table, taking a seat.

Freddie winked at Hand. “You've done well, lad. You got yourself Laird Farweather's daughter on your arm, and a right brawler at your back. I feel like I should

have sweetened that deal I offered you. You're probably too fine to come and work for me and my brother now."

Lizzie asked, "How—how do you know who I am?"

"Don't be surprised. We keep an eye. We follow your father, see who he talks to."

"Maybe you should stop following him."

"You might be grateful, lass, one day, that we kept an eye on him."

The pub had become noisier than before, and three men shoved through the back door, their shoulders pulled in, eyes kept low. They brushed past Hand as they made their way to the bar. He looked back, but these newcomers blocked his view of Montrose. The situation was already slipping out of control.

He said, "My parents owe you a pound and two pence." This, at least, was the sum that Calum had reported.

Freddie Thomas's pinked eyes opened wide. "No."

"No what?"

Hand could hear Montrose speaking to someone behind him, but he didn't want to turn round. He had to make sense of what Freddie was saying.

"Your paw and maw owe me nothing. As of this very morning, not a penny. Your whole damn clan means nothing to us, McLeish."

"No," said Hand. "I have the payment right here. I can pay you now."

"I'll take the money, lad. But it won't help you none. Someone bought your debt. Lane Waller owns you and yours. He bought the debt clean away. And now he's coming

for you, too.” Freddie's gaze shifted, inspecting the pub behind Hand's back, and he leaned in close. “You two better follow me. Time to get out of here.”

Lizzie glanced back, and her gasp made Hand turn. Three men had surrounded Montrose, and one of them was pressing something into the soldier's back. A fourth stranger, a large, overweight man with a cropped, dark head, was easing his way between the tables, coming towards where Lizzie and Hand sat.

Freddie moved too quick for Hand to stop: he gripped Lizzie's arm above her elbow, and stood, dragging her away. She screamed, and struck at him, but he pulled her back through a door in the inn's rear.

Hand was frozen for a second as the door swung closed, hoping Montrose would free himself, come to Hand's aid, but Montrose's bitter face showed he had no way out. The fourth man reached for Hand's shoulder, and Hand's clocks cried out in alarm: Hand ducked away just in time, the man's finger slipping off his collar. Hand ran for the same door Freddie had gone through. The door opened at his shove, and he found himself in the crowded, warm air of Boxer's Close.

Chapter Fifteen

Men and women sat on the steps of Boxer's Close. They jeered at Hand as he stumbled into the courtyard, whistling at him, cursing. He could not see where Freddie Thomas had taken Lizzie.

One elderly lady in faded lace asked, "Want me to wind your clock, you pretty lad?" This comment made the Close chuckle, both the skinny youngsters and the fat old crooks. Some bore the marks of torture, victims of the government's painful curiosity; many carried the pocks and scars of long dried-up disease.

The door thumped open behind Hand, and the large man with the dark head emerged. He made to step into the close, and grab Hand, but a great whistling and shouting rose up, forcing him to falter.

A woman in an apron handed a pipe to the woman she was sitting next to on a low step, and stood.

"Go," she said. "Get lost."

The huge attacker gritted his teeth, and retreated. The woman in the apron resumed her seat, and her friend put the pipe back in her mouth. The men and women around her laughed and cheered. Then the crowd turned its attention to Hand.

Hand had spent his whole life being warned about Boxer's Close. For the most part, the different social classes of Edinburgh were divided not by district or street, but by altitude. Although there were bad buildings, and the grandest residents might maintain their own estates outside the city proper, the majority of the population shared the same

buildings, regardless of wealth. Towering high above the streets, the lands contained rooms for everyone, only not on the same floor: the poor occupied the cellars and the rafters, while the comfortably well off lived comfortably above the street. The prime properties in each land stood on the third, fourth, and fifth floors—just above the noise and bustle of the high street. Even in Hand's sad and dirty home, Tallow's Land, the fourth floor was a widely admired residence, occupied by a famous judge of the Courts of Session.

One part of the city, however, was an exception to this rule. The four houses that looked on to Boxer's Close were so run-down, so impoverished, so unsanitary and so depraved, that no person of even middling quality was prepared to live in their most convenient floors. Hand's mother, for instance, had remarked that it was better to go homeless, and fall on the charity of St. Giles. To her, Boxer's Close was among the worst curses that God had inflicted upon their beleaguered country, second only to the English. And yet the close was tiny, hidden away. A casual visitor to Edinburgh might not even notice the entrance to the lane.

Hand said, "Where did Freddie go?"

The crowd regarded him in silence. Through a window, above everyone's heads, Hand heard Lizzie's voice shouting. She sounded desperate, afraid, although not quite in panic.

"He wanted me to follow him." Hand said, moving to that building's front door. "I owe him money."

The steps up to that building's entrance were occupied by clean-faced teenage boys, and they rose to their feet to let Hand pass between them. The door to the building was unlocked, and no one guarded the stair. He walked up the spiral stairs to the next floor, where a steel sign announced: "The Thomas Brothers. Welcome."

The door was opened by a young, thin boy. Lizzie was standing in the room's middle, her arms crossed over her chest. She looked scared, and her face looked pale, but she did not seem to be hurt. She did not smile when she saw Hand.

"I'm glad you're all right," she said, her voice shaking.

The room was broad and full of people, with a small fire smoking in the hearth. Many children were seated around that fire, their flickering eyes turned to observe Hand and Lizzie. Freddie leaned against the wall, looking very pleased with himself. The other grown ups in the room, however, were grouped around a great throne-like chair, upon which a dark-bearded man slouched. This man's arms and shoulders were huge. On his knees, two stout crutches rested crosswise. Hand couldn't see his legs, as they were covered by a blanket. He was Arran Thomas, Freddie's brother. People said he was the worse brother by far.

Arran said, "Come on inside, little boy. Well done for escaping those men."

"Let Lizzie go," Hand said.

"I'm happy to do that," said Arran. "She understands our deal, I think."

Hand looked at Lizzie. She was trembling.

"No," she said. "I won't. I can't." Around the fireplace, the children watched her. To Hand's shock, Lizzie no longer seemed so much older than himself. Even her fine clothes

seemed like a costume, like a dress borrowed from a much older woman. Her face trembled.

“You don't get a choice,” said Arran. “I'm telling you what to do. What you have to do.”

“What,” Hand asked, “are you asking from her?”

Freddie pretended to sigh, as if upset. “I saved you from Mr. Waller's men. Now we want repayment, that's all.”

Lizzie's eyes were wet. “They want me to give them a spare key to Douglas's house, so they can rob it. Or they say they'll break his legs.”

Freddie walked over to Hand. “Aye. We have a very angry young man following him right now, as we speak. If he gets the right word, he'll take a steel rod to Mr. Laird Farweather's knees. He won't walk right the rest of his days.”

Hand said, “I bet they're lying. No one is following him.”

Lizzie shook her head. “They told me things. About Douglas. About Martha, our maid. Even the boy who brings us coal.”

Freddie laughed. “Yes! The little lad with the unwell eye. A yellow, ugly eye, he has.”

Arran nodded. “You can't go to the town guard, neither, can you, lass? Lane Waller controls them. He'll have you locked up in no time. He'll be glad to throw you in a cell. It'll break poor Douglas's heart. And then we'll break his legs, just for the fun of it.”

Hand tried to let his clock-sense guide him, but he was too scared by Arran's careless feline grin, by his frightening, winter-cold eyes. The big man was far beyond numbers or

monitoring. Hand reached out, tried to discover Arran's own pattern, his individual code. For an instant, he thought he grasped it, a special rhythm, some subterranean unordered frequency. It clashed and grated, awful in its un-logic. But in the next instant, that pattern had dashed away. Moment to moment, there seemed no telling if Arran would remain absolutely at ease or lash out furiously.

"I just wanted to pay you back," he said.

"Of course," said Arran.

Freddie grabbed Lizzie's arm. "If you say anything to your father—if you try to warn him—if you do anything but go all the way home and get the key, we'll know. We'll be watching you and Hand. The moment we something we don't like, we'll cripple him."

"No," said Hand. "We can't bring it back tonight. My family is expecting me home. They knew I was coming here. If I don't come back—"

"Your family," Freddie said, "has bigger worries."

Hand tried to keep his voice from shaking. "Lizzie is expected back at the Library, too. We can't just walk up the high street, without stopping. Someone will see us, suspect something."

Arran looked at him. "You think you're so very clever, don't you? Bring the key here by noon tomorrow. We will be watching you. And our man with the rod? The longer he has to wait, the worse he'll make it on Douglas."

Lizzie shook, began to cry. Hand couldn't bear to see Lizzie's tears: he ran to her. He wanted to hold her, say it would be all right, but she screamed, and he was knocked off his feet. The entire room swung left and up, his cheek hot like a pot over a fire. Freddie

Thomas had smacked him with the back of his hand. Hand's face stung like the skin had been cut.

Arran said, “Go. Bring back the key. Or you know what will happen to your Laird Farweather. He'll never recover. He'll never be well again.”

Chapter Sixteen

Hand's lane was not far from Boxer's Close. He asked Lizzie if it was all right for them to stop there first, but she did not reply. She had not spoken since they had left the Thomas brothers' house.

He said, "I don't believe there's a man following Douglas. They were just trying to scare us."

"Maybe."

"I live here," he said. "They know that. If we're being followed, they won't care if we go inside."

Hand took Lizzie upstairs. On the climb up, he was troubled by the many closed doors and the empty stairs. He could hear people moving around inside their homes, but no one showed their face, and no one was chatting on the landings. When he reached his floor, his family's door was locked. He knocked again, but there was no reply. Had they gone out somewhere? It was unusual to find no one at home, and Hand tried a more few times—in case Calum was asleep. He sat down on the landing, and waited. He assumed that within twenty minutes or so, someone would come home, but the time continued on with no word or sign.

All the time they had waited, Lizzie had been sitting beside him, saying nothing, not seeming to care about the dirt, the damage to her clothes.

She brushed at her skirt, not seeming to see it. "I better go. I had better give them that key."

She sounded unsure, however. She did not want to surrender herself to Arran Thomas. But Hand had no idea where his parents might be, and although desperate for a way to help her, he didn't know what he could do.

She seemed to be waiting for him to reply. He only stared at her, hoping she would wait a little longer.

She stood. "I'll go. Don't worry about me."

"They're lying. We can just go to Douglas, tell him everything."

"They have been watching us. That's definitely true."

"But—"

"It would break my heart," she said, "if I caused Douglas to be hurt. Break my heart. So I had better go back to my house."

"Wait," he said, frantic and afraid, hating the thought that had just come to him.

"There's someone who can help you. She lives next door."

Granny Wynd looked glad to see him. Hand stood close to her table, blocking her view of Lizzie, who was holding back by the door.

In her raspy voice, Granny said, "I didn't expect you yet. I imagined that you would attempt to take care of Lane Waller yourself."

Hand didn't know what she meant.

"It's a pity," she said. "I pictured some quite creative responses. Instead, you came straight to my house."

Hand felt confused. "I'm not here to talk about Mr. Waller." This meant, he understood, that his family's locked front door was Lane Waller's doing.

"It will be almost nothing to assist you. Waller's mother, you know, is a Campbell. A Lochcarron Campbell."

"I'm not asking for me."

The reply surprised Granny Wynd. "Then—the girl?"

"I want to ask some questions, first, before I let her talk to you."

She watched him, not offering him permission; he ploughed ahead, wanting to get all his fears out. "Are you evil?"

"This is an interesting approach, child, when asking a woman for her help."

"Are you?"

"Are you asking about me as I am now, or about the young damsel I once was, the sweet child running in the fields?" Hand didn't reply, fearing a trick answer.

Granny Wynd waited, and when she saw he wouldn't speak, said, "That girl, she was only as evil as every other misbegotten daughter of Eve. She was fond of remote places, and she could be cruel to her brothers. She liked to wander off and explore the places men don't often go. But she was not Granny Wynd."

She was playing with him.

"Tell me about your magic. Can you really do anything, or is it just clever talk?"

"If you want, I can relieve your worries. I can tell you the same thing I tell the fine ladies who call on me. I can tell you that I have no powers at all. Rather, I simply see that

which other people refuse to look at. I am just a woman with a ruined voice and a knack for advice.”

“Is that the truth?”

“It is not.”

“Tell me.”

“I do not know the name of that which lies within me. I never asked for it to come. But I do know that it is the same power which breaks the city wall and sunders the grand pavilion. It is the power which casts the fine garden into the furnace. It is the power which smashes the mountains together and cuts the sky in two. It is the force, you proud and disrespectful child, which is the sorrow of courtiers and of kings, the mockery of all plans and all vows. It is the befoulment of the sacred. It is the silencing of prayer. It is that which calls down the meteor and gives birth to the murdering disease. It is the sword that lays waste to the old and the newly born alike. It is the gnawing beetle that eats a forest whole. It is the frothing ocean that creeps ashore, oozing past walls and ancient columns, pulling the strong man down to his grave. It is a chipped and rusted butcher’s knife, and his well-bloodied block.” She was snarling as she completed her speech, her lip twitching in derision and loathing, but whether of him, or herself, Hand had no idea.

“It is a power without name because it is the ruin of all names.”

“Does it come from the Devil?” he asked.

She sighed, annoyed. “Look at the fire.” She said. “Why does it die out?”

Hand didn’t know what to make of the question. Granny Wynd spoke differently to him than to how she spoke everyone else. She seemed glad to share her secrets. And yet

he knew that he was unready for it. He did not understand her—he did not know what questions to ask, nor how to understand when she replied.

“The fire dies,” Granny Wynd said, “because the grate does not burn. Ours is an unfortunate planet in which few things burn. Here, the fire dies quickly, or rages loose and is thought a nuisance, a horror. But if the grate that holds the fire burned, and the stones burned, and the land and the air also burned, then the fire would never go out. The fire would be the men and beasts, and they would be fire, too. Dancing fire which today, all men fear.” She smiled. “One day, child, the grate and the stones will burn. The moon will be a silver ball of flame in a burning black sky. Upon that day, you will not think to ask if I am wicked and my power a thing of terror. You will be that power, as will I.”

She was fearsome and incomprehensible and alien. He wanted, more than anything else, to ask her about himself, his own strange powers. He needed to know if he was her creation. Who I am, he wanted to ask.

Before Hand could decide how to answer, Granny snapped her fingers. “Girl! Come here. Let me build an understanding of you.” She glanced at Hand, her expression dark and unreadable, then looked back at Lizzie. “Do not trouble yourself about the words I have been exchanging with the boy. He and I are birds of a particular feather, and so we talk in a circular fashion. Let you and I speak like sisters, and be frank.”

Hand watched as they spoke. Lizzie perched on the chair at Granny Wynd’s table. She leaned forward to Granny’s ear, speaking in a whisper, and despite the rough bass of Granny Wynd’s replies, she was impossible for Hand to overhear. He waited by the door, deeply troubled. What fate had he doomed Lizzie to? When he tried to remember what

Granny Wynd had told him, it seemed only that she had failed to answer any of his questions. Like the Devil, she had equivocated at every step. What could Granny Wynd be telling Lizzie, and what advice took so long to describe? Four minutes passed as they spoke, and Lizzie looked intrigued, thoughtful. Five minutes passed. Hand thought he heard Granny Wynd promise a “red fog, all fury,” but for whom, he didn’t know. Granny looked serious, even sad, and Lizzie had turned pale. At one point, Granny seemed to tell Lizzie something about “a marriage,” and at that moment, Lizzie turned to look at him. Granny chuckled at this, at Hand’s confusion. Then the two of them went back to their deliberations, but now with Lizzie speaking and Granny listening.

Hand heard footsteps on the stairs. Looking out into the hall, he saw his brother Calum coming up the last few steps. Today, Calum seemed to find the stairs a great effort, panting as he reached the landing, his face drained and grey. Hand left Lizzie alone with Granny Wynd, coming to his brother’s side.

Calum took hold of his hands. “We’ve been evicted. It happened all at once. They came in a team, five of them. Then and there, they kicked us out. We don’t know why the landlord demanded the debt be repaid just like that. We can’t be the only family who owes money. And most of our stuff is gone, too—they seized everything they thought they could sell. We don’t have a place we can all stay in tonight. I don’t even know where dad has run off to.”

This was Lane Waller’s work, Hand knew. Waller had picked him out for revenge.

From Granny Wynd’s house, Lizzie appeared. She closed the door behind her, the latch clicking it shut.

“What did she tell you to do?” Hand asked.

She kissed his cheek. “Nothing,” she said, brightly. “She just told me a story.”

She started down the stairs.

“Where are you going?” Hand asked.

She paused. “Back to the Library. There are some people I never thought to talk to there.” Her calm manner was eerie.

“How? How is this going to help us with the Thomas brothers?”

She shrugged. “I don't think we will need to worry about them, not after tonight.” He watched her descend the stairs.

Chapter Seventeen

Morgan the Dutchman was Edinburgh's master of locks. On a quiet lane off the high street, his shop stood a little way back from its peers, gloomy among their bright displays, like a shy man among friends. Although the locksmith's sported two large and street-facing windows, they were of such thick and grimy glass, their panes so small—no bigger than a man's palm—that even if one stood right in front and tried to look in, the interior of the shop remained a haze of candle-glow and shadow. On cold days, the faint light from inside gave those windowpanes the look of a snake's scales, moist and pale.

Hand had never cared for the shop. Inside, the many locks on display depressed him, like a blood clot given metallic form. The shop's low ceiling, its high rows of locked drawers, and its wavering, bobbing candles that reflected on the glass cases, all gave him the opposite of vertigo, the sensation of sucked inwards to be crushed. But Morgan had proved himself a great friend, letting Calum sleep in a warm cot in the back room. Thanks to the locksmith, Calum was safe. Hand had slept with Sheila's family, and his mother had taken Abi to a friend's home in George's Square, the new district to the city's south. The bailiffs were pursuing them, and if one of the family was spotted on the street, they might be ordered to hand over the contents of their pockets, or imprisoned with the city's other debtors. Even as the rest of the family scavenged and scrounged to try to pay off the bailiffs.

Hand was relieved to sense no tension between Morgan and his temporary guest. Calum leaned against the counter, looking relaxed and dapper, while Morgan tried out

one pair of inscrutably opaque glasses, then another, trying to get the right focus on the lock he was attempting to repair.

“Tell me,” asked Calum, once Morgan had retreated to the back room. “How is everyone?” Hand did his best to sound positive.

He did not mention the other danger, the one that threatened him personally. He also had to watch out for Freddie Thomas. Even this trip to see Calum, in the full light of the day, had required Hand to carefully encourage himself out of his aunt’s front floor. Although he had heard nothing, since waking up, about Lizzie, or about an attack on Douglas, he had to assume that the Thomases were still keeping an eye on him. He had been too harried and sleep-low to ask around or think of a way to escape their interest; he had not mentioned Freddie Thomas to his family, reckoning his mum and dad had enough to worry about, even though he remained desperate to share his fear with sympathetic ears.

“Morgan’s an odd one,” Calum told him in a low voice. “I think he’s a republican. When it’s just us two in the shop, he certainly likes to go on and on about his politics. But it’s all right. I can handle a few odd ideas.”

“Is he going to make you work in the shop?”

“Aye, but I think I’ve got a talent for selling his locks, you know?”

When Morgan returned from the storeroom, his expression, bearing troubles of its own, stopped Hand short.

Morgan's mouth was tight with regret. "Boys. I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this. But your mother's been arrested. I just heard it now, getting in the day's deliveries. She's been arrested for debt. They're already holding her."

"Where is she?" Hand asked. He had believed—he had allowed himself to believe—that Lane Waller had evicted his family just to distract his real opponents, to annoy Mr. Farweather and Tyler. He had always expected their misery to be temporary.

"They're saying she's been taken to the Old Tolbooth." Hand could only stare to Morgan, unable to make sense of what they had just been told. An arrest could be overturned, and a debt, in time, paid off. But if she had been thrown in the Tolbooth—that was like she had already been sentenced to death. The Old Tolbooth, or Thieves' Hole, had squatted in the heart of the high street, right by St. Giles church, for hundreds and hundreds of years. Although expanded and rebuilt many times, it was still a loathsome warren of rodents, illness, and cruelty—the worst among the prison's guards terrified the inmates. By deliberate design, the Tolbooth's upper cells looked out on the gallows on its lower roof, and so within a week or two of arrival, every new prisoner was intimately acquainted with the procedure and spectacle of a public hanging.

Hand and Calum ran to the Tolbooth. Despite the cold, the two boys were required to wait in the rain while a prison guard checked his records, and checked them again. The day was wet, the rain slicking the cobblestones, and men and women hurried without looking round, their heads kept low under hats. A sea breeze, bearing with it the bite of North Sea ice, whipped and sighed between the tallest towers.

“Your maw’s not here,” the guard announced. “She should be here, by all the books. But she’s not.” He pointed up the high street. “Someone had her taken to the castle.” Hand begged him to say who had done this, who had brought his mother out of the prison, but the guard just shrugged.

“Someone who could get the warden to do it, that’s who.”

This development left Hand weary and numb, his capacity for fear all but exhausted. It didn’t make sense: the castle housed the city’s militia, not common prisoners. It did contain cells, of course—it possessed a dungeons and deep, lightless vaults. The castle was immeasurably ancient, and had been besieged and stormed many times. According to Calum’s version of things, when God had been making the world, Edinburgh castle had been a big inconvenience to Him, as He had been forced to work around it, his plans being considerably delayed as a result. Nowadays, the castle had little civilian purpose. It wasn’t even the site of the city’s council. The only prisoners brought to the castle were those the state needed alive—foreign agents, Jesuits, and traitors. Their maw, surely, could be none of those.

Calum started up the high street, but Hand waved for him to stop. “You better find Abi. Work out where she’s been left. And see if our paw knows what’s happened.”

Calum shivered in the spitting rain, turning to look in the direction of the locksmith’s lane. “I’m not sure,” he said weakly, as he turned to go, “why you’re the one going to find maw.” But he still went.

Hand climbed for the castle, the rain flicking on his hair and neck, trickling down the back of his shirt. His thoughts seemed larger than his own head, arriving as flashes and

shifts, roaring in his mind like ocean waves. Shame battered him, as he knew he was responsible. He had provoked Lane Waller's response, but that guilt soon surged into anger, a demand that Waller suffer twice, three times, whatever he inflicted. That anger, too, seemed unable to stay long, dispersing into a series of worries for his mother. In Edinburgh's rotten prisons, the punishment of one's health and sanity began long before you went to trial. Yet he had no idea how he would free her, once he arrived at the castle—and with that thought, guilt flooded back, even heavier and colder than before.

He arrived at the castle out of breath, his mind wheeling. At the gates, however, Montrose, the soldier with the white-powdered face, was taking cover under a narrow ledge. He beckoned for Hand to hurry up.

“Come on in, lad. We've been looking for you all over.”

Unsure what the soldier's warm tone meant, Hand followed him through the castle's low buildings. Lizzie, looking bright and refreshed, ran up to him, seized his arms. She was smiling.

“Did you hear the news?”

“News?”

“About Fred. Freddie Thomas. We don't have to worry about them.” She sounded playful. “We really don't need to worry. All I did was tell a few stories. I just talked to man in a bakery, and the woman who—you know her. In Parliament Close.”

Hand did not know what Lizzie was trying to tell him.

“Is my maw all right?”

Lizzie paused. “She's good. She's well. You'll see. I'll let Montrose take you through.”

Hand was brought in front of Tyler Cavenar, who was seated alone at a table. Tyler stood, his arms out, his smile an open welcome. Servants came and went, bringing Hand a towel to dry his hair, steaming coffee in a china cup.

“Your mother is safe,” Tyler said, “We have put her under our protection—as much protection as we can offer. When I heard about her arrest, I forced my father to intervene. Your family’s debts are so small!”

“She’s not in prison?” Hand asked.

“No, but I couldn’t get her fully absolved. Lane Waller has made sure of that. I have reduced her sentence into a sort of house arrest, here in the castle, while she works off the extra fees and penalties demanded by your landlord. You can go visit her in a minute. She’s waiting for you upstairs.”

Montrose added, “I like your maw. She’s not best happy with our Mr. Waller, I can tell you. She’s had a lot of sharp words about that man.”

Hand closed his eyes. The departure of tension was sharp enough to hurt, and he pressed both palms into the cup of coffee just to make sure it didn’t drop. “Thank you,” he said. “It’s so—”

“Please,” said Tyler. “I’m just doing what I can.”

Hand struggled to understand the source of Tyler’s apparently limitless goodwill. He had experienced nothing quite like it. The Cavenar family’s money had to be part of the cause, of course. Those riches allowed Tyler to treat the demands of the world with such

disdain. But money alone did not, for most people, lead to goodness. Great wealth, as far as Hand could tell, usually made its owner as petty and cruel as one of the Tolbooth guards.

Hand said, "I am grateful. But I need to tell you something else. A new problem. It's my fault. There's a man threatening Lizzie, a criminal. It's two brothers, the Thomases. Everyone's afraid of them." This revelation provoked a stronger reaction than he expected. Tyler exchanged a sharp look with the white-faced soldier, the two of them weighing how to respond.

Montrose examined his fingernails. "You have little to fear from the brothers. One of them died last night," he said. "He's extremely dead."

Tyler nodded. "Freddie Thomas died in an awful manner—haven't you heard? The whole city is talking about it."

Hand recalled Lizzie's long and involved conversation with the witch. What had Granny Wynd done?

Montrose said, "Word spread that Freddie was going to betray Arran. Arran killed him with a pair of scissors. Very small scissors, too. People who saw the scene say—"

Tyler interrupted: "Maybe Hand doesn't need to hear this—"

"They said it was like a dozen hogs had been slaughtered in that room. Blood in places you wouldn't think to find blood. Now Arran is hiding out. He won't show his face in Edinburgh for a good while."

Granny Wynd had done this. To everyone else, it appeared a piece of grim chance, horrible but meaningless. But Hand knew whose mind had weaved it, whose calculating

evil that had planned it out. This was how Granny Wynd worked—in chaos and the dark. She took an innocent's plea for assistance, and left an entire room covered in blood.

Tyler seemed to sense that something was amiss. “Go up and see your maw. She’s waiting for you.”

Chapter Eighteen

Up a flight of stairs, Montrose unlocked a door. Hand ran to his mother, hugging her. Her arms gripped him with such strength he couldn't breathe. At last she pulled back, examining him, just as he was examining her, searching for any damage inflicted by her arrest.

She said, "It's like I'm Mary Queen of Scots, locked up in a tower. Who's this son of mine, to have such grand friends?"

"The boy you met? He's Tyler Cavenar, from a rich family."

"I'm glad you had the sense to befriend him. But don't worry about me," she said, smoothing down the servant's dress she wore. "I'm fine. It's your father I'm worried about. No one has a clue where he's ended up."

"Maw," Hand said, the words trembling in his mouth, "it's all my fault. It's because of me that they arrested you."

"Shush, shush. What's all this crying, now?"

"I shouldn't have done it."

"What did you do, my child?"

"I made someone angry."

"Hand, leave it off. Tyler and his man, Montrose—they told me a fair bit. You never lied to this man, this Mr. Lane Waller. You didn't steal from him. You barely spoke to his face, in fact. So if he chooses to persecute you and your family, that's on him."

"But people warned me not to face him—"

She sat him down on the bed. “Hand. You’re clever, but you’re still very young. Part of growing up is learning that most of life isn’t your fault. There’s a time to feel sorry for yourself, and there’s a time to know when you’ve been wronged. Parents try keep things simple for children, because it’s hard to explain the whole world in one go. But now you’re mixing with these fine, dangerous gentlemen. So here it is. Here’s the truth. Some people are just snakes. You can’t listen to their words. If a snake follows you out of the grass, and it won’t leave you be, there’s nothing for it but to kill it, however you can.”

“I can’t kill this man.”

“Oh, you can.”

Hand stared at his mother.

“I want to tell you a story,” she said, still holding tight to his wrist, “about a young woman I once knew. Will you sit, sit down with me?”

“I met her a long time ago, maybe ten years before you were born. She was a real newcomer, up from the borderlands. She was walking in the market when I saw her, looking around at everything she couldn’t afford. That year, we had all kinds of people coming to the capital. It was a cold, icy spring and it rained all summer. The crops failed everywhere, and people who lost their farms, or their place on a farm, they came to Edinburgh, hoping to earn enough to survive. The streets were full of them. They crowded around St. Giles each morning, hoping for charity. Women knew better than to go around at night. Perhaps that’s why I introduced myself to that girl. I wanted to help her, but at the same time, I already knew she wouldn’t need much help. I could tell she wasn’t one you had to worry for. She had these remarkable eyes, like the sea on a cloudy

day. She was so tall, too—I've never seen woman taller." Hand had never heard his mum speak like this, reminiscing in such a distant tone. She was talking to him without the sugar adults usually added to their words.

"I suppose I did help her, though, a little. I found her a room, something simple. I set her up with a few temporary jobs. It wasn't much but it helped her in those early days. After that, we spoke quite regularly. I had only just married your father, you know, and I was so young. Married life was a hard change for me, and I wasn't pregnant with Calum yet, so I liked visiting this woman. Most of the time, neither of us had money to spare, so we would sit in her room and talk.

"She told me her strange eyes hadn't always been blue. She said she had been a typical country girl, with the usual country eyes of brown. She lived with her family in one of those sad border towns where almost everyone is old. She said she been like everyone else, until one day, she had gone walking on the moors, leaving her town miles and miles behind. She had upset someone at home, so she walked away.

"What she told me was so strange, but I believed it then, and I still believe it. The moors seemed to go on forever, so she thought, the mountains that surrounded them to the north and south never coming an inch closer. But then, once she had all but given up ever finding her way, she came to the edge of a great sea, a great ocean, with no life in it at all. Even the water was dead, thick and glassy. As the water lapped her feet and ankles, dead things from the deep washed up—all sorts of creatures with giant eyes and claws. From that sea, she heard voices, the voices of all the dead things the water held. When she walked home, two weeks had passed. For her, had felt like an afternoon's had passed,

but her family was already coming out of mourning. Those country folk weren't much pleased once they saw her. That girlish voice, you see, had changed to an old woman's rasp. She was already a few inches taller, and still growing fast. None of her old clothes fit. And her eyes had acquired the shade of that dead sea. She frightened people just by looking at them."

Hand had grown cold. "Was this young girl Granny Wynd?"

"Aye, my boy, that she was. I don't know what you've heard about her, but Granny Wynd is no charlatan. Oh no. I've seen her magic performed right in front of my eyes. I've seen it, so you don't believe anyone who tells you she's just a trickster."

"Mum, I know she's not—"

"Once I had got her set up in her room, I watched her meet one worried mother after another, always knowing the right path she should choose. That boss of thieves, Arran Thomas? When he was only four years old, and his legs were wasting away, his own mother brought him to Granny. I don't know advice Granny gave, but the boy lived, and grew strong, in a fashion. She could just see it. I still don't know why she entertained me so long. Who was I to her? But she had a way of talking I liked so much, a sort of far away outlook, not the run of washing and cooking I knew I was fated to do until I died."

"She doesn't just talk," Hand said.

"Oh, I know. There was a time when some fools tried to make her leave her house. There was this big family come down from the highlands, a real clan of husbands and wives, and they fancied taking the top floors of Tallow's Land for themselves. They persuaded everyone to go but Granny. At first they were polite with her, and then they

weren't. Neither way worked well for them. I saw it with my own eyes. I saw two of those men die right in front of me. The rest, well, I heard how they ended up. None of them outlived the week."

"Maw," Hand said, "Granny Wynd is evil."

"Aye, perhaps," she replied. "But why should we be afraid of that? When we have a grand fellow like this Mr. Waller hunting us down, turning the courts against us, what does it do? Granny is fair. She knows the help I gave her, even if it wasn't very much. You find her, and tell her that I want her to ruin Mr. Waller. Send him crashing from his high place until he's bayed with the stray dogs in the street. Tell her we'll pay whatever she asks."

"What she does is horrible."

"I've seen my friend's baby choke to death in her cradle. That's horrible. I've watched the town guard beat an old man, a friend of your father's and mine, until his skull caved in, and with no reason for it, none. That's horrible. It'll always be with me. We live in horror, lad. We swim in it like fish. You think your fine friend, that Tyler boy, would refuse to have business with Granny Wynd? Well, I'm glad for him. He's so good, isn't he? He's all the good you could wish for in a person. Let him keep it. He's welcome to it. Because there's no other way to stop this Mr. Waller, this snake. A snake has come to bite us, Hand, and we can't worry about what stick we use to strike it dead."

He stood up, shivering, feeling absolutely alone. "I'll deal with the snake," he said, "But not that way. I can't."

His maw stared at him.

“I won’t.”

“Go,” she said. “Try whatever you think is best. But soon enough, you’ll do what I told you.”

Chapter Nineteen

Montrose led him to a door guarded by a pair of men, locked on the outside and bolted from within. Once the door had been opened by a third guard on the other side, Montrose guided him inside. After the door had been sealed and bolted, that guard proceeded to search both Hand and Montrose.

“We have to be careful,” said Montrose. “There has been an attempt, you understand, on Mr. Farweather’s life.”

At a table in the middle of the room, Mr. Farweather and Geoffrey Cavenar, Tyler’s father, were examining papers, along with a team of four clerks. Lizzie was sitting in a corner, weary and worn. This suite was very fine, with great maps displaying the outlines of far off countries, a high ceiling decorated by ornate crown moldings, its corners illuminated by tall fat candles set on every table and chest, and yet the anguished look on Douglas’s face robbed it of any sense of luxury. One guard waited by the room’s only window, and he shared the edgy concern of the men on the door. This was their last refuge, Hand understood. They had retreated here to be safe from Waller, but these guards, this sequence of locks, revealed how little safety they believed they had.

Montrose said, “I heard your mother giving you a job to do. It’s anything I should know about?”

“No,” said Hand. He could not let these men know what his mother expected him to do.

“Some of us have wondered if your family might decide to switch sides, in order to get Mr. Waller off your backs.”

“My mother wants Mr. Waller dead,” said Hand, anxious to stifle these questions. His certainty seemed to placate Montrose, but the soldier clearly remained half-way suspicious. The room was on the edge of lashing out at any enemy they could get hold of.

Farweather waved him over. “I want to thank you for helping my daughter.”

“I couldn’t protect her,” said Hand, looking at Lizzie. At the start of the week, Douglas Farweather had seemed a figure from a fairytale. Now, wigless, he looked old and tired, a great craggy shape sunk low in a chair. The candlelight picked out every line on his face. Lizzie looked back at him, her eyes warm.

“You tried, that’s the point. And now her tormentor is dead, so you have indirectly succeeded. If only you could do the same thing with Lane Waller. I would be very grateful.”

Geoffrey Cavenar looked up. “Don’t joke about such things. This boy has been very resourceful, certainly, but the time for resourcefulness is done. We have to protect ourselves, first of all. We have to survive the night.”

Farweather noticed Hand’s confusion. “Geoffrey is all for caution, unlike myself. I never believe in caution.” The words seemed like something Farweather remembered, not something he still believed. “Tomorrow morning, the council will meet to decide whether to remove me as city architect. Waller has the upper hand, the influence: the decision is as good as made.”

“They are going to vote on it?” Hand asked.

“Vote? No. How the Edinburgh council operates is a mystery to even those who sit on it. No Moorish vizier, nor Venetian doge, could comprehend the labyrinthine rules that determine how the council acts. Waller has their ear, that’s all that matters. Unless we can get at Waller tonight, the council will act as he recommends. If communication were possible—”

“It is not—” said Cavenar.

“If it were, we might parlay. But he is holed up in his own offices under Parliament Close, refusing any requests for conversation. He appears to have no gross desires, no hidden vices or secrets, aside from a love of drink. He has no weaknesses that I can detect.”

Hand desperately wanted to help. “I heard, from a friend, that Mr. Waller does have a weakness.” This statement interested the table, and Montrose idled closer, ready to hear. Farweather’s curiosity was awful for Hand to see: he was so lost, he was ready to accept advice from from a child.

Hand said, “This friend of mine said that Mr. Waller’s mother was a Lochcarron Campbell. I don’t know what that means, though.”

“Interesting,” said Farweather, leaning forward, resting his chin on his hand.

“Lochcarron is a superstitious little town. In my youth, it was famous for it, a joke among the well educated. And the Campbells were said to be the most ghost-fearing people of all Lochcarron. In a crowded theatre or bustling market square, a Lochcarron Campbell will still consider himself more in the company of the dead than the living, more beholden to his dead relatives’ requests and complaints than of the living tradesman in front of him. If

Waller shares his mother's frailties, we might be able to exploit it. Assuming we could get to him."

Montrose cleared his throat. "Who's this friend of yours, child, who knows Mr. Waller's mother?" Hand didn't reply. Lizzie, however, was smiling.

Douglas looked at the ceiling. "The irony is painful. It is this very superstition from which I hoped to free Scotland. This illogical grip of the past. We are weighed down by our ancient dead." This thought seemed to strengthen him, and he continued in firmer voice. "Tonight, here in Edinburgh, either a man is for the dead, or the living. Either he wishes to build a city that serves the needs of the living, or he wishes to maintain our old hill-top graveyard, fearful of any reform that might anger those who departed centuries ago." Hand wanted to announce that he was definitely for the living, and for Mr. Farweather, but the silence in the room seemed to forbid speech. Mr. Farweather's moment of strength appeared to pass, and he sat back, brooding, his eyes nearly closed.

Montrose led Hand to the castle gates.

Chapter Twenty

Montrose brought Hand back to his brother, leaving him at the Morgan's House of Locks. Inside the quiet, close air of the locksmith's, Hand felt himself grow calmer, more relaxed. A single clock on the wall kept the time with a reassuringly regular tick. While Calum was glad to learn their mother was safe, he swore they would get recompense from Lane Waller.

"We've got to find him," said Calum.

"Maw wanted us to talk to him," said Hand, "She didn't want us to do anything criminal." The lie, he felt, was justified in the circumstance. Calum seemed glad to believe it, too.

"Well," Calum said. "Why don't we just go and talk to him? Ask him to leave us alone?"

Morgan the Dutchman appeared from the shop's back door.

"Lane Waller?" he asked. "You're friends with that bastard?"

Calum explained the conflict, and the problem with reaching Waller.

"I would go round the back, down in the Cowgate. Maybe he'll hear you." Hand had never thought that Waller's offices descended so far down the crag that they opened, on the other side, to the streets of the Cowgate.

"We can knock, but what if he doesn't let us in?" asked Calum. "What do we do then?"

Morgan shrugged. "If I had a key, I would give it to you."

Hand and Calum descended the steep, slippery steps to the Cowgate, the lowest portion of the city, looking for the rear entrance to Waller's office. Had not Morgan told them about this backdoor, Hand would have never thought to look for it, and the lane it stood on was plain and low, a simple run of warehouses and workshops. Yet while the door was plain and unmarked, it was immensely thick, and offered no handle for an outside visitor to turn. To its sides, no windows broke the wall of dark, aged brick.

A spy hole opened at their knock, and a small boy with white hair allowed them inside.

He spoke in a whisper. "Do you have an appointment?"

"No," said Hand. "But he knows who we are."

The boy bit his lip. "Mr. Waller really likes people to have appointments."

Hand said, "It'll be all right."

"Nah," said the white-haired boy. "Won't."

The corridor led them to a dark room full of books. Hand could hear, beyond them, the mutter of male voices, one of which, low and bitter, he suspected was Lane Waller's. The room itself reeked of an odd mixture of paper and spirits, the ink and whisky for some reason reminding Hand of his worst nights of troubled half-sleep. A burning taper revealed bookcases on all sides, the uniform red spines rising almost to the ceiling. Paintings and decoration were absent from the walls: the rows of books left no space for them.

The white-haired boy said, “He really doesn't like it if you don't have an appointment.”

Calum startled Hand with his speed. He winked at Hand, walked to the door, and turned the handle

Their appearance caused the two clerks to stand, blinking, but Lane Waller merely glanced over, barely a flick of eye, and continued to dictate. Both clerks looked ready to call for help, but once they grasped that Waller had no intention of ceasing work, they awkwardly descended to their chairs. For a moment, one looked ready to interrogate Calum, but Waller’s weary drone, unending, commanded him to return to his place on the page.

Calum said, “We’re not here to threaten you, Mr. Waller. We're really not.” This announcement made both clerks flinch, looking up from their work, their offended eyes not quite believing that someone could think to speak to Mr. Waller in this way. But Waller merely raised his voice, and like swimmers whose feet were attached to a ship’s anchor, his workers had no choice but to go on transcribing his words.

Calum continued: “We—we have come to talk. I would like to discuss an amicable end to the last few days’ conflict between you and the McLeish family.”

Without warning, Waller stood. He did not, however, stop talking. While continuing to rumble on about a particular crop and seed license, he moved, his head hanging over his chest, to an architect’s table in the corner. The table was cluttered with two vague stacks of documents, some of them creased, tatty pages with curled corners, while others bore the grand embossed seals of the crown. With his back turned to Hand and his

brothers, Waller searched through for a particular sheet, smiled as he found it, and then clicked his fingers, telling his clerks to rise.

Calum said, “We are willing to offer you our apology for seeming to challenge you. Because he didn't! It was never our plan—not mine, nor any of our family. We're willing to simply move on. We would be content to simply end this disagreement. Any mistakes, to either side, we can leave in the past.” Hand had never been prouder of his brother. Calum seemed so calm, offering his concessions in a firm, clear voice.

Waller passed to one of his helpers the sheet he had found, turned away, and walked out of the room, still dictating. Hand, growing concerned by this strange response, followed the three men, coming into a new room, this one damp, smelling of heavy use, the way that rooms without windows came to smell if men were in them long—sweat, damp towels, and, to a lesser extent, soap. A day bed, with three messy sheets laid over it, occupied one corner, and a table, bearing a pair of plates, neither of them clean, took up much of the room's remaining space.

Calum gripped Hand's arm. “Why isn't he talking?”

“I don't know.”

Calum called out, “Mr. Waller. We would like to call an end to the trouble between you and our family.”

Lane Waller sat heavily on the day bed. He waved a hand at the nearest clerk.

“Start a new letter, addressed to George Drummond. Begin—Dear George, I regret the implication contained with the minutes of the last council meeting. It is the furthest

thing from my mind that you should be negatively affected by the proposed adjustment to the duty. In fact, I see you as one of the potential winners from this small alteration.”

As he spoke, Waller bent down, and reached under the bed, grimacing as he clutched one way, then another, finally finding an attaché case, which he pulled out and placed on his knees. He unwound the twine that clasped the case shut, flicked through it, and removed a single sheet of paper, bearing one single sentence. He gestured for a quill, rested the sheet on the attaché case, and appeared to sign the document twice. With this done, and without pausing even for breath in his letter to Mr. Drummond, he handed the sheet to the other clerk, and heaved himself up.

Calum said, “Mr. Waller—please.”

But Lane Waller had already opened the next door, and before Calum could ask anything else, he departed again, leaving the room for a grand staircase, heading up. In contrast to all the rooms they had seen so far, this staircase was finely laid out, with several portraits hung on the off-white, peeling walls. Each portrait depicted a middle-aged man in legal black, a chain of office slung around his neck. As Hand followed Lane Waller up the stairs, the paintings seemed to rise from the deep past, beginning with subjects in archaic dress. The lowest painting presented a plainly dressed fellow, bearing an unadorned staff in his right hand, standing in front of an old hall, with many men at arms in the portrait’s background; the next canvas showed a gloomy-eyed man in chain mail, Edinburgh castle some distance behind him. At the height of the stairs, a portrait of a pale, sensibly attired gentleman, who looked a little like Lane Waller.

“Mr. Waller—” implored Hand, moving ahead of his brother. “Mr. Waller—”

Through yet another door, in a sitting room of faded yellow, Lane Waller ceased his letter to George Drummond, wishing that gentleman a farewell. He startled Hand by placing both hands to a bookcase and, in one smooth motion, rolling that bookcase further along the wall, the heavy shelves sliding on well-oiled wheels. A safe was now exposed, and Waller opened it with a key from his pocket. He extracted two more papers from inside that safe. He signed them as he had the ones before.

Calum's breathing was heavy, his knuckles white.

The clerk who had written out the letter to George Drummond turned and regarded him and his brothers, coldly amused. "You urchins," he said, "are nothing to Mr. Waller. You don't deserve even a minute of his time. Isn't that obvious?"

Calum shouted Lane Waller's name, but again, the attorney simply moved for the next door, and the brothers followed him again into another room, one of several more clerks scribbling at tables. This office trembled with all the motion and hurry the rooms below had lacked. Official letters lay, supine, waiting for the sting of sealing wax; notes and bills, stabbed through by pins, had been scattered all over a detailed map of a nine-story land, each room and level bearing a name. Over the years, so many candles had burnt here that a black tarry mass speckled and stained most of the ceiling.

Again, no one seemed bothered by the arrival of strangers. On his way through the room, Waller leaned over one young man's shoulder, and in a kind tone, pointed out a mistake in a calculation. He moved on, reaching a lectern on which an enormous old book was resting, and among the dash and motion of the busy room, he lifted the book from its place and began to read, comparing, one by one, the four pieces of paper he had

collected on their trip through the house with some specific detail inscribed in the giant tome's early pages. The book had to be very heavy, and yet Waller cradled it with ease, supporting it in the crook of a comfortable arm. He had always seemed large, but only now did Hand understand how physically powerful the old lawyer remained.

Hand looked up at his brother, hoping Calum knew what to do next. The workers did not care that the McLeish boys were present, merely moving around them on their errands. Waller had made them invisible, it seemed.

Unlike all the previous rooms in the house, this office possessed a clock, a shabby tall piece, its glass front smudged and chipped in places. Its hands were grievously wrong, being a good twelve minutes faster than the St. Giles clock.

"Mr. Waller," said Hand, "What's the right time?"

Lane Waller did not look up from his book, but his jaw had stiffened.

"What's the correct time, sir?"

The clerk at the desk nearest to Waller said, "You can't trust that thing, gents. It's a good ten minutes off."

"Mr. Waller, if you're so clever, can't you tell us the time?"

Now Waller met his eye, but, Hand was alarmed to see, he did not seem irritated. He did not seem afraid he would be outmatched in this test. Rather, he resembled a cat that had finally caught a troublesome mouse by its tail, and knew the moment to consume had arrived.

"Come to my side, you clever one. Just you, for now. Let your brother wait—before he hears my good news."

Hand approached. He didn't want to be close to Waller, but he had no choice, beckoned to stand right by his side, almost underneath the huge old book. Once Hand was where Waller seemed to want him, the old man squatted down, the four documents laid out across the spread-open tome. Hand looked at one letter then another. He found the writing hard to read, but he could make out certain words and phrases repeating in each page.

In a light, breezy voice, Waller commented, "I have given enough assistance to the authorities in London, year by year, that I have accumulated a small collection of these forms. Such valuable pages, and I am going to use them up on your family. You should be flattered."

From several paces back, Calum asked, "What's he showing you, Hand?"

Hand strained, examining one grandiose flourish, finding his own name, "Hand McLeish," the only words on the page in still unblotted ink, its strokes shiny in the candlelight. The rest of the writing was old and dry, sunken into the parchment.

"Oh, can you not read, child?" asked Waller. "The effect is a little spoiled if you're ignorant."

"I can. I can read fine," said Hand, flushing, catching on another letter his mother's full name, also recently added. Among the old, faded words, he thought he could also read, "Trinidad."

Waller said, "These are transportation orders, child. One for you, and one for each member of your worthless family. I have sent each of you to a different corner of this

Earth, as per the instructions on each order. You will each be transported as soon as the authorities receive these notices.”

Hand stared at the four pages, seeing his family’s fate written out on each.

Waller pointed at the document bearing Calum name. “This one sends your brother to the one of the sultans of Borneo. How lucky for him!” Waller actually seemed to expect praise for this. “You should be impressed, boy! It’s not at all easy to get these letters. I can’t even remember what I had to do to be rewarded with one.”

Hand readied himself to reach for the orders and throw them in the fire, but Waller, snorting in amusement, slammed the huge book shut.

He said, “It gives me an oddly intense thrill, to know you will disembark thousands of miles from the rest of your family, with each of you suffering from utterly different tropical plagues—from quite different, but equally cruel, colonial masters.” Hand couldn’t believe Waller actually meant to do this, but the man’s obvious pleasure, his wide, almost giddy eyes, made Hand tremble.

“What?” asked Waller. “What did you expect? Did you think you could break into my house unpunished?”

Calum said, “For God’s sake! We just wanted to talk to you. We just wanted a conversation. Aren’t we citizens, just like you?”

Waller shrugged. “We are not capable of having a conversation. We are not on the same level.”

“I gave you an apology. I explained—”

“You’re too late!” said Waller, all but shrieking. “If your great grandfather had given that apology, or his father, or his father’s father, then perhaps, at that early point, the debt would have been small enough that an apology could have repaid it. But he didn’t. So the debt kept growing. Centuries have gone by while my family has preserved this city. And through those same centuries, your fathers and uncles have whored and played dice. Like all the worthless families in this stinking city— dancing around fires and dressing up in idiotic robes. Your debt to me is already so great that—”

“What the fuck,” cried Calum, “are you talking about?”

Without warning, Calum ran at Waller, his eyes locked on the book Waller held. He moved too suddenly for any of the clerks to react, coming in low, his arms in close. Hand reached for Waller’s leg, trying to keep him off balance, but as Calum lunged, Waller simply raised the giant tome with both hands, and smashed it across Calum’s face. The impact threw Calum back, and Waller struck him again, knocking him across one of the desks, splattering ink and pencils to all sides. Hand leapt for one of the transportation orders that had fallen free during the brawl, but before he could grasp it, a clerk had grabbed his arms. Waller’s men grappled Calum and Hand, seizing them both.

“Your family has until morning,” said Waller, his voice calm, “before the city’s government will receive these documents and the guard seeks your arrest. Enjoy yourselves, you poor fools, if such a thing is possible in Edinburgh.”

Chapter Twenty-One

“We have to do it,” said Lizzie.

Hand nodded. There was no choice.

“We have to,” she repeated, looking at the floor. “But we can't tell Tyler. Not ever.”

“We won't,” said Hand. “Not ever.”

Hand and Lizzie climbed the stairs to Granny Wynd's home. When they had gained the building's top floor, passing by Hand's old front door, still boarded up by the bailiffs, they found Granny Wynd in consultation with a young lady in spectacles. Whatever Granny had been saying to her, their arrival resulted in the end the discussion. The lady gathered up a few small objects in a ragged, dirty cloth, and left.

Granny Wynd, still seated, gestured for Hand to sit opposite her. She pointed at a chair by the wall that Lizzie could take. Hand, however, did not take the seat. He stood by the table, sure that if he was not wary, Granny Wynd would trick him.

“I have given you both help before, for free. Now I would like payment.”

“Lane Waller,” Hand said, “wants my family dead.”

Granny nodded. “Aye. So we have to remove him. But will you help me do something, in return?”

“Will my family be safe?” Hand asked.

“And mine, too?” Lizzie asked.

“They will live, certainly. But none of us are meant to survive very long. It’s not how we were made.”

“Am I your son? Did you make me?” Hand hated to ask this question in front of Lizzie, but he had no choice. He had to know.

“I did not. I did not cause you to happen. I knew about you. I could feel you walking about the city, even before you were born. That was why I allowed your mother to befriend me. But you are not my child.”

“Who else is like us?”

Granny nodded at the question, as though she had given it much thought. “There is no one else. I have looked high and low. There might be a handful of men and women with a trace, a touch of it. But no more. The rest—all your amusing stories of curses, enchantments, and transformations? Your terrible tales of women drowned and burned? They are frauds, the unwell in spirit, or the unjustly accused. Most are some unfortunate blend of all three. Women with a trace of intellect choked to death by fearful men.”

“Why? Why?”

She gestured again for him to sit, and, lacking any reason to fight her, Hand took a chair.

“For a long time, a woman is making gravy. Picture her, at work with her great pot, standing by the fire. As kingdoms rise and fall, she is there. Through the endless ages of mankind, she works without hurry, adding more butter as the recipe needs, coaxing the flour, watching it transform and slip away. While she works, the world continues as it is. But someday, she attends to other matters. She is called away from the pot, and her

husband takes her place. He is full of haste. He has in mind a great plan, many great plans for mankind. He stirs while picturing a destination for Greece or Egypt, some clever development for the world, and so he rushes the work. He lets a few clots of flour remain, unbroken, in his pot. I am thinking of proud Cleopatra, struggling as Rome sought to rule the world, or the rainy halls of Camelot.”

“My mother said you owe her,” Hand replied. “She said you would help us.”

“I owe her nothing, and she isn’t here. I will make an agreement with you. My help with Lane Waller, in exchange for your help with something I need.”

“What’s that?” Hand asked.

“The world is about to change. Can’t you feel it? If the two of you survive to be old, you will look back to your childhood and say that Granny Wynd was right. You will live to see a wholly different planet. Do you not feel the great shapes and forces on the move? I do. I wish to give the men who are building that new world a little more wisdom. Will you help me?”

Hand did not understand what she was asking him to do. The room’s few candles left the corners of the room unclear. The usual clatter and bustle of the night had died down. No one seemed to be moving in the whole building, on the whole street below. Silence had swallowed the town.

“How are you going to stop Waller?” he asked.

“He will perish in terror.”

“How—tell me?”

“Our spell has already begun. Already, night birds are gathering on rooftops. Some have flown for weeks to arrive. A fog, dark, impenetrable, sorrowful, is rising from the sea, settling over the streets and blocking out the sky, even though there is no wind. A thing like a wolf approaches, a creature that sniffs and whimpers in the shadows, coming from a far off place without a name.” Hand assumed that Granny was talking in metaphor, but as he listened to her speak, he heard a great flock of birds waft past, circling outside the high window, exchanging discordant, maddened cries.

From the corner of the room, Lizzie cried out, “Why do you have to be so evil? We’re trying to build a better city, you know?”

To his surprise, Granny Wynd nodded. “I know. That city will be better than this one, child. It will not be as your architects imagine, not completely, but it will be better than it is now. I am eagerly anticipating the future, just as they are—maybe even more.”

She indicated for Hand to put his hands on the table, and when he had done so, Granny Wynd sighed, closing her eyes, as though this acquiescence was enough. Hand wanted to delay, to hold off—he had not yet agreed to anything—but he seemed to be rising, lifting out of his chair. In an unsteady, hazy flash of vision, he saw his mother in her room inside the castle, unable to sleep. He saw Lane Waller, seated in an armchair, holding a wine bottle by its neck as his office bustled around him, his clerks scribbling on documents. And then Hand’s mind shot away, like something in him had recoiled, rising at great speed into the light. The room was gone, as were Granny Wynd and Lizzie, and as the noon-time sun shone on all sides, Hand felt no trace of the room had been sitting in. He had fled away.

He seemed to be flying, drifting high above a great city on a sunny day. The city was vast, stretching over the hills, its outskirts reaching the sea. Although the actual buildings were unfamiliar, he knew the city was Edinburgh: he made out the great towers of the ancient city, the new town's straight lines. Over time, the city had massively expanded—he could not quite make out how the rest of the city looked—it was as though this were a dream, and he seemed to understand more than he should, as though what he knew no longer fully relied on what he saw. This grand city's ornaments and pinnacles reached up towards the sky. Observing this bright city, Hand felt a great happiness for Lizzie and Douglas Farweather. Not only would Edinburgh's new town be completed, Douglas and his successors would continue to build it in the future, extending it beyond anyone's expectation.

This city of future centuries was remarkably clean. There in the bright sunshine, the streets illuminated by a brilliant glare, clean water flowed through the walls, supplying every family's thirst. The stench of human waste was gone, too, as were the animals from the roads and gardens. These people looked healthy and robust, and, to Hand's delight, it seemed to be a city of great speed and great inter-connection. A journey that would have taken Hand hours, even days, these citizens raced through. And it was a city of fabulous meeting and conversations, each man or woman interacting with fellows nearby, with friends all over the city, all over the world. As though every home, in this Edinburgh, were the equal of Anderson's Library. Language upon language were spoken. Great cargos moving across the sea.

Yet Hand, as he drifted over the great towers, as he continued to absorb this vision, noticed that something was flickering in his sight. It seemed that the city was shining in one moment, falling into shadow the next. As though the sun were being perpetually adjusted by the passing of clouds, even though the sky was clear. In those flashes of darkness, Hand saw a quite different city, even if, physically, they looked the same. This second city had the same clean streets and quick pace of the first. But its population moved, Hand understood, not with eager intention, but with a panicked, helpless haste. Like they were commanded to dash from place to place, without rest, as though clocks had sped up their counting of the day. The clock and its remorseless ticking seemed to rule their thoughts. Great hordes of fresh food were stored behind locked doors even as children begged to eat. Indeed, even the rich members of the city behaved as though they would soon be denied access to those grand stores, racing and doubting themselves and arguing to take away the little that others had. Hand looked further out, trying to understand the cause of this unease, and he found that the city was walled all around by a great silence. Birds had been extinguished from the sky; the oceans were empty of life. Some great blow had struck this city, this country, and its inhabitants sensed the ruin that gathered all around them.

Hand, his image of the two cities fading, understood what he had been shown. Douglas Farweather was trying to build the bright city; Granny Wynd wished to create its shadow twin. He would spend the rest of his life working with Douglas, helping to defeat her plans.

A great intensity had filled Granny Wynd's room. The air itself seemed to throb, and Hand's skull ached. Lizzie had covered her face with her hands, and Granny Wynd was sitting back, blinking.

"We have done a great thing today," she said, wheezing. "The city will never be the same." She seemed nervous, unsure of herself.

"Did you see the city?" Hand asked. "The two cities?"

"No. I saw a terrible thing. I saw a man eating the stars."

The room spun, and Hand's stomach heaved. His mouth was dry. When Lizzie came to his side, he could not make out her face, as though something blocked his sight.

"Is it done?" she asked.

"It is done," Granny Wynd replied, her eyes distant, worried.

Lizzie gripped Hand's arm. "Let's go. Let's go."

Hand did not recall where the two of them walked. The city felt odd to him now, a mist drifting across the night that, it seemed, only he and Lizzie could see.

"This feels wrong," Lizzie said. "Something has happened."

All Hand did not know. Something strange had settled over the night, and his clocks cried out.

After some unknown period of aimless wandering, they arrived in sight of the castle gates.

"We should go inside," Hand said. "Tell them the good news."

"What did we do?" Lizzie asked.

“I don't know. But Lane Waller is finished.”

“No,” she said. “I don't believe it. It's just stories! Stories! It's nothing. I didn't kill anyone. I just told stories. It's a trick, it's to make us believe—she's tricking us, that's all. Tomorrow, Lane Waller will still be alive.”

Hand didn't reply.

“We can't tell anyone,” she said. “Not Tyler. Not my father.”

Hand nodded.

“Nothing happened,” Lizzie insisted. “That old woman? She just tried to trick us. But nothing happened. I don't even know why you introduced me to her. It was cruel of you to make me talk to her.” She stared at him, annoyed. “Nothing happened.

Hand turned away, frightened by the anger which Lizzie was regarding him, like she just discovered that she hated him. A deep, dark fog had settled on the high street, as if the city was being swallowed up.

BOOK TWO

1780

Chapter One

The summer dusk hung over the Farweather house, humid and cool. The hour was late, but around this time of year in Scotland, the days stretched long, the low-hanging sun reluctant to depart. It was the night of Lizzie's party, and every room in the house glowed with hurried activity. Lamps winked in the high windows, and the servants took turns watching for early arrivals, ready to shout at the sight of coaches approaching from Edinburgh. Behind the house, the hired butler supervised the arrival of another barrel of wine, guiding the delivery men up the four steps to the rear doors. Shadows flung themselves across great swathes of the grounds. The tops of the hedgerows shone in the warm, rich twilight, as did the smooth stones inlaid in the garden walls, but the vegetable patches and flowerbeds were dark. A stand of tall hydrangea glowed in the gloom. And to the south, past the gardens, beyond the shabby fields and the farmers' cottages, the towers of Edinburgh rose, smoke waving from the chimneys, the castle looming on its crag. But the air was so much fresher here.

Hand McLeish followed the butler and the barrel as they progressed into the house, and he waited until the barrel was set down to the butler's satisfaction in the servants' quarters. Once everyone looked content, Hand moved on, taking a quick look at the kitchen, hoping to see the cooks at work cutting the roast, but the heat was too much for his face and wig, and he withdrew before any melting could begin. As he climbed the stairs, he was stopped by Miss Sahar, Lizzie's maid, who told him that the first guests would shortly arrive.

“Are we ready?” he asked.

“Douglas is after you, did you hear? Can you have a wee word with him?”

Hand promised to do so shortly, and walked over to the house's long and elegant sitting room, where the event would shortly be held. The only occupant of this intricately decorated salon was the young Poppy Cavenar, a minor cousin of the Cavenar family. She was stationed at the piano, nervously peering at her sheet music. Through the tall windows, Hand saw four coaches depositing a large number of men to the front of the house: awkward scholarly types, uncomfortable in their dark stockings and freshly powdered wigs. He would need to ease their mood, make them feel welcome. Lizzie was the hostess of the night, but she would not descend for some time; Douglas was around, but the last anyone had heard, the great architect was still not dressed.

Hand went over to Poppy and suggested she begin.

She looked back at him in fright.

“Don’t worry,” Hand said, “By the time they get indoors, you’ll be at the good bit.”

The first guests turned out to be Edinburgh’s society of amateur researchers, The Reckless Club. Dressed in their finest attire, the part-time scholars circled the sitting room, offering greetings to Hand, praising Poppy’s uncertain rendition of a Pachelbel fantasy. The club members murmured their admiration of the salon’s furniture, and debated amongst themselves the national origin of each decorative piece. It was, without question, a very well-made room. The grand Turkish rug that covered the floor, its midnight blue broken up by a maze of yellow patterns, seemed to comment on the simple cream lines that decorated the ceiling. It was as though Lizzie had perfected a variation of

the Adam style, Hand heard with pleasure exclaimed, but with more force and daring than Adam himself would have risked. Hand listened, enjoying the praise that Lizzie could not hear. The arrangement of the salon—the design of the entire house—was Lizzie's doing, and Hand was warmed to hear her genius given its due.

On opposing walls, one canvas by Gainsborough faced another canvas by Robert: the Englishman's crowded, energetic countryside seemed to regard with pity the Parisian's lonely ruin.

Hand wished the scholars well and escaped. He climbed the stairs to Douglas's study where, he hoped, the great man would be dressing himself. Douglas, however, was sitting at his desk in his natural hair, relaxed, large, and at ease, surrounded by the fruits of his craft. The study was not a substantial room, and the folios, leather-bound—Douglas Farweather's vast collection of essays, architectural designs, and street plans—crowded the walls to Hand's left and right. Maps of Edinburgh's new town, both the original design by Craig and sketches of the actual construction work, occupied the study's rear. The fireplace's mantel was decorated by an array of rulers and spirit levels, compasses of varying sizes, and measuring devices of more opaque intent.

"I have a request," said Douglas.

"Whatever you need."

"Remember Diarmid McDonald, my attorney? The Glasgow fellow who helped us purchase the land for Lizzie's theatre? He'll be here tonight. Keep him happy, yes?"

Douglas spoke as though the hour was of no concern. Hand could hear a pair of servants making haste along the corridor, sharing whispers about the coaches seen approaching on

the Edinburgh road. He could hear through the floorboards the chatter of the Reckless Club in the room below. And, due to his strange gifts that still, after all these years, lacked a name, Hand could sense much more. Without needing to exert himself, he could *feel* the growing urgency of the house, the rising force and velocity of its patterns: the cooks coaxing the kitchen's fires to roar higher, the butlers emptying claret bottles into the upraised mouths of wine glasses.

Hand promised to welcome Diarmid McDonald. He paused, wondering if Douglas would require anything else.

"He rather resembles a human mole, I feel," added Douglas, unkindly. "Those small eyes of his. He's the sort of fellow who, if you were to place him on a highland moor, or in the jungles of the Darien, he would faint dead away."

"And yet—I keep hearing how he impressed the Court of Session."

Douglas looked like a man forced to eat something bitter. "Yes, it was well done. Of course it was. That does not mean I have to like him."

Hand returned to the party unsettled by Douglas's sour mood. Tonight was supposed to be a celebration of the firm's triumph. After months of planning, fund-raising, and legal debate, Farweather and Associates had purchased a large plot of land to the north of the city, close to the Rocheids' estate at Inverleith. This land would be the eventual site of Lizzie's enormously ambitious "Scots' Theatre," a great playhouse and music hall which, for decades to come, all of Europe would admire, placing Scotland in the forefront of the continent's productions of culture and art. In normal times, it would have been unremarkable to have overcome the legal barriers for such a project, but to have

accomplished it this year, while the Crown's money and attention was still consumed by the war in the American colonies, during a period when most of the city's building projects had long languished without funds, was an impressive feat, one that should cheer all of anxious Edinburgh.

Hand hoped that Scotland's society would now express its gratitude in financial form. Tonight, in Douglas's house, the firm would open subscriptions for the theatre itself, and at midnight, the best members of Scotland's society would salute the woodsmen and farm-hands who would, at day break, eliminate the last remaining obstacle in the path of Lizzie's Scots' Theatre. As soon as the dawn illuminated the terrain, they would tear down and raze a knotted stretch of dreary, low woods, thick with thistle and fern, that stood on the theatre's intended site, the plot of worthless land named, for reasons unknown to scholars, "The Bray Shambles."

The other properties that made up the remainder of the purchase, Douglas had been able to secure with little work. The Shambles, however, had required an enormous struggle in the courts, its ownership disputed for many years between rival claimants, its name a local by-word for the incompetence and venality of the law. From everything Hand had heard, Douglas's lawyer deserved enormous praise for picking that particular lock, for opening up the Shambles, at long last, to reform. Diarmid McDonald deserved the firm's gratitude, not its scorn: Douglas was clearly in the grip of a temporary bad mood, giving voice to sentiments he would in the morning regard with shame.

Perhaps he was merely overworked. Hand vowed to keep an eye on Douglas as the night progressed, and he re-entered the sitting room, looking around for Diarmid McDonald, intending to tell him how appreciated he was.

The salon had grown busy in the minutes Hand had been away. He greeted several friends and accepted a firm handshake from the famous philosopher, Adam Smith. Hand thanked Smith for attending, and, spotting Diarmid alone by a window, he moved across the loud room to give his regards, but the lawyer was too quick, getting in his response before Hand could speak.

“I have found you out,” said Diarmid, who spoke with a heavy Glaswegian accent. “I know your secret.”

Hand was jolted by this remark, which Diarmid had delivered quite seriously. What secret did the man mean? Hand felt a shiver cross his back, as though Granny Wynd were watching him, wrathful and amused. Hand had not in ten years spoken to Granny Wynd, nor had he deployed—at least not in anger—his strange genius, his uncanny abilities of time and counting. He had kept his odd abilities hidden as best he could. Yet at the same time, he could not help suspecting that one day, somehow, the deeds of his childhood would be found out.

“I want to thank you again, on behalf of the firm,” Hand said. “You did excellent work.”

“Nae,” said Diarmid, shrinking under the praise. “It was a clear application of Scots law. Little more than that.” Edinburgh's lawyers had for years argued that to make any progress on the Bray Shambles, a new law would have to be passed down in London, one

that would overturn by legislative fiat the mass of incompatible claims that had grown up around the case. However, according to Hand's understanding of the proceedings, Diarmid had perceived an easier path: if the two major claimants could be persuaded to surrender their rights to the land, selling their stakes to Douglas's firm, then the judge who oversaw the handover of those claims could act on his own. He could deploy the great powers that Scots law assigned to its judges, and simply declare the sale binding. Diarmid then persuaded the bench that they possessed the power to simply declare void the mossy, thorny bundle of precedents and defunct rulings that had prevented the Shambles from joining Scotland in the modern age. And with the simplest of pronouncements, it had been done. Now the Shambles belonged to the firm, and Lizzie's theatre could be built.

“I'm just saying, lad,” Diarmid said, leaning close, “I saw ye at church last Sunday. At a real kirk, too. I was pleased to see it!”

This should have prompted relief, as Diarmid's “discovery” had nothing to do with Hand's worst fears. It was still, however, an awkward development. Hand usually attended the moderate, insightful, forward-thinking service at St. Andrews, the leading church of the new town. But the previous Sunday, he had at his family's request crossed over to the high street, to attend with them the Gallows Kirk: discontented, harsh, evangelical. He had, as a result, endured an hour of irrational apocalypics. But that was exactly the kind of service his mother and siblings seemed to like.

Diarmid McDonald waved an awkward hand, reassuring him: “I was proud to see you there. Proud. I applaud any learned man who can still follow the real religion.”

While Hand was still deciding how to respond—the real religion?—a fresh group of guests arrived, among them Tyler Cavenar. The whole salon hushed, and Tyler, the heir to the great Cavenar fortunes, gallantly made his rounds, equally polite to each guest, whether they were high or low. Tyler was as charming as ever, gaining smiles and bows from everyone as he made his way to Hand’s side.

“Have we made any money yet?” he asked.

“It’s still too early for pledges,” Hand told his friend. “But I think the dam is about to break.”

Tyler, despite his years of illness, had mostly maintained his looks and girth, but the darkness around his eyes, if you knew what to look for, hinted at the enormous strain he bore. Every winter his lungs weakened, and he fled Scotland, seeking warmer climates to the south. Each spring, he returned later in the year.

“By the way,” Tyler said. “I want to hire you for something. Does Douglas let you accept outside projects?”

“What do you need?”

“It can wait.” Tyler paused. “Why is Mr. Smith standing outside? Is he all right?”

Adam Smith was indeed alone, standing on the steps to the gardens, glancing back at the party through the glass. The night was certainly warm enough for outdoor air, and while some residents of the city had been persuaded that direct exposure to the elements offered recuperative powers, thanks in large part to the energetic campaigning of a local eccentric, the judge James Burnett, Adam Smith did not seem the sort whom such blather would convince. Hand walked through the long room, accepting on the way a forceful

embrace from his friend Marian, the countess of Ayeshire, and he slipped out through the doors to the garden, joining Adam Smith on the steps.

“Are you taking a recuperative moment, Mr. Smith?”

Adam Smith continued to watch the party from the outside. Despite Smith's copious and brilliant writings, he was a man of few spoken words, and Hand expected to hear the briefest of replies.

Smith, instead, nodded at the crowd inside. “It's so melancholy how he works to entertain us. To have all the wealth and prestige anyone could desire, and yet be marked for death. Terrible.”

Hand did not reply. It was not the polite thing to refer to a friend's illness, even though he imagined that everyone, in practice, knew about Tyler's condition.

“You have been patient,” said Smith. “I admire that. You have given him no cause to feel ashamed.” Hand, his face growing warm, understood that Smith was referring to Hand's long-hidden feelings for Lizzie. Hand did not know how Smith could have learned the secret.

“Myself,” said Smith, “I would not have been able to—my heart, yes, is too fiery. I would have caused my friend harm. I would have made—demands. But you are better than me. You have done a good thing by that lad.” No one ever spoke to him like this. No one had ever thanked him for waiting for Tyler's death.

“Perhaps,” Hand said, “I am deluding myself. Perhaps, when he passes to the better world, she will choose someone else.”

“No,” said Smith. “Don’t diminish yourself out of modesty. I am not breaking any confidence, you understand, but I can speak in general terms. I can reassure you.”

“I didn’t know you and Lizzie were friends.”

Smith hesitated, and Hand, desperate to hear whatever intelligence the philosopher could share, felt afraid that the older man might lapse into his usual circumspection, and fall silent.

“Since I published my study of human sentiments,” Smith said slowly, awkwardly, “many people, both men and women, have opened correspondences with me. Lizzie and I have exchanged letters, and although our discussion has primarily been philosophical, she has discussed you. Women, of course, cannot experience the same intensity of longing, of desire, but—I was at times surprised to see the clarity with which—with which this lady spoke. You do not delude yourself.”

Hand did not trust himself to coherently reply. His fingers trembled. No one had ever confirmed that Lizzie felt anything for him. The only person who ever talked to him about his fondness was his mother, who over and over told Hand he was wasting his time with “that woman.”

“I have read,” Hand said, “that waiting for something that has been promised to another is a sin.”

Smith, the great adjudicator of morality, shrugged. “Well. Modern existence is complicated. That is its nature. You have feelings in both directions, for the lad and the lass, and you are trying to do right by both. That seems no sin to me. At worst, it is an

overflow of sentiment, an excess of the good. Would that more of us experienced such excesses!”

Adam Smith had never spoken this many words at one time, Hand was sure.

“I am very grateful to you, sir.”

Smith bowed his head. “It is me who is grateful to you.”

Chapter Two

Hand was not fully conscious of the remarks he made after he rejoined the room. He believed he had said thoughtful things to various men and women, but the words passed out of him freely, without attaching themselves to his memory. He accepted a glass of wine from the canal enthusiast, Mr. James Hutton.

“Is the Shambles to be cut down tonight?”

Hand confirmed that the work would begin the following morning. “It’s an exciting time. Perhaps you and I can now attract some interest in the Clyde canal.”

“It’s possible,” said Hutton, “although I am not as universally beloved as Miss Farweather. Anyway, I’m glad that your firm will make haste. Tear down the Shambles tomorrow, I would advise, before someone tries to intervene. You might be surprised the number of men in Edinburgh with a fondness for those woods.”

Hand would have asked more about this strange claim—the Shambles were worthless, economically—but he was pulled away from the conversation when another man, someone he did not know, reached out with considerable force, grabbing his arm.

“I want to ask a question of you, Mr. McLeish,” said the stranger. “About dreams. It’s about dreams.”

This fellow appeared not entirely sober, and the state of his frayed, reddish coat suggested that he would not be a useful donor to Lizzie’s theatre. Hand kept his smile fixed, even though the man’s question chilled him, made him grow tense. Hand hated talk

of dreams, but he could not be openly rude because Diarmid McDonald, and a few other Edinburgh worthies, were standing within earshot.

“Where,” the red-coated man asked, “are the least disturbed nights to be had, in Edinburgh? Should I be concerned where I stay?”

“What, exactly, you are asking me?” Hand hoped a firm response would quell the newcomer’s interest. He had to look around, to check Lizzie had not descended. She would be disappointed to hear him discussion nightmares, superstitions.

“Dreams, sir. Nightmares of every kind. I am up from Newcastle, where I live. I have heard that Edinburgh is uniquely troubled by bad dreams. The old heart of the city in particular. The city sits under a curse, some say.”

Hand hated such talk. For a moment, above the chatter of the room, he seemed to hear Granny Wynd’s cruel laughter. Being so far from the city, among the tall grass and the heather, he had almost managed to forget the shadow that covered Edinburgh.

“Let me speak plainly: there is no curse,” Hand said. “On the contrary, Edinburgh is leading humankind into the future. The people of this city are guiding the rest of Europe out of the darkness of superstition and into the light of reason. Don’t worry about outrageous tales.” Hand, as he spoke, was troubled by the suspicion that he should know this red-coated man. The stranger certainly acted as though they were acquainted.

“See?” said Diarmid, appearing pleased. “Mr. McLeish is of the old, strict Scottish faith. He disdains graven images. A cold-minded Presbyterian, he has no interest in our childish stories.” Hand wished he could politely correct the lawyer’s mis-conception.

“No, the curse is real,” said a nearby merchant, a trader and speculator who had become famous, before the American revolt, for his imports of American Indian furs and crafts. “The curse is as real as you like. We do get bad dreams, very bad ones, all o’ the time. The new town is better for it, if you can find a place to stay there. Some folk say that the houses down in George Square don’t suffer as bad, neither.”

Hand turned to a friend of his, a fellow rationalist, expecting support. This medical professional owned an apothecary just off the North Bridge.

However, the chemist frowned. “I used to feel like you, Hand.”

“You used to?” asked Diarmid McDonald. “But no more?”

“Two nights ago, I was converted.”

“What did your dream involve?” asked the Glaswegian.

Hand broke in: “This is nonsense. Listen to me: it is nonsense. If you want a natural explanation of why the residents of the city sometimes complain of odd dreams, you may find your answer in Edinburgh's terrible sanitation, its windowless rooms—its colossal piles of animal waste, the stench that has made our city infamous across the world. Then you should add the mental strain of an entire population living on top of each other, the weight of five floors—ten floors—above one's bedroom.”

The apothecary patted his arm. “Hush now. Let me tell my story. It’s a good one. It happened Monday night. I had come home from an evening with the lads, some school friends of old.”

Hand said, “Could the whiskey be related to your nightmare?”

The chemist gazed on him kindly. “I staggered home, threw myself on the bed. An hour or so later, I woke from an awful dream. I was being chased through the woods. A real forest, the likes of which I had never seen. None of us Edinburgh folk have much experience with forests, do we? But that was what I dreamed. Something big was chasing me, a huge creature on two legs. A giant fellow. I woke up, afraid for my life, my heart pounding. I had sweated through my nightclothes. But now I was afraid. Even more terrified. Why? Because I was awake, and there was a man standing in my bedroom. A huge one, in the dark, staring down at me. Something was strange about his head, too, like he was standing in the branches of a tree.”

“What did he do?” asked the red-coated man.

“Nothing. I lit a match and he was gone.”

Hand said, “I have no idea what this story implies.”

“He was there,” said the chemist. “In my room. I know what dreaming feels like. This was not it.”

Hand laughed the story away, telling the men to go a little easier in the pub, trying to hide his worries. He had heard a similar tale before. During a business meeting with an association of wigmakers, two out of that peculiar group had described a similar nightmare. Both had described being chased through mysterious woods in their sleep, pursued by a giant. At the time, Hand had ignored them. Edinburgh wigmakers were, generally speaking, an odd bunch, tending to be persnickety and conspiratorial—fond of sharing unlikely beliefs about human physiognomy in between declaiming ominous-sounding passages from Revelation. However, to hear a third person experience the same

nightmare, especially someone whose clarity of mind he trusted, left Hand anxious. Now he wished he had paid more attention to the wigmakers' remarks.

Hand did not know what Granny Wynd's spell was supposed to do. She had cast it—seemingly with his help—without explaining her purpose, and ever since then, he had avoided her home in Tallow's Land. He had a real life to build among the city's society, one that did not involve curses and prophecies. So he had stayed clear away. In all that time, he had watched her spell settle over the city, and he had hoped it would fade on its own accord. For the average person, it caused bad dreams; for an unlucky few, waking visions. But he had rarely heard of a specific dream repeating itself. Perhaps there was a natural explanation: dreams often deployed as their basic material events and encounters from the real world. Hand hoped that there was some local legend or custom that might explain the similarity between these dreams. He went looking for Douglas Farweather, hoping to avail himself of Douglas's vast knowledge of Scotland's tales and traditions. Hand hoped that Granny Wynd was not literally planning to bring the woods to the city, as in the Scottish play.

A moment later, Hand saw Douglas Farweather withdraw from an encounter with two young Drummonds.

"What do you need?" Douglas asked. Like Tyler, he looked tired, the craggy lines on his cheeks seeming sharper than ever.

"Do you remember that odd group of wigmakers? We discussed their interest in taking a building on Queen Street."

"Fools. They successfully wasted a week of our time."

“They were strange, yes. Do you recall how two of them were complaining about a nightmare? Two of them had experienced the same kind of dream. They had both been chased through a forest.”

Douglas raised an eyebrow. “So?”

“Another fellow, a reliable friend, just reported a similar dream. You know Scotland better than any man I know. Is there a superstition, or local legend, about a haunted wood, or a forest giant—something that could be the source of these imaginings? Does that sound possible?”

“I hired you to manage my firm because I believed you to be a clear-sighted, practical young man.” Douglas looked annoyed. “Did I make a mistake?”

Hand was taken aback. “You did not.”

“Good. Dreams are of interest only to idle minds.”

Hand watched his employer go. Where had that venom come from? Hand worried that he had let his performance slip, and endangered himself. He had prospered all these years by ignoring Granny Wynd's existence, and by acting as though all talk of weird dreams and unearthly visions was mere irrational chatter. If he wanted a chance to, at long last, win Lizzie's heart, and her hand, he had to maintain that pose.

He was beckoned over by Marian, the countess, who wanted him to join her conversation with Tyler Cavenar.

“Has Tyler,” Marian asked, “recruited you to his campaign? His most noble venture?”

Hand paused. “Is this—”

Tyler nodded. "The help I was asking you for—before the crowd arrived."

"You must help him," Marian said, sighing, "Tyler wishes to end his family's involvement in some terrible, terrible business. He amazes me, Hand! Our young friend is so noble. Could you ever believe he is descended from cotton merchants? No, you cannot."

"I can imagine it, countess," said Tyler, amused. "I really can." Hand felt a great sorrow in his chest. Tyler was indeed a remarkable man. But there was nothing to be done: nothing to be done but wait. And to give thanks to the heavens that one's own health was, for the moment, spared from destruction.

"I would not be surprised," Marian said, in a louder voice, "were he a lost grandchild of our unfortunate Charles, his true heir."

"If he were a Stuart, my lady," said Hand, not sure if such talk was wise, "he might have to relocate to France quite promptly."

"And we would lose him! How terrible. So, let us decide, instead, that he hails from the northern relatives of old King Arthur. Oh, you are laughing at me!"

"I am not," Hand said.

"You are, you are indeed! You are a terrible city bird, young man. Terrible!"

Tyler said, "So. You'll help me with my problem? I'm feeling overwhelmed."

"What's the business?"

"There's more than one. I have a lot of papers to read before I can make the case. Can I hire you?"

“I’ll come when you call,” Hand said. He did not consider his love for Lizzie, Tyler’s fiancée, to be a betrayal. It was as though there were two Hands living in the same body: the first considered himself among Tyler Cavenar’s closest friends; the second hoped, one day, to marry Lizzie Farweather. As no one knew of his love for Lizzie, he should feel no shame for it; as Tyler’s failing health continued to postpone the wedding, Hand saw no reason why he should give up hope.

Hand, alone for a moment, looked around for Lizzie, just in case she had managed to slip into the crowd without his notice. At the door to the stairs, however, he saw her maid, Miss Sahar, waving to him.

He was wanted upstairs.

“You should come up,” she said. “Lizzie needs you.” Mr. Smith’s words repeated in Hand’s head. He was loved. He felt sorry for Tyler, and guilty for keeping his love for Lizzie secret, but he could not change the way he felt, and, it seemed, he had no reason to. Lizzie loved him.

Chapter Three

Upstairs, the entrance to Lizzie's private chambers was unusually quiet. Hand knocked once.

"You can come in," said Lizzie. Hand had to pause, to make sure he had heard right. He never been allowed past this door before.

Lizzie was alone, seated at a simple vanity. She wore the same plain dress he had seen her in earlier that day. He took a chair a good few feet away from hers, listening for the return of a servant, but he heard no one on the stairs. She did not meet his eye.

"It's going very well downstairs," he said.

"Yes. Sahar has been telling me. People are happy? Enjoying themselves?" He should not be here. If he were discovered, even if he were simply sitting with her, there might be trouble.

"Perhaps too much. Some men have been telling me about their nightmares."

"Lord!"

"I know. They want my advice on the best parts of Edinburgh for a good night's sleep."

"Detestable, detestable. Did you tell them about the city's awful sanitation? The density of people, crammed together?"

"I did. I really did."

Lizzie sighed. "I distrust men who blame the events of their life on the supernatural. It always feels like they are giving themselves justification for the worst impulses in their

own hearts. And they always seem blissfully ignorant of the real costs of such talk, the women, vagrants, and orphans who have to face, sooner or later, the crowd's anger." Hand smiled, nodding, watching her. Ever since the awful night of Lane Waller's death, Lizzie had despised all talk of magic and the uncanny.

"Well," he said, "They are a small proportion of the party. I don't think else anyone has noticed, and many of your guests are ready to donate money. The theatre is going to be a great success."

"Excellent. You thought it would never happen, didn't you? But I'm wearing you down, aren't I?"

"I'm happy to be wrong."

Lizzie nodded. "Hand. We probably don't have much time, without anyone bothering us, and I need to talk to you about something. It's painful for me to raise it. Please believe me: I wouldn't if I didn't have to. It's a personal matter, between the two of us."

Despite his commands to his body, the shivering in Hand's chest grew to an embarrassing extent. Lizzie had never before discussed her feelings about her long-delayed marriage. In fact, she had never spoken directly about romantic feelings in any way. It was not, generally speaking, a thing a lady did. Even to express desire for a legal marriage was considered, in some circles, to be a scandal.

"What do you want to tell me?"

"I don't *want* to say anything. But I have no choice. You should abandon me. I mean it. Find someone else. Forget I exist. Forget me in every way."

Hand had long wondered if she would ever tell him to stop loving her. He had long rehearsed a complete denial, jovially promising Lizzie that he saw her only as a sister, a colleague in her father's firm.

“You could always throw off Tyler,” he said, startling himself with his boldness, “and marry me.”

Her fond expression made him even more unsteady. He had never said anything like this before. He had never told her what he felt, assuming—correctly, he now saw— that she already knew.

“That would be nice,” she said, unconvinced. “I have been happy, these last few years. I have been very happy. But now it needs to end.”

Hand wondered when a servant or friend would come back into Lizzie’s quarters, breaking the moment.

“Look,” he said. “I’m not a rich man. But I appear to be employable anywhere. Robert Adam has often asked me to travel with him. And Douglas seems pleased to keep me as his secretary.”

Lizzie’s smile was more sad than pleased. “I am so envious of the girl who will win you. You’ll give her a wonderful life.”

“You wouldn’t have to stop any of your projects, your work. I would treat myself as your sponsor, your artistic patron. Whatever you sought to do, we could achieve.”

She looked away. Hand often wished his strange abilities, his mastery of clocks and patterns, gave him extra insight where human beings were concerned. He longed to be able to read gestures and expressions as easily as he read the passage of time.

He waited for her to continue. But she was looking at the floor.

“Lizzie,” he said, trying to sound firm. “Do you love Tyler?”

“Of course.” The answer stopped him, chilled his blood. “But even if I didn’t love him, I would still have to marry him. That has always been the plan. That is how we ensure the new town will be built.” That was the old pact. Douglas Farweather had the vision for completing the new town; the Cavenar family had the money that would allow him to carry it out. Before Hand had ever met Lizzie, this had been understood.

“But—”

“You should rejoin the crowd downstairs. They are waiting for you.”

“Lizzie—”

“Forget me,” she said. “Find a better lass for yourself. Abandon me.”

He heard female voices, and footsteps ascending the stairs—he had to leave.

Hand numbly descended into a gathering of the greatest minds in Scotland, the pride of the country gathered under one roof. The crowd was boisterous, glad to celebrate and drink, fully aware of its own greatness. There was no country like Scotland. Even the proudest foreigner conceded this fact.

Mankind might never understand the forces that led the Goddess Fortune to turn her gaze upon one state and raise it above all others, to quicken the merits of its people, to cause industry and learning to thrive. Yet while the causes of national greatness might be unknown, the results were clear. For the last twenty years or thereabouts, discoveries which in London or Paris would have made a scholar legendary among his peers had

become routine in Glasgow and Edinburgh. In all fields of learning—even in fields of human life where learning had previously not dared to venture—the minds of Scotland formed the advance party, the boldest scouts.

Yes, John Locke had been an Englishman, but David Hume and Adam Smith had carried his ideas far beyond their original bounds. The most renowned architect and designer in the British Isles, Robert Adam, hailed from the “lang toun” of Kirkcaldy. In Indian Bengal, Scots comprised an uncanny proportion of the officials and explorers, and in North America, at least until the outbreak of the current conflict, Scotland’s commerce had enclosed the colonies in an amiable but remorseless grip. Were Sir Isaac Newton able to return to life and take a lecture in Edinburgh’s colleges, he would only marvel at the mathematical advances achieved since his day.

And all this brilliance had occurred in a country where the northern reaches remained impoverished and isolated. Most of Scotland’s countryside was sparsely populated and, outside of the cities, life remained harsh and bare. Despite the reforming efforts of its many scholar-farmers, Scotland could rely on none of England’s easy fertility: as the unpopular Dr. Johnson had observed, the land could boast of few fully grown trees. These natural limitations were real and potent, and yet they could not hold back the rising power of the country’s mind. It was a confident time, a generous time, and the warmth of the party swept Hand up, pushed at the worry and fear he felt in his heart.

Lord Kames was arguing with one of the College’s professors, in the harsh, hectoring manner he was known for. Hand admired Kames, and he had repeatedly poured over the judge’s essay, “Six Sketches on the History of Man.” Kames had intended it as a

polemical attack on Buffon and the new natural history, but Hand had instead examined the work for clues to his own origin, his own strange abilities. Tonight, Hand was troubled to see how aged and weary the great judge looked.

The Duchess of Gordon walked by with her steward, a famous composer and fiddle player, whose name Hand suddenly could not recall. Visitors from Trinidad were in attendance, strange-seeming men and women in elaborate and expensive dress. Hand was introduced to them, and their familiar Scots names—Tavish, Robertson—sat oddly with their chill, superior expressions, their eyes haughty as though they had just emerged from heroic battle. The men looked sun-beaten and dark; the women looked cold and deathly fair.

Why had Lizzie asked him to abandon her? He didn't know, and he resolved that, whatever she said, he never would. He saw no reason to remove her from his heart. He was liked, he was sought after. Was he anyone's picture of a leading figure in Scotland's life? Not yet. But he was known to every social club and political faction, and as he moved about the salon, men pulled him into conversation.

"Hand, please settle this for us: Scotland will never be able to afford its own navy. Is that not, well, true?" said John Playfair, the nervous mathematician. "Raising enough of a fleet to catch one single American pirate—it would bankrupt us."

"I believe," said Hand, "that is why many believe we should maintain our own militia."

Playfair sighed. "I used to think so. I am no longer convinced."

Adam Smith, staring at the floor, replied with a discontented “Hr-hmph.” This was the usual level of eloquence he deployed in public conversations, forcing Hand to wonder why Smith had been so bold with him earlier.

Boswell took up the case: “The cost of ships is obviously too high. But the cost of men is not. How can it be? Men arrive every damn day in Edinburgh, looking for food, employment. Put a pike in their hands and teach them to march them up and down Arthur's Seat. The need is urgent. If Mr. Paul Jones lands on our soil, are we supposed to wait for London —”

Hand generally found Boswell difficult company, and today the lawyer looked even more dissolute than usual. Boswell's eyes were rheumy and glassy, and a heavy application of powder seemed intended to cover up an unsightly rash on his cheeks and forehead.

More wine arrived, and the group split in half to allow the servants through. Hand would have stayed with the conversation, but men demanded his company, asking how they might subscribe to Lizzie's theatre, offering their advice about the best plays to stage. Hand accepted their donations, grateful to be busy.

At last, once his voice had grown hoarse with talking, he was left alone in the middle of the salon. The happy crowd briefly parted, revealing, on the opposite wall, Robert's grand painting of a Roman palace, its walls fallen down in decay. Hand had never liked the picture: the immoral sheen which the painter had given the ruin's few remaining columns made it seem as though Robert was glorifying death and failure.

Hand sensed a change in the room, and he looked to the stairs, seeing Lizzie there. She had descended unnoticed, wonderfully pretty in her pale blue jewels. He met her eye, but although she noticed him, she did not smile.

A bell rang, and slowly, conversation ceased. The crowd thickened as bodies returned from the gardens and the corridors. Lizzie thanked everyone for visiting, and offered apologies for having such a small house in which to entertain so many. Cheers drowned her out, and she bit her lip as she waited for them to die down.

“Now, friends, I have a small announcement. There is good news to share. Thanks to the generosity of our friends, we already possess the majority of the financing that we need to construct our Edinburgh Theatre.” As the room applauded, Hand stayed still, feeling confused: from what he had seen of the project’s books, the funds were nowhere close.

She went on: “One man has been particularly generous. That is my soon-to-be husband, the wonderful Mr. Tyler Cavenar. He has offered, as a wedding present to me, to fund the first half of the project’s costs. Through his kindness, the project’s success is guaranteed.” She glanced down at Hand, her eyes hard to read. Before he could react, she had looked away.

Tyler ascending the stairs with two glasses of wine. He passed one to Lizzie, and waved down at the crowd. His face shone, white and damp, in the smoky candlelight. “You have been patient with us. But I am delighted to tell you that Elizabeth Farweather and I will finally be married. On mid-summer night, I will be proud to call her my wife.” Mid-summer was only three weeks away.

As the room cheered the couple on, and Tyler continued to explain the details of the planned ceremony, Hand retreated, slipping away. Outside, in the darkening night, he stood in the gardens, unable to escape the noise of applause. He found himself brought back to a memory: a particular morning he had spent on England's south coast, in Brighton. It had been late September then, at the end of his informal European apprenticeship. Waves had slid across the pebble beach, cool and slow. A breeze played with his hair, easing the throbbing ache of the previous night's beer. He had been away from Edinburgh, by that point, almost two years. After his sixteenth birthday, Douglas and other friends had presented him with an allowance to travel and study abroad, and he had apprenticed in London, been introduced in Paris, and had documented the designs of half a dozen wonderful towns. Richelieu, in France, and Bath, in warm Somerset, had been the best of all.

After those remarkable urban centres, Brighton's architecture had not impressed, and Hand had found himself lethargic, little inclined to study, and he had allowed the town's social life to dictate his days. Spending more money than he should have, he discovered a previously unknown ability—that of making friends—and with invitations to two private clubs and any number of assemblies, he rarely needed to spend an evening without company. Adding to his heady sense of possibility was the interest he received on Brighton's streets and at dances, where more than one young woman seeming to find him intriguing. The whirl of the English coast felt very far from Edinburgh's rain-sieged towers, its dream-haunted lanes. For the first time, Hand had questioned his intention to

return. He might have stayed, whether in Brighton or some other town that wanted construction, found himself a modest occupation, grown familiar with his neighbours, and never thought again of Granny Wynd. The sea breeze, so gentle, seemed to beg him to remain.

Lizzie and Tyler would soon be married. The wedding would be held in the following month. This, obviously, had been what Lizzie had tried to tell him, during their quiet conversation in her room. He might have preferred a more direct warning, certainly, but Lizzie had been betrothed to Tyler the whole time he had known her: she owed him no explanation. That she would marry Tyler was the most reasonable thing in the world. Still, the ache was something terrible. The pain he felt seemed too large to be contained inside his body, less a sensation, and more a previously undetected quality residing in the physical world; it infused the landscape he saw. Although Hand felt a great deadness inside his chest, that numbness was no comfort at all, but rather an awful, overbearing pressure, like suffocation, like drowning.

It was not fair. The thought was childish but there was no other way to put it. Were Tyler simply Tyler alone, Lizzie would do well to marry him. But he was not himself alone: no one could be. If you invited the Great Khan for dinner, his horde of mongols would also come along. In the real world, Tyler was sick and tired, and his family were terrible, constricting, heartless. They would ruin Lizzie, break her.

A tapping on the window made him turn. Miss Sahar seemed to be gesturing for him to come back, and Hand resisted, waving her away. Perhaps he should take the summer

off, go down to London. Perhaps that was why Lizzie and Tyler had chosen mid-summer night for their wedding, so Hand could decide to escape the city for the rest of the season.

Sahar tapped the glass again, more frantically, and the fear in her eyes persuaded Hand that something was wrong. He climbed the steps and opened the door, looked across the long, crowded room.

“It's Mr. Farweather,” she said. “He's in trouble.”

Douglas was so tall, he was easy to spot: he was being led out of the room, towards the front of the house, by a few men. The room had gone quiet, and Lizzie, on the stairs, looked outraged.

“It's the sheriff,” said Sahar. “The sheriff and the city guard. They're arresting Douglas.”

Chapter Four

Hand would have pushed his way through the crowd, but Sahar told him: “Go round the house. It's quicker.” Hand ran along the stone path, beside the high garden wall, coming out to the front of the house where many carriages were waiting. The closest carriage, facing the house's front doors, bore the seal of the local sheriff.

Douglas walked out of the house, accompanied by two city guardsmen and a thin, unpleasant fellow in a high-collared coat.

“What are they arresting you for?” Hand called.

Douglas beckoned him over. “You are in now charge of the firm, my friend. Make every decision as you see fit. I appoint you the treasurer of Lizzie's theatre, too. Two red books on my desk contain the project's financial history. You might want to collect them before they are seized.”

The thin, lawyer-ish man approached Hand. “We have no grounds to take you into custody, Mr. McLeish. But we doubt Douglas worked alone. Both you and Mr. Diarmid McDonald should remain in Edinburgh for the next few weeks. No trips to London, you understand.”

“What in God's name are you accusing him of?”

The thin man thumped the side of the carriage, and the door opened. He gestured to Douglas to climb inside.

“The two parties who sold you the rights to the Bray Shambles,” he said, “one Miss Arabella Carver, and one Mr. Peter McNiece, have come forward with accusations that

Douglas intimidated them. They say he threatened their lives if they didn't give away their inheritance. This is a clear violation of the law, and it puts the legal standing of The Bray Shambles in doubt. You must cease work on the Shambles immediately. It is not yours."

"Is any of this true?" Hand asked.

"Of course not," said Douglas. "We overpaid, in fact, for those rights. We gave them the best deal they would ever get."

"The two claimants were very detailed in their accounts," said the thin man. "Very detailed and clear. They never wanted to give away their inheritance, not until Douglas extorted it from them."

"Step up, Mr Farweather, sir," said a guard. "Step up, please."

Hand watched his employer ascend into the coach.

The party dragged on unhappily while, upstairs, Lizzie called a meeting in her room. She and Diarmid looked sick, defeated; Tyler looked exhausted, on the verge of closing his eyes. Hand could not look at Lizzie; despite the extremity of the situation, he found it easier if he did not look her way.

Lizzie said, "Someone is trying to ruin us."

Diarmid agreed. "The accusation makes no sense. It never occurred to me to try to intimidate anyone, for precisely this reason."

"But someone else could have," Hand pointed out.

“I suppose that Douglas, or someone else, could have threatened them, but it seems very, very unlikely. This was a slow case. There were no great surprises, no sudden leaps. Months went by while the two inheritors considered the offer.”

Sahar spoke up. “Why can't you just ask them? Where are they staying?”

Diarmid said, “I don't know where the lass stays. She was always rather secretive. But the other, Pete McNeice? He's always been at Jence's Inn, in the new town.”

“There,” said Sahar, looking at Lizzie. “Have Hand ask him what happened.”

“We would have to be careful,” said Lizzie. “Very careful. I don't want to provoke the same charge that we're trying to dismiss.”

“Hand can be careful,” said Sahar. “He knows to be polite.”

“All right,” said Lizzie. “Hand, Diarmid? Would you go to Jence's inn, see if you can find this man? Tyler and I will stay here and tend to our guests. Lord! If Douglas really is going to be tried, subscriptions will collapse. The theatre will be doomed.”

“I will put my gloves on,” said Diarmid.

Lizzie met Hand's eye. “One other thing. Someone must be behind these accusations. I don't believe that those two young things invented this plan on their own. Someone else must want our plan to fail, and I would bet money that it's the criminal, Arran Thomas. He's trying to bring my family down.”

“Who?” asked Diarmid.

Hand stared at her, shocked. Lizzie never mentioned the events of their childhood, the day they had visited Boxer's Row, their meetings with Granny Wynd. She talked as though those terrible encounters had never happened. Until this moment, she had always

acted as though the men who Granny Wynd had helped them to put in the ground, Freddie Thomas and Lane Waller, had never existed.

“Arran Thomas blames me,” she said, “for his brother's death. I am sure he is behind this attack on Douglas.”

“But,” Hand said, slowly, unsure how much he wanted Lizzie to say in reply, “didn't his brother die in a knife fight? Arran killed his own brother. “

Lizzie waved the point away. “Of course Arran killed his brother. Everyone accepts the facts. In reality, neither Hand nor I had anything to do with it. Yet Arran still blames me. So you should investigate him. I'm telling you, Hand. Investigate him.”

The coach's horses raced down the road to Edinburgh.

Diarmid sighed. “I cannot believe it. So much work thrown away. A year of toil, gone!”

“Are you expected back in Glasgow, Mr. McDonald?”

“Not really. I can stay as long as your firm needs me.”

“Good,” said Hand. “Because I haven't given up.” He was afraid he might not be able to help, however. The law allowed the prosecution to wait one hundred and eleven days before bringing the trial to court: the theatre would be long dead before Douglas was acquitted.

“Who is this Arran Thomas?” Diarmid asked.

“A master of criminals. He would have no reason to be interested in the Bray Shambles, or a new theatre.”

“I recall,” said Diarmid, “that one of the city's leading judges, the famous Lord Monboddo, was at times critical of the plan. He seemed to have an unreasoning dislike of me, as well the idea of expanding the city's reach.”

“He would be a powerful enemy,” Hand replied, “if he were truly against us. But I can't see him seeking Douglas's arrest.”

“Edinburgh is a complicated place, indeed. When this is all worked out, and Miss Farweather's theatre is a roaring success, why don't you pay my side of the country a visit? A great deal is happening in Glasgow. Edinburgh is a good enough place, sure, but doesn't smell it rather of paper—extremely old and unhappy paper?”

Hand felt his pride stung. “Edinburgh's paper is creating a new world.”

“The new world is already here. Have you been to Paisley, Mr. McLeish? Paisley! The old women remember when the only noise in the town were the church bells and the cow bells. Now look at it: crowded like a church pew on Sunday. Lose your grip on your wee girl's arm, and you'll never hear her on the high street, no matter how loud she calls.”

Hand had to accept this was true. Through the carriage's open window, he watched the approach of the Shambles. The small stretch of ancient weeds lay just to the south of the Farweather property, a dry old mess of shrubbery and half-trees, blocking an easy journey between Lizzie's house and Edinburgh's new town. Hand felt irked by inefficiency of the rough, close undergrowth that flashed by, a sad carnival of creeper and plant. This was not one of the country's modern, managed woods. It contributed nothing to Scotland's health.

“What was it like,” Hand asked, “when the sheriff arrived for Douglas? What did people say?”

“You weren't in the room?”

“No. I had gone outside. I had chosen to step out.”

“It was terrible. I thought Douglas would strike the sheriff to the floor.”

“I'm glad he held back.”

“It was terrible. When the men walked into the house, I actually believed the sheriff had come for me. I had convinced myself of it! Not because of the Shambles, of course. About another matter.”

Hand examined the man's eyes. “Should I know what that other matter is?”

“I can tell you this,” said Diarmid, smiling, “because you continue in the old way of our country's faith. I expected to be arrested for murder. But as I have not yet murdered anyone, it was understandable that the sheriff did not touch me.”

“You cannot be arrested for *not* murdering someone, I think,” said Hand, wondering if he were being played with. “What had your victim done?”

“It's what he will do. He intends to kill the Christian faith.”

Hand wondered what qualities Douglas Farweather had seen in this odd character. Diarmid might be proficient, but there were plenty of excellent lawyers in Edinburgh. Why go all the way to Glasgow to hire a lunatic?

Diarmid laughed. “How serious you look! Please, you can rest easy. I will aim no pistols tonight.”

“Who,” Hand asked, “were you planning to kill?”

“Did you not see Mr. Hutton, standing by the fireplace?”

“I know Hutton,” Hand replied. “A skilled technician, and a good writer. He and I have expended a large amount of ink on the subject of the Clyde canal.”

“The master of the Spanish Inquisition, if he were standing tonight in the Farweather house, would gladly allow every witch and pagan in his dungeons to walk free, unharmed, if only he might put a good clean bullet in Hutton’s skull.”

“How will a canal destroy the church?”

“A canal? What? No, lad. I’m talking about Mr. Hutton’s real interest, his research into our planet. Are you not reading the circulating papers? Every member of the club has been reading the progress of Hutton’s work, even though few can grasp what it means.”

“I am not,” Hand said, “a club member.” Despite Hand's fears for the theatre and the Shambles, he was already looking forward to telling this bizarre story to Lizzie, to watch the expression on her face.

“To put it simply,” said Diarmid, “so that you can decide whether to be braver than I, and to commit murder to save the soul of Christendom: Mr. Hutton has a theory to explain the origins of our planet. He believes that the Earth is self-forming, self-shaping. He argues that the land that we see around us has been formed via pressure from the planet’s core. A core that he suspects is filled with fire.” Lizzie would love to learn about Diarmid's eccentricities. Hand was imagining how to recount the conversation to her when it struck him that she might not wish to talk to him, in private, ever again. She was shortly to be married.

“Fire beneath our feet?” Hand said, vaguely. “The Bible has already surmised that fact.”

“Aye, a fiery underworld, like the Hell of the popular imagination. But where Hutton departs from the Holy Book is significant. He postulates great movements reshaping our planet over unimaginable amounts of time. Hutton claims that the Earth is much older than currently assumed. He has estimated that the planet is millions of years old. Yes—millions.”

Hand was not impressed. “Should I sigh in wonder?”

“It is a small increase from the six thousand years promised by our clerics.”

Hand saw in the distance the lights of Queen Street. “Come now, assassin. Here is the new town.”

Chapter Five

Charles Jence's inn was one of the new town's few successes. While the three major streets—Princes, George, and Queen—had been laid out, and many houses of quality had been constructed along them, the original plan remained incomplete. Most of the connecting streets, as well as the residential squares required by Craig's original design, remained mere mud and grass. For many people in Edinburgh, the new town seemed both distant and dangerous, and the walk across the North Bridge an undertaking that only the brave or the foolish would enjoy. There were even whispers that the new town might fail to take hold, that its roads and sewers would soon return to the earth.

Hand felt grateful, therefore, to the continuing popularity of Charles Jence's establishment, the heart of the dancing scene during these warmer months. A handsome building, wide and deep, the inn stood on the very western end of George Street, attracting a grand crowd every weekend.

Edinburgh's informal dancing had always revolved around the city's oyster cellars. Quality or otherwise folk descended the stairs to eat and drink, and, when they felt sufficiently given to the mood, they called for the tables to be pushed away so that the dancing could begin. But such underground quarters were a trifle warm during the summer, hence the popularity of Charles Jence's street-level hall. Within its upstairs floor, the inn offered fine lodging for visitors to the city, an innovation muttered against by the multitude of men and women who let out private beds, earning their living by the city's constant need for spare rooms. What cuckoo would pay that much, Hand had heard

asked in every marketplace, to stay at a noisy *inn*? But while Mr. Jence's lodgings excited such controversy, everyone was impressed by his downstairs dancing area, with those clever folding doors at the back, giving his guests a broad view of the countryside beyond.

That evening, Jence's inn was crowded and the music seemed to shine on the air. Or perhaps it was the dancers who shone, their long jeweled dresses, the four women graciously turned by the four men, the whole room in pleasure looking on. In dark waistcoats and white stockings, just a step or two from the whirl of the dance, the three fiddlers of the evening wove their giddy tune, urging their couples to turn faster and faster.

Hand and Diarmid found the inn's owner, Charles Jence, at a table close to the musicians, tapping the floor with his walking stick. He was overseeing the couples who wished to dance, so he could make sure nothing inappropriate took place. Outraged to hear about Douglas Farweather's arrest, he agreed to show Hand and Diarmid to Pete McNiece's room, escorting them as an independent witness. The three of them climbed the stairs, the music gently shaking the walls.

Pete McNiece was a young man with thinning reddish hair who, despite being Hand's age, had the worn-down, enervated look of someone who had too long lacked money. His eyes darted about as though his creditors were in the room with him, and their inaudible questions consumed much of his attention.

He affirmed, however, that Douglas Farweather had threatened his life.

“I don't know what he said to the lass, to Miss Arabella. I barely know her. I can only tell you what happened to me. I was going to turn down the offer, but then Mr.

Farweather came to me and threatened my life.”

Diarmid asked, “Someone must have coordinated your complaints, yours and Miss Arabella's. You must have had someone helping you.”

“No,” said Pete. “No. I just went there. To the court. I told them.”

Diarmid sighed. “That seems unlikely, sir.”

Pete stared at the floor. “Would—would Hand talk to me alone, for a minute? Would the rest of you leave us, let us talk?”

The request startled Hand. He peered at the young man, worried this was a trap of some kind.

“Are you sure about that, lad?” asked Mr. Charles Jence.

“Aye. Please. Don't listen at the door, neither.”

Once they were alone, Hand asked, “What do you want to tell me? Is it something about Diarmid?”

“Do you not remember me, Mr. McLeish? Do you not recall my face? From when you were a wee lad?”

Hand looked at Pete McNiece more carefully. “I'm sorry, I don't.” He did not like unexpected references to his personal life, and in particular when they referred to his younger years. He was content when his childhood was treated as a foreign kingdom, its coasts all but unreachable, its hinterlands obscured by fog.

“I went to school with you, remember? Before you were expelled. I was one of those boys that called you 'Murderer's Hand.' I was one of them that made your life a misery.” Hand, now, remembered the red-headed lad he had known as a child, the boy who had made fun of him in the tent.

“You humiliated me,” Hand said, “in front of Tyler Cavenar.”

“I did, and I am guilty for it. You scared us and it felt good to tease you. You lived next door to Granny Wynd, remember! You lived there, without any complaining. You saw what she did and you never ran away.”

“ We didn't have any choice.”

“I know. I'm just saying that's how we told it to each other back then. How we felt about it. Lads can be immoral creatures, can't we?”

“I haven't spoken to Granny Wynd in ten years.”

“I know.” Pete McNiece closed his eyes. “All my life, I didn't think there could be anything worse than Granny Wynd, but I was wrong. Look: I am going to tell you something, but you can't repeat it. You can't bring those other fellows back in here. I'm telling you this, you alone: Mr. Farweather never threatened me. I'm guessing he never threatened Miss Arabella, neither. He's being unfairly accused.”

“Excellent,” said Hand. “You will tell the judge this?”

The look on McNiece's face shocked him. “No! I can't! You don't understand. I can't tell anyone. If you let a single person know what I said, I'm a dead man. That's what he said.”

“Who said it?”

“The man with the giant. He made me promise to accuse Mr. Farweather.”

“Who was this man?”

“There was a giant there, in the forest. I saw him in a dream. Three nights ago. A huge creature. There was a man with him, that's the fellow who spoke. He told me if I wanted to be spared, I should accuse Douglas Farweather. If I refused, the giant would tear me in half.”

“Wait. All this happened in a dream? And you believed it?”

McNiece rolled up his sleeves. Rough, jagged claw marks shone red on his forearms. The wounds looked unhealthy, festering. “I tried to run. I tried to fight. But it was too strong! It would have killed me. And the dreams came every night, worse and worse. So I did what they asked. I went to the court and said those things about Douglas.”

Hand recalled the nightmare the apothecary had reported. “Tell me about the forest you saw.”

“It was full of grey light. It went on forever.” McNiece smiled. “See? I knew you would believe me. You lived next to Granny Wynd.”

“Thank you for trusting me,” said Hand. “But we have to tell someone.” What was Granny Wynd doing?

“No. I'll deny everything. If you share a word of this, to anyone, I'll deny it. And no one will believe you, neither. No one would believe it.” McNiece was correct. Lizzie, in particular, would be disgusted if Hand began talking about dreams, and a monster who hunted in them.

“You find the monster, yes? Find the giant. Find his master. Stop them. If you can do that, I'll change my story. I'll say Douglas is innocent.”

“What about the girl? Arabella. Did the giant appear to her, too?”

McNiece shook his head. “No clue. I barely know her. She looked scared, though, when we came to the courts. She looked real scared.”

Hand had no idea how he could oppose a creature that hunted men's dreams. And there was no guarantee that McNiece was telling the truth. He had to find Arabella, see if her story was the same. He asked for tips about finding Arabella, where she might be staying, who had represented her in the courts. All McNiece could offer was the first volume of a Richardson novel, which, he said, Arabella had lent him. Hand flicked through the book, finding a black piece of card used as a book mark. McNiece confirmed that the tag had been there when Arabella had given him the book.

Hand knew this stub. How?

“Please concentrate, sir. Who was the man you saw? With the monster? Who was that?”

“I don't know. I couldn't see his face. I just knew he was there, the way you do in dreams.”

Where might Arabella be staying? Hand concentrated, trying to recall how he knew the ticket stub, and he felt the closeness of his many clocks, their whispering chimes, their ticking breath. A thousand patterns of frequencies unknown. They were edging closer, offering him their aid. He did not want their help. He did not want that part of

himself to be who he was. For something this simple, he could rely on memory alone. And once he had peered at the scrap of card a second time, he smiled, getting his answer.

Once, at a dinner in his family's home, he had watched two of his mother's guests complain about the rudeness of a particular pawnshop. A third mother had displayed a dark stub like the one in Arabella's book, the ticket that Michael Land's pawnshop gave as proof of repayment. She had displayed the stub like a medal, a sign that she was no longer in debt.

Michael Land's pawnshop was housed in a corner of the Grassmarket. If Arabella was spending time around the Grassmarket, there were only two boarding houses where an unattached woman would be comfortable. Of those two, Miss Annie's rooms were the cheapest, and, if Arabella were indeed staying there now—Hand ignored the lack of firm evidence for this—she would soon be settling down for the supper that old Annie provided. If he and Diarmid left now, they could catch Arabella at table.

“Send a message to me,” he told Pete McNiece, “if the dreams come back. Don't go anywhere.”

He found Diarmid at the top of the stairs, waiting with Charles Jence.

“I think I know where the other claimant is staying,” he told Diarmid. “We can find her tonight.”

“What did the McNiece lad tell you?” Hand waved the question away.

The carriage raced down Princes street, heading for the North bridge. Hand closed his eyes. The coach turned into the bridge, advancing on the old city at great speed. Hand felt his throat grow tight. He always attempted to cross into the old city slowly, on foot.

Given enough time, he could cope with the eerie aura around the high street, getting little more than a headache as punishment. The coach, however, was charging, the horses tearing at full pace. As they crossed from the new city to the old, Hand felt his stomach turn. The blood sank from his head. His many ticking clocks howled in protest as the coach neared the end of the bridge.

Despite its strangeness, it was not something he considered often, his clock-sense, his multitude of whispering timepieces. It was indeed odd, to be able to calculate where a hundred people would that day be walking, to know in advance how long a clerk would take to copy out the same page. The intellectual gift, or magical talent, or whatever it was—for, throughout his travels and education, both in England and France, he had met no one like himself—it seemed merely a subtle companion, a reassuring steadiness laid over the troubled, frantic world. His clocks were always ticking on, monitoring: during all his travels, he had encountered only a few places where they faltered. Once, at sea, when his ship had floundered in an oddly still portion of the English Channel, he had encountered a gruesome absence of time that he alone seemed feel; once more, in London, among the rambling lanes of Southwark, where he had been shown an abandoned brothel in which a customer had slaughtered the five women once employed there: in that bloody room, the oppressive pall had been obvious to all. In those places, the world's regularity, its constant forward motion, had been jolted, disrupted. Like a scar crossing time.

But neither of those awful places could touch Edinburgh. His clocks seemed maddened in the old city—and had been for the past ten years. All of time seemed a scar

there. As the coach cleared the bridge, the wailing discordancies made him wince, close his eyes: he had steeled himself in preparation, but today was the worst it had ever been. So many years had passed, but rather than weakening, Granny Wynd's spell seemed only to be gripping the city with greater force.

"Hand?" asked Diarmid. "Are you all right?"

The coach dropped them close to the market. Hand hurried through the many glances of the crowded square. Bounding up the narrow stairs to Annie's boarding house, he felt good, proud of his cleverness, as though the queasiness in his stomach were the mark of impending success. But in Annie's kitchen, he found no young woman at the table. The four boarders regarded him in suspicion when he asked after Arabella.

Annie came up to him, concerned at his hasty entrance. She had seen no girl called that name: she had housed no young women for some weeks.

Hand looked back at Diarmid, who had come up behind him, and his glare must have been fierce enough to knock the lawyer back a step.

"My friend, you tried your best. I'm sorry. It's late. We had better return to the Farweather house."

Hand did not want to give up. He took a breath, reached out for the doorframe's support, and summoned his clocks to him. Very well—he needed them. But they whined, wailed, pulling away—the old city made him tremble with its uncanny defiance of ordered time. Hand clenched his jaw, and summoned his powers again, refusing delay. Tell me where she is, he asked. Unweave this city of motion, and locate her in it.

His clocks resisted, shuddering at the prospect of expanding into the city, of being pressed against Granny Wynd's spell, but a moment later, they obeyed, racing outwards in every direction. They found nothing. The old city made no sense. Whatever Granny Wynd had done, whatever magic she had performed—with his help—he could not penetrate it. To the eye, the city appeared whole and hearty, like seeing ahead of you on high street the neat hair of a young girl, catching sight of her prim coat and dress, but when you walked around her to look at her face, you saw only a mass of scars. No eyes, no mouth, only a riddled patchwork of ruined flesh.

Hand's mouth filled with spit, and he lost his hold on the door, grabbing blindly at it for support. He would not let Granny Wynd beat him. He not a child anymore. He pushed again, as hard as he ever had, and he saw, for a flickering instant, a complete absence, an abyss lacking shape or hue. Then, in a sudden shock of fear, that abyss grew heavenward, towering over his head, and he was surrounded by immense, ancient trees, huge shadows that crowded out the sky. Someone was moving in that darkness. Someone was coming for him. An arm reached out.

“Lad?”

He was sitting on the floor. He had fallen down, and one of her guests was crouching over him, holding out a cup of tea. Hand turned, scanning the room, but his vision was blurred, the candles dim.

Chapter Six

Hand slept poorly and rose the next morning with a crushing headache. Although he remained in pain and low spirits, he had no choice but waste the daylight hours accompanying Diarmid to long discussions with the authorities, trying and failing to have the charges against Douglas Farweather dismissed. They used up the entire day with no benefit to anyone. Indeed, the judicial powers responded to their pleas with unusually pointed condemnation, as though during the months spent pursuing the Shambles, the firm had, without knowing it, offended a number of the city's heaviest names. No, they were told, Douglas would continue to be held: there were sufficient witnesses to bring a case of coercion against him. No, Hand and Diarmid were not yet implicated, but, at the same time, they should not feel safe from prosecution. No, Mr. Farweather's trial would not be hurried to help the firm's business. And no, the Shambles should not be touched, by flame or axe, until the true ownership of the land had been established.

The second day passed in a hurried search through paperwork. Diarmid and Hand supervised the firm's four clerks as they assembled of a long chain of documents, all the papers that had been accumulated about the Shambles and the theatre, searching for signs that Douglas had pressured the two inheritees into selling their stakes. They found nothing. As Diarmid had said, the project had unfolded, through all its stages, in the slow piecemeal fashion one would expect. The case against Douglas, he declared, would be easy to defeat.

Hand watched the clerks copy out letter after letter, feeling far less confident than Diarmid. There was more going on here than a mere confusion of inheritances: the scars on Pete McNiece's arms kept coming back to him, and the terror in the man's eyes. A forest, a giant, and a man in the shadows who spoke on the giant's behalf. If McNiece had been lying about his dreams, he was a remarkable actor: he should move to London and ask Garrick to hire him for the stage.

But while Hand believed the man's story, he had no idea what it meant, only that it revealed Granny Wynd was wound up in the firm's troubles. She played no role in the city's development, as far as he knew, and she, he assumed, cared nothing for property disputes and the borders of the town. She continued to live in the same small house at the top of Tallow's Land, and although Edinburgh folk spoke less of her than they had in his youth, she still earned a living through her advice, her reputation for wisdom.

Hand was scared to seek out Granny Wynd. He was also scared that Lizzie would hear about McNiece's dreams. Lizzie quickly grew to dislike people who spoke about such things, and Hand did not want her to turn against him.

Eventually, after the papers were copied out and annotated, and presented to the authorities, they finally had time to take their dinner with Douglas.

He was not imprisoned: with the approval of the criminal courts, Douglas had arranged to stay in a friend's house in Blair's Land, overlooking Parliament Close. That friend was away in London for the entire summer, and his modest, neat house, with its spare, diffident furniture, seemed far too small for Douglas's endlessly fecund thoughts. Books and papers lay all over the sitting room: Douglas had spent his incarceration

productively. He had abandoned his diagrams of Lizzie's theatre, saying he needed to be back in his real office for such demanding work, preferring instead to map out a series of visions of Edinburgh's future, a street plan intended for the century to come.

Douglas looked jovial, proud of his work, and eager to share his ideas. These plans, for the future expansion of the city, were intended to be his great contribution to posterity, an outline of the city built up in all directions, over all the nearby hills, and stretching to the port of Leith. Yet the plan remained faithful, in its orderly dimensions and design elements, to the character of Craig's original design. This city of the nineteenth century, despite its vast scale, would look as though it were all of one piece, extending with absolute geometrical regularity the first streets envisaged by Craig. Hand felt moved, with unexpected force, by these sketches. Was this, he wondered, the first origins of the bright city he had once seen, the vision he had been given at Granny Wynd's table? The Edinburgh of the centuries to come had been an immense, well-ordered city, spread out on a scale comparable to Douglas's designs. It might be Douglas's destiny to create that city, to lay its founding stones. Perhaps that was why Granny Wynd wanted the great architect's reputation destroyed.

"I am making good time," said Douglas. "I am creating many original thoughts. Although I barely sleep. I can't drift off in this room, not really. I keep waking from strange dreams." He had scattered his pages about the previously-tidy sitting room.

Lizzie had chosen the room's most comfortable-looking chair, but she kept adjusting herself, unhappily, seeking out in her obvious fatigue the most pleasing way to sit in its arms. "I didn't sleep, either, but it had nothing to do with a nightmare. The theatre! Those

two lunatics—Peter and Arabella—are going to doom its chances. And if the Shambles falls back into the legal swamp we dragged it from, then who will ever pull it out again? No, that will be it. No one will ever try to reform the property again.”

Hand asked, “Have any subscribers asked to back out?”

“Not yet. But they will. I'm running around charming everyone I can, but it won't last.” She looked at her father. “Douglas, put down your papers and listen to me. Action is needed. You should make Hand your equal partner in the firm.”

Douglas had been peering at his sketches. “What?”

“Do it today. Promote him to be your equal. I mean right now, this instant. It can't be Farweather and Associates, not when Farweather is in custody. Farweather and McLeish—that's what we need.”

Douglas stared at Hand. “Did you tell her to do this?”

“No, Douglas, he didn't,” said Lizzie. “It's obvious, though. The sign on the firm's door needs to say Farweather and McLeish—as soon as possible.”

“The clients,” Douglas began, with an air of disgruntled superiority, “might feel—”

“They will feel relieved,” said Lizzie. She met Hand's eye, pleased with herself. “We agreed this would happen one day, anyway. It's just happening sooner than expected.”

“Hand,” Douglas said. “Do you think I'm doomed? Is my head meant for the chopping block?”

“No, sir. We're going to get you released and acquitted. We're working very hard on it.”

Douglas pulled off his philosopher's cap, and, sighing, crumpled it between his hands. "Very well. Mr. Hand McLeish, I agree with my daughter."

Hand could not believe this unexpected turn. He had dreamed of this moment for so long.

Diarmid McDonald raised his hand. The lawyer was not smiling at the news. "Mr. Farweather, sir? Before you promote Mr. McLeish, I have something to say. I have to say it before you make your decision." His tone was unhappy, tense. "I believe Mr. McLeish is keeping a secret from you, and your daughter."

Hand could not believe it.

"I'm keeping any secrets from you," he told Lizzie.

"When we met Mr. Peter McNiece," Diarmid said, "he asked for a private meeting with Hand. They spoke for a little time, but afterwards, Mr. McLeish refused to tell me what they discussed. I believe it had some import to this case."

Hand stood, promising that he was keeping no secrets, and that McNiece had simply admitted that he was lying about Douglas's involvement. Douglas, however, waved him to sit down.

"Thank you," he said, "Diarmid. Thank you for raising your concerns with us, but there was no need. I trust Hand. I trust that whatever he was told, even if he is holding it back, he will use in the firm's best interest. Perhaps in Glasgow, your fellow city folk do not respect information told in confidence, but here in Edinburgh, we admire a man who keeps his word.

Douglas gestured for Hand to come close to him. "Mr. McLeish. You heard my daughter tell me to promote you because of this crisis, but I want you to understand that my troubles hasten an inevitable decision. Your promotion has been on my mind for some time now, and I am glad to grant it to you. I hereby raise you to an equal partnership with me. The firm, from now on, will be known as Farweather and McLeish. There. It is done. Diarmid, please would you prepare the necessary documents, and write up some sort of announcement. Hand, you should inform the other employees, and make sure they understand that they are under your power. They answer to you, life and death. Now, if you will excuse me, I need a minute to track down the chamber pot." He rose to his feet, and left the room.

Hand felt in his chest a hollow sense of absence, despite this great reward. The advancement had come too quickly, as though his emotions were still lingering in the previous hour, when he was merely Douglas's admiring, humble secretary.

Lizzie stood, too, indicating she was preparing to leave. "That went better than I expected."

"Thank you," said Hand. "What happens if I get arrested, too?"

"Don't say that. Really. I don't want to think about it." He could tell nothing from her face, whether her fear was purely for the family firm, or whether she was trying to tell him something more. She had told him to forget her, to find someone else, and yet she continued to hold complete power over him, raising him to mastery by her own decision.

"Have you tracked down Arran Thomas yet?"

"No," said Hand. "We've been busy."

“He's behind this. I'm sure of it. Lord, he should be in custody, not father.”

“I don't have any evidence for that,” Hand said. “Not yet.”

“Well, someone has to be planning this attack on us. I don't believe those two little inheritees devised this by themselves. Go talk to Mr. Thomas. Take Montrose for protection, if you want. Knock some heads together. I don't want my father in prison on my wedding day, do I?”

Hand was left standing in the room after she had gone. Her final remark had knocked him back, left him cold again. Diarmid came up to him.

“Congratulations, my friend. Well done.”

“What were you thinking? You tried to betray me.”

Diarmid shook his head. “Until a moment ago, Mr. Farweather was my employer, not you. I am loyal. And I stand by what I said. You *do* know more than you are telling me.”

“Perhaps there was an easier way to go about it? Had you considered that?”

“Hand. Sir. I am a suspect in this case. My own life is at stake here. Do you not understand that? We both could be arrested at any moment.”

Hand nodded. “I know. I'm going to do everything I can.” He would go to talk to Granny Wynd. The prospect frightened him, threatened the life he had built since he had escaped Tallow's Land. But if Lizzie could take a risk, to improve the firm's chances, so could he. “Go back to the office. There must be some clue in the papers to where Arabella is staying. Her banker, her attorney.”

Douglas returned to the room in a brighter mood. “Hand, let me congratulate you properly. I’m sorry if I held back, earlier. I’m just so tired.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“No more ‘sir,’ please. You should call me Douglas. And let say again: you deserve this advancement. Robert Adam has been scolding me to raise you up for some time now, and I have been foolishly putting it off.”

Hand felt himself catch up, all of a sudden, to the happiness of his success. He thanked Douglas.

“One—one other thing,” Douglas added. “When you go back to office, would you have one of the lads send over some more paper? I have run out of the supply I brought here, without really meaning to. Look.” He passed over a dozen thick sheets of architect’s paper, each of them scribbled on with heavy, clumsy ink. “After my latest nightmare, I started just drawing, drawing. I must have been more worked up than I thought. You can write me up for wasting the firm’s money, if you like.”

Hand stared at the pages Douglas had given him. They were covered in rough, hasty vertical lines, like a nightmare forest. It was the forest that the giant haunted.

“What were you trying to draw?”

Douglas shrugged. “Nothing, I think. It’s just being in the city again. Gives me bad dreams.”

Chapter Seven

Hand knew Diarmid was unhappy. But there was nothing he could tell him that would be believed, and so he did not speak up. Soon they had arrived at the entrance to Hand's old lane. Among the shouts of the market booths, the talk of merchants conducting a quick trade in the open air, and the barking of a particularly incensed dog, Hand looked at the entrance to the close he had known as a child, where Tallow's Land was housed. He was afraid. He did not want to duck his head under that archway, walk in. He did not feel ready to speak to Granny Wynd. But after the madness of Douglas's sketches, he didn't think he had a choice. He had to know what was going on.

“And where are you going?” Diarmid asked.

“Douglas sounded like he was suffering. I need to talk to an expert on dreams.”

Diarmid was silent for a few moments. “So you do, in fact, believe in the city's reputation for nightmares. You were just pretending in the Farweather house.”

“I don't believe in anything,” Hand said. “Douglas seems in pain, that's all.”

Diarmid agreed to meet him later, and Hand was left alone. He ducked into the close. Tallow's Land loomed above him in the rainy day. The front door, as usual, was not locked.

As he climbed the stairs, Hand felt his sense of clarity about the city and his work drift away. All along, it had seemed like the firm had been operating in the bright, visible realm of laws and purchases, but this had been an illusion, a mistaken impression. Now they were being drawn into Granny Wynd's world, the miasma of nightmares and

vengeful visions. And indeed, the spell seemed stronger as he climbed the stairs. His head ached and the edges of his sight shimmered. He had to rest halfway, unsure for a moment which way was up, and which was down. On the fifth landing, his breath spare and tight, he passed by two mothers bickering. They paused their argument to acknowledge him, greeting him by name. It was like his family had never left Tallow's Land.

The top floor of the building, however, surprised him by its busy, warm air. Both front doors were open, and two small boys sat on the landing, being supervised by an older girl. Hand observed them with a strange, detached feeling, as though he had walked through a memory, as though observing characters in a book, as though the scene was in no way within his power to affect.

The girl looked up: "She's seeing someone."

Hand smiled, trembling. "I'll wait." Soon, however, a young man with dark, sorrowful eyes came through Granny Wynd's door, and he gave Hand the briefest of nods as he began the walk down the stairs.

Granny Wynd's room was neater than Hand remembered, and more elaborately decorated, with a real bed and a row of shelves stocked with kitchen wares and supplies. A tall chest in the back corner had replaced the hanging sheet from his youth. She owned more books, as well.

"The family next door likes you," he said.

She smiled, and Hand, sickened by the tension in his neck and shoulders, saw that her face still bore that mixture of amusement and rage that he remembered so well. "They are my family."

“Up from the border? They came to Edinburgh?”

“Aye. When the land failed them, and they could no longer survive.”

“I thought they hated you. I thought they cast you out.”

“Hate is a frail thing.” She looked the same as he remembered, although with a substantial increase of the white in her hair. She was still large and powerful, and while the rest of the room had been furnished in more respectable goods, her simple round table, at which she met her customers, had not changed.

“I want to ask you some questions,” Hand said.

“I will answer honestly.” Hand shivered, knowing how easily he had been misled in the past.

“Who is behind the attacks on my firm? What is this giant that threatens Peter McNeice? Is this part of your spell?”

“The giant is born from our spell, yes, but it is not something intended by me. The giant is that which a man found, or made. A proud, world-weary man. He wandered in his own dreams for long enough that, when he turned again for the light, when he tried to walk back to the waking world, his shadow had changed. It had grown heavy with nightmares.” As always, she spoke in language he could not understand.

“This is your spell. Your doing. You cast a spell on the city.”

“Our spell. We performed it together. Remember? Our spell, made in a bond, even though you have never visited me, in all this time. You have neglected our friendship.”

“I was a child then. You tricked me.” Granny Wynd began to speak about the help she had given him, how she had freed him from Lane Waller, but Hand interrupted: “No,

listen to me. I just need you to stop tormenting people. End this spell. Leave Douglas Farweather alone.”

“I cannot, for I am but the midwife of this great curse. When I first cast my spell on the city, the night poor Mr. Waller died, I did not expect it would have the power it has now. This great shadow stalking the city's dreams. No, it has surprised me, surpassed me. I expected it simply to produce a few troubled minds in the night-time, a few unaccustomedly vivid reflections. But look—how it grows! It becomes so strong, much stronger than I could have envisaged. It sucks the strength from me, like a greedy child.”

“People are being threatened, Granny. I saw a man with scars on his arms—from your monster.”

“Aye. But you are like me. You have seen something of the world that is to come. The world of our grandchildren and their grandchildren. Those babes, those wee lasses and lads, they will cause such murder and destruction that there are not people alive today to equal their screaming dead. There are not graves dug across the Earth, not in all of recorded time, in which could fit the bodies of the murdered and assaulted innocents of tomorrow. One man's arms? Scratched? Poor fellow! In my ears I hear an entire ocean of the diseased and the starving, crying out in pain.”

She made no sense, just as before.

“Who is the man who is opposing us? Who is the man who, you said, changed his shadow?”

“I cannot tell you. I do not know his name, and I would not reveal it, neither, if I did. I *sense* him, of course, a proud, respected, sea-crossing gentleman. Inwardly, however, he

has grown tired of life, tired of the great pretending of the mind, this great city of fools. Hating the hearth, and daily comforts, and women, and disgusted by the horror of other people, his mind turns elsewhere: towards death, towards pictures of nature, the ancient landscape. His rage seems to him illuminated by bright interruptions of genius. He wants Lizzie dead, you know?"

Hand stared at her.

"Yes. He wants her under his body, choked to death."

"He can come at any time? He can attack her in her dreams?"

Granny, to his surprise, appeared to seriously consider this question. "No, I don't believe so. There are limits. Even to you and I, there are limits, and he is merely the inheritor of our spell. But he is growing stronger."

A tap at the door made Hand turn around. A small girl was waiting there, a loosely-wrapped parcel in her arms.

"Our interview," said Granny, "is over. I am hungry and would like to eat undisturbed by a boy who hates me."

"You are a monster. You should be forced out of the city."

Granny Wynd seemed glad to hear him speak so fiercely. "It is you who will be forced out, shamed, hated by every woman and child. Not me."

Hand emerged into the high street, his throat dry, his jaw tense and tight. He had gained no ability, now that he was a grown man, to make better sense of Granny Wynd's

advice, and he felt sick that he had broken his ten-year rule of not speaking to her, not visiting her.

This giant, and the man who led him, were intending to kill Lizzie? How, or when they would try, Hand had no idea. First of all, he should pay Montrose to assign her guards.

Who might the man be, the enemy of the firm, the master of the giant, this figure in the shadows? He had no idea. Someone respected by the city, someone who kept his madness hidden away. It could be Douglas himself, Hand had to admit. Douglas had been short-tempered the night of his arrest. It made no sense, surely, that Douglas would have plotted for his own arrest—and yet Hand, oddly, could picture Douglas released from custody, his name cleared, and then leaning down, his deep-set eyes dark and unreadable, to whisper in Hand's ear: “I knew you would clear my name. You're good at that.”

Hand dismissed the picture from his mind. He had to find Arabella, learn her version of events. Perhaps she could identify the man who Pete McNiece had seen.

As Hand walked down the high street towards the North Bridge, the stall owner who was set up in front of Gladstone's Land called out to him, told him to slow down. The “hindoo” girl, the man said, was looking for him. And a few seconds later, Hand saw Lizzie's maid, Miss Sahar, coming up the high street, waving to him.

“Her family is from Lebanon,” Hand said, “not India. And she is a Christian, too.”

“Aye,” said the stall holder, knowledgeably. “Some of them Hindoos are Christians, too—but in their own fashion, you know?”

It was strange. In Lizzie's house, Sahar seemed no different to any other young Scots woman, and no one treated her, as far as Hand knew, any differently than they would if she were fair-skinned and bright of hair. But here, on the high street, her face was tight and discomforted as the city peered at her, the stares that never seemed to grow tired of staring. Hand walked over to her, and greeted her loudly.

“You are looking for me?”

She nodded. “Did I see you come out of St John's Close? Isn't that where you grew up?”

“No, not Tallow's Land.” Hand could not have his visit to Granny Wynd reported to Lizzie. “I was visiting a business associate nearby.”

Sahar did not seem convinced, but she accepted his answer. “You're wanted at Countess Marian's house tonight, for dinner. She wants to celebrate your promotion. She wants your family to come, too.”

The promise of a dinner with Marian was a lovely thing. “I'm guessing this was Lizzie's idea.” It was a clever move: Marian was known to almost everyone who mattered in Scotland, and she loved to spread news. His promotion would be public knowledge by the end of the day. Hand considered Marian one of his dearest friends, and the chance to receive her happiness for him raised his mood, made, at last, the reality of his sudden good fortune swell in his chest. “Farweather and McLeish” had a good sound to it, and even Granny Wynd's mad musings could not drag him down.

Chapter Eight

Marian, the Countess of Ayeshire, lived in a peculiar house. An Edinburgh citizen by birth and inclination, she had survived the war of '45, as well as the decades' various shortages of food and sweeps of disease, residing for all those years on the fourth floor of a land a minute's walk from Parliament Close. That fourth floor had been her palace, and every member of Edinburgh society delighted in taking dinner there. However, a dispute with a disinherited branch of the family, a middle-aged pair of unhappy spendthrifts who had taken residence in the land's attic, and who insisted on provoking arguments with Marian each time she ventured out, had finally put her in the mind to move. Intrigued by the project of the new town, and inclined to give it the backing of her person, she had expressed to Douglas Farweather the worry that she would be too lonely in a private home. She had entered the world in a building where a half-dozen new-borns cried at night, and where her own first steps had aped those of equally wobbly toddlers on the floors above and below—where similar suppertime smells rose from pots smoking from a multitude of similar fireplaces—how could she now delight in a roof that sheltered only herself and her three remaining servants? How would she bear the silence?

The new town was young and in need of residents. Douglas Farweather, hearing Marian's concerns, designed a house in the new Edinburgh that preserved the character of the old, an outwardly modern building that was half home and half land. The building contained four tight floors plus a deep cellar and a high-poking attic; Douglas invoked ingenious tricks of eye to make every resident feel as though her ceiling stood higher than

it did. Still, the roofline would have exceeded the height limits ordained by the council had not Hand arranged a specific dispensation. When the building was completed, the floor above the street became the Countess's new home, while the two floors beneath her, and the three above, became the homes of the very same families she had always lived among. Back in the old city, the middle part of the land was entirely emptied out, and her disinherited relatives were left alone in their attic, startled into disgruntled solitude.

Was her new house cramped, impractical, and only three-quarters legal? Perhaps, but the Countess appeared content. To her, life continued as it always had, although with a carriage ride to the high street rather than a descent of many stairs.

Hand paused to point out the entry-way's features to Diarmid.

"Look at Mr. Farweather's mastery."

"I believe you, because I lack the capacity to see it for myself."

Hand reached up and ran a finger across the beam set above the doorframe. "Still perfectly level after three years. Rest a coin on that beam, and it will remain there, rolling neither left nor right, until doomsday."

Douglas was a flawless architect. It had been a privilege to watch him plan and re-plan the unusual building, imagining each detail with his pen. Once in a while, Hand suspected he would have been happier, by some certain standards of happiness, had he remained in Bath or London. But working with Farweather on the countess's home—seeing the original design raise itself from paper and ink to embody itself in stone and stucco, its mathematical precision remaining intact through the change—had shown him how lucky he was, how special and remarkable was his home.

Marian's elderly butler received Hand and Diarmid into a transformed space. Since Hand's last visit, the dining room had been redone, the classic oak panelling replaced by gaudily eye-catching wallpaper. Across those walls were depicted, from floor to ceiling, various activities and scenes from what Hand supposed to be the Scottish highlands. He saw kilted warriors crossing over a blue and green lake; he saw the same misty mountain repeating on several panels. The room was larger than he remembered, too—the right-side wall had been knocked down, a servant's bedroom consumed in the process. And the furniture was new. The mahogany dining set, personally designed by Thomas Chippendale and admired by all of Marian's guests, had given way to constructions of rough, unfinished oak; her curved, well-cushioned seats had been replaced by stern, high-backed chairs.

Hand did not know what to call this new style, only that it gave the impression of being lifted from an epic poem. Why Marian—long-ago widowed, rosy-faced, barely five-foot-tall—wanted to pose as a modern day Ossian, he could not imagine. Fortunately, the lady's dress did not match the room's new style: her shawl, covering the shoulders of her cream gown, was an exotic midnight, patterned with Near Eastern swirls. She embraced him, told him how very proud she was: with a terrific shock of recognition, Hand felt the excitement of his promotion wash through him. Marian had been his friend since his childhood: she alone, it seemed, had the power to make his success feel real.

Hand, letting her go, saw behind her the red-coated man from the party at Lizzie's house, the drunken visitor from Newcastle who had talked about dreams.

"I wanted to thank you," the stranger said, "for tolerating my bad manners."

“This is Conley Cavenar-Dunley,” said Marian. “He is a cousin of Tyler's. He admits to being in too high spirits at Elizabeth's house.” Conley was sober, and yet continued to display an awkward, uneasy manner.

Marian turned to Diarmid. “I'm so glad that you two are working together.” She reached for Diarmid's face, pinching his left cheek as though he were a child. “You'll take care of my McLeish, won't you? You keep an eye out, now, and he will take care of you in return—I'll say that firmly and won't stand to hear it contradicted.”

“I will look after him,” promised Diarmid, taking her hands, displaying an easy, good-tempered manner.

Marian's butler approached Hand, and passed him two notes. Hand examined the first, written in the shoddy script that Montrose called his own handwriting. The soldier had scribbled down a simple message: “Lizzie is guarded.” The information relieved Hand, although he feared that one of Montrose's men would be no shield against a giant out of a nightmare. The second note was from Lizzie herself, demanding that, after the dinner, he bring Marian dancing. Lizzie wanted the city to see and praise him.

The prospect of being re-introduced to Edinburgh by her, re-invented as her father's equal, remained with Hand through the noisy, exuberant arrival of his family. He watched them arrive, pleased to see how well they treated Marian, and how kindly she responded.

When her new house in the new town had been completed, Marian had been so pleased by Farweather and Associates that she had helped Hand move his own family into a portion of her old home. What had been a single floor of a land was now split into three separate abodes, and in the section that had once been Marian's kitchen and

bedroom, Hand's mother, his sister Abi, his brother Calum, plus Calum's wife and their three children, now comfortably ate and slept. Marian seemed pleased to rent the space to his family, often asking after their health, and the business connection between Hand and Marian had strengthened their friendship, inching them marginally closer on the city's many-notched social scale.

Hand's family clattered into the room with great chatter and stomping, praising the Countess's change of decor with vague, excited murmurs. Abi raced in, the first to curtsy to the countess, receiving something from Marian's palm as a reward. Calum helped their mother step through the door, supporting her weight as she looked around, cooing at the new wallpaper. She had grown large and unsteady in her middle age, and Hand was glad to see his mother outdoors, being social, a thing that had become rare in recent years. Calum's wife, Mary, whom Hand liked a great deal, came to him, kissing his cheek, scolding him for being absent from their dinner table so long.

"Isn't it grand, Abi?" their mother remarked.

"Enchanté," said Abi. *"Il faut tres jolie."*

Hand met his brother's eye. He had thought Abi had grown out of her affection with the French tongue.

"She's hopeless, lad," Calum said.

"Let's not delay anymore," Marian announced. "We must eat! I hate to have you standing around in silence." The silence she feared could not be of the usual, physical kind, for the closely occupied building in which Marian lived kept up a constant communal noise. From the landing came the trooping of children, five pairs of small

boots climbing stairs. Through the floor, Hand heard a baby cry and be quietened, and then cry out afresh. And within Marian's house itself, voices nattered in the kitchen, arguing in that muted servant way, their disagreement hissing over the crackle of the fire.

Marian sat at the head of the table, with Conley Cavenar-Dunley to her right. Hand had been nervous about inviting his family, but now they were here, he saw that they added an earnest energy to the room, a genuine delight at the food about to be served.

Patting Conley's arm, the Countess said, "I am glad to see you all. Although—no, I shouldn't say it—"

Conley asked, "Say what, countess?" His tone remaining grating, too forceful. Hand blamed this deficiency on the loneliness of the man's poverty: Conley could not perceive how his sentiments, generous or bitter, affected the sentiments of those around him.

Marian took a breath. "I am so wonderfully happy to see you here. But I must offer special congratulations to our dear friend, Hand McLeish. He has done so very well for himself! It is such happy news." Her face took on an impish cast. "We must celebrate with dancing. We must! You know, the other night, Mr. Butter escorted me for a wee dance before supper, he did. He did! Though none of you believe it. He offered, and his wife said she wouldn't mind."

Diarmid said, "We would be very happy to take you dancing."

The Countess, blinking, seemed too delighted for speech. She bit her lip, making young Abi smile. The table sat that way, with no one saying a word, until, regaining herself, Marian tapped a wine glass. "Let us toast Mr. McLeish, the joint owner of

Farweather and McLeish.” His family's applause shook Hand to his deep self, made his throat tighten.

From the kitchen, a young man carried a weighty cup of bronze, sculpted with a stag's horns rising above its mouth. The serving girl bore plates of smoked salmon and blood sausages, and then returned with roasted pigeon, somewhat charred, and then a bowl of large potatoes, turned gently golden. And then she returned twice more, bearing oysters baked in flour, and a meat broth, and a stack of thin oatcakes.

Counting the dishes upon the table, Conley asked, “Are we to be joined by other guests, my lady?”

“Mr. Butter, perhaps,” said the Countess. “Around the supper hour.”

Her serving lad handed the Countess the stag cup. She raised it—Hand saw the small muscles in her forearms shivering at its weight—and she made the first toast, to departed loved ones. With her lad's careful aid, she passed the wine to Conley, who collected it, blinking.

“What am I to do, gentlemen?” he asked. “I am—I am not used to this custom.”

Hand summoned the cup. Once he had it, he announced, “To the city of Edinburgh. May it prosper and grow.” This toast was received warmly, with much tapping of the table by the Countess and Diarmid. Hand sipped and passed the cup on to Diarmid. As Diarmid offered a toast to Douglas Farweather, and to his eventual release, Hand felt a little sorry for the confusion on Conley's face. Perhaps he should have explained the city's eating traditions to the visitor.

“It is a little early for me,” Conley remarked. He uneasily offered a toast to God the Father, the Lord Christ, the Church in England and Scotland, and the divine intention that each person would one day achieve their heart’s desire.

“A bit wordy, young man,” said Marian. “The food will go bad if we cannot keep our toasts brief.”

Around and around went the cup. Hand ate heartily but sipped as little he could. However, the Countess believed in setting out individual glasses of claret as well as mandating the continual use of her stag goblet. Soon enough, both Calum’s and Conley’s faces glowed. When the local water-carrier arrived, even though he entered the residence through a back door, his conversation was overheard in the kitchen, resulting in his being invited in for a bite to eat, occasioning Conley to raise a toast to water itself.

Once the broth and potatoes were consumed, certain delicacies of cream and sugar were produced, along with glazed turnips. Outside, on the stairs, the wry entreaties of a male lover could be heard, as well as the half-giggled responses of his female counterpart, causing Conley to twitch in affront. But this was merely the close-together life of the city, Hand knew. Conley would have to accustom himself to it, if he wished to stay long.

Hand asked Conley to pass over the last of the oysters.

“I had Samuel run out and get these,” Marian remarked, “once I knew you would be my guest.”

Diarmid looked over, his nose and forehead pinked from the wine. “You are partial to oysters?”

The question made Hand feel grave and sad, but he could not respond before the Countess clapped her hands: “Gentlemen, we ladies must leave you. We retire for own safety! You are free to exercise your manly debate. Oh! Tell them all about oysters, you monster! You rogue!” She took Hand’s female relatives with her, whispering something French in Abi’s ear.

Hand attempted to recline in the extremely uncomfortable chair, smoking pipes with Diarmid while his brother and Conley received a tour of the wallpaper from the servants. Conley wobbled on his feet as the butler pointed out amusing details. Through the ceiling, Hand thought he could hear the faint but distinctive sound of lovemaking—of the hurried kind—and he tried to recall the names of the possible women on that floor, soon allowing the effort to pass from his mind.

“Oysters,” said Diarmid. “You were about to explain your feelings about oysters.”

“When I was in the last years of my boyhood, someone told me that one day, there would be no more oysters in Edinburgh. Since then, I try to eat my share whenever I can.”

Diarmid had just caught, Hand saw, the sounds of sex upstairs. It was a wry, knowing look, perhaps at odds with his mole-like shoulders, aged eyes. In that moment, it seemed as though all the doings of man and woman lacked the power to make Diarmid feel repulsed.

“That person was quite the comedian. No more oysters? Where would they go?”

“I know,” said Hand, his heart grown cold with the memory, his vision of the dark city of the future, its clean towers surrounded by lifeless land and sea. “It sounds impossible.”

The countess's door opened, and, to Hand's surprise, Mary, Calum's wife came out. Calum nodded to her as though this had been planned. “Hand, would you talk to me and Mary, in the kitchen? We want to ask you a thing.” Hand looked at his brother, surprised at his serious tone.

Once they were inside the kitchen, Mary seemed ready to speak, but did not.

Calum said, deliberately lightly, “Did you like coming with us on Sunday?”

“I did,” Hand said, waiting. He did not admire the Gallows Kirk much, but he was happy that his family had pews there. He was proud to be able to pay for their seats from his own pocket.

“Has old Maggie talk to you, since?” Hand tried to remember who this was—there had been a friend of his mother's, Maggie, who had stood close to him during the service. “Did she ask you about her son?”

Hand was confused.

Calum smiled. “Her son is over in Virginia. She hasn't heard from him in a year or more. She likes to ask folk for information, folk who have the sight.”

Hand looked at his brother, feeling his face warm. “What? She thinks I have what?” Calum had grown up, and had married a lovely woman, but he remained rather simple in his thinking, his way of coping with the world. Hand was shocked to hear him talk like this.

Beside her husband, Mary raised a disbelieving eyebrow. “Don’t you have it? That’s what I always figured, that our Hand has a touch of the sight. I guessed that’s how you managed to move up in the world so quick.” She noticed his reaction: “Don’t fret! It’s nothing so uncommon, anyway. I could take you to my nan’s toun: half the people there already know your name before you take your seat.”

Hand had never imagined that his sister-in-law, outwardly so devout and prim, would talk this way. “Well, please let old Maggie know that I do not have any idea about her son. I wish I could console her, but I don’t have any kind of second sight.” They did not seem moved.

Calum said, “You’d better show him. Won’t you?”

Mary glared at her husband.

“Oh, Hand’s not like that,” said Calum, grinning like a boy. “He is a cold-blooded rationalist.”

Mary sighed. “I had a right scary dream two nights ago,” she told him. “I was in a forest somewhere. A real wood, like in a painting.”

Hand felt sick. “Were you being chased?” Calum looked at him, startled.

“Aye. By a giant. A giant with horns or something. His head was like a stag. He caught me. He had claws like a cat.” Checking the kitchen door was closed, she raised the hem of her skirt, and lifted her right foot to a chair. Deep and jagged scratch marks ran from her ankle to her heel.

Calum asked, “I really don’t believe she had those marks yesterday, not when we called it a night.”

“But it could have been a rat,” Hand said. “The dream could be a result of something that really happened.”

“That wasn't the worst part,” said Mary. “The giant, he just held me, stopped from getting away. But there was someone else there, with him. A normal-sized man.”

Hand asked what this other figure looked like.

“I couldn't see. But that man, he was shouting at the giant, telling him to cut me open, eat me. He was wild. Cruel. I was kicking at the giant's arm when I woke up.”

Hand stared at claw-marks. “Please don't mention it to anyone, all right?”

Calum said, “You already know about this.”

Hand promised that he would tell them everything, as soon as he knew anything for sure. “Please. Don't mention this to anyone.”

Chapter Nine

His family took a very long time to leave Marian's house, bickering with each other and trading stories with the servants. Hand hung back, chilled by the conversation in the kitchen. Granny Wynd had said that the giant in the forest was after Lizzie, specifically. She had mentioned nothing about other people in Edinburgh. This, clearly, had been a lie, one of Granny's many clever omissions.

And Calum's willingness to discuss the matter made Hand fearful, made him feel as though he walked on cracking, watery ice. He had spent so long rising in the city's estimation, in Lizzie's estimation, confident that he had locked away the past. He had assumed that he had finished ascending from the dark events of his childhood. He was considered one of Edinburgh's leading moderates. And yet, ever since the party in Lizzie's house, the floor seemed to be shaking underneath him. Horrors might at any moment to burst out and claim him, expose him to the city, name him as one of their own. As he kissed his mother's cheek, and shook Calum's hand, he thought he heard Granny Wynd's voice, her low, hoarse whisper: "Murderer's Hand."

His mood was not eased by the considerable quantity of wine he had sipped. When the remaining members of the group—Marian, Hand, Conley, and Diarmid—walked down to the street, there appeared to be a misunderstanding over how they would all get to the dancing, and Hand and the countess ended up in the leading coach, with the two men in the one behind.

Once they were moving, however, Marian turned to look at him, her face bearing no indication of the drink she had consumed.

“Tell me,” she said, “about Douglas. Can you get him released?”

“I can't, not yet.”

“Damn. Damn and blood. I have never particularly liked the man, but this is not good news. It's not good for any of you.”

“You two aren't friends?”

“I will not say that we were not friends. There's more to life than right angles, that's all.”

“I am working to clear his name, but it's not easy. I'm sure that someone is coordinating the two inheritees, someone who holds a grudge against Douglas. I spoke to one of the suing parties, Pete McNiece, but I can't find the other, a Miss Arabella. If I could talk to her—”

“Arabella? Is she a young woman? Very pretty?”

“I think so.”

“You mean Arabella Carver, the heir to the Shambles.”

Hand closed his eyes. Marian was brilliant. “Do you, my lady, know how I could talk to her?”

“I do. I know Miss Carver quite well.”

“Can you introduce us?”

“I might be able to arrange a meeting. It has to be secret, though. Just you. She is very fearful.”

“Can it happen quickly? I want to get Douglas's case dismissed as soon as possible.”

As their coach shuddered and bounced on the rough Leith road, Hand promised he would obey all of Marian's requirements.

“Shambhala,” a quarter mile from the sea, legally retained its prosaic, Scots name. But for the past year, the master of the estate had been missing, vanished from his post in Bengal, and the women who struggled to keep the house intact had received no word, no news. The surrounding land was small, and consisted mostly of rocks and sandy earth, providing neither income nor sustenance. Rather than watch the house decline into ruin, the three women who lived there had devised a peculiar solution. They bought up great swathes of foreign fabric, a dozen lamps from Persia, and two Chinese sailors who had been left behind when their ship had sailed. Two nights a week, as long as the weather was serviceable, the women welcomed guests to their house for poetry, dining, and dancing, inviting them to share in the mystery of ancient Shambhala—the name, apparently, had come from an illustration in a travel book. Hand had predicted that the enterprise would be a short-lived disaster: who would journey out of Edinburgh when there were plenty of dancing opportunities within the town? However, he had been proved wrong. It seemed that the better half of the city was pleased to entertain itself at some distance from the lower half, and “Shambhala” had all year been a glorious success.

Hand was glad to attend such a popular event. If there truly was a figure who walked in people's nightmares, the man Granny Wynd had spoken of, her “sea-faring”

gentleman, then he might be present tonight. Perhaps he could be caught before anyone was truly hurt, before Lizzie would be at risk.

Hand had never killed anyone, not directly. He had been involved in no violence, in fact, since Lane Waller's awful death. But he might have no choice, especially if Lizzie's life was in question.

Shambhala, when they arrived, was relatively quiet, and the music was half-hearted. They had come too late to hear poetry but too early for dancing. The three ladies who owned the house were moving about the room, greeting their visitors, encouraging them to share a toast. The mad judge, James Burnett, "Lord Monboddo" by title, was seated by a window, looking out to the sea, as though he planned to paint a scene. Monboddo was known to be peculiar: he might well be the sort who would believe in forests and monsters, and he could possibly be the sea-farer that Granny Wynd had mentioned. Hand looked around the evening, watching the Duchess of Gordon, all in brilliant green, moving about the room with one of her lady friends, looking strangely melancholy. A few people glanced at Hand in doubt, as though they suspected him of being in league with Douglas Farweather's crimes, but all of his closest acquaintances greeted him warmly.

Hand, once the novelty of his arrival had passed, took Diarmid aside.

"I may soon have a private meeting with Miss Arabella. I can't tell you how or when. What do I need to ask her?"

“Clever lad. Find out who is behind this. Who told her to change her testimony. And find out what she would need to reverse her plea. She needs our money, after all. She is even poorer than Peter McNiece.”

Hand saw James Hutton across the room.

“Look,” he told Diarmid. “You can execute Mr. Hutton tonight.”

“Do not taunt me. I’m a weak, small man.”

“You know, I’ve been thinking about your argument, and I don’t think you need to worry. I don’t believe Hutton’s philosophy will damage anyone’s faith. People have always conjectured about the age of the world. Didn’t Aristotle believe the world was very old—that was Aristotle, wasn’t it?”

“There have been conjectures, yes. But never a system. That’s the difference.”

“Why does that matter?”

“Hutton sees our world as a self-perpetuating engine—with no beginning or end in sight. An engine running entirely on its own fuel, according to its own private laws. And I believe he will be able to prove his theory, given a few more years of study.” Watching Hutton across the room, Hand imagined this would be the case. Hutton was the sort of careful, precise thinker who cut problems down, dividing them into smaller and smaller pieces until they were no more. “So, he will publish—think what that will do.”

“Hold on,” Hand said. “Do you remember those two, from Lizzie’s party?” On the other side of the room, one of the colonial couples from Lizzie’s party, Mr. and Mrs. Tavish, were standing together, mingling with no one, their expressions sour. Dressed in the dark tones of shades, of ghosts, they stood with their backs to a great window.

“I do,” said Diarmid. “Why?” For the merest instant, Mr. Tavish seemed to meet Hand’s eye, but did not offer a greeting. He seemed the very picture of an unhappy seafarer.

Hand turned away, and his eyes struck upon Tyler Cavenar and Lizzie Farweather. His lack of preparation for their appearance struck all the air from his throat, forced him to stare. They were sharing a single goblet, and although they were surrounded by three of Tyler’s sisters and an equal number of his English acquaintances—plump men with glossy, cattle-ish faces—still, Tyler and Lizzie appeared wholly of their own party, separated from their companions by an unbridgeable divide. Watching them, Hand was surprised to feel a wonderful fondness—not for either one of them specifically, but for their very existence as a pair—and, at the same, a brutal sense of not belonging. Hand was born of Edinburgh, knew its every corner. He was at home nowhere else. Every single day he had spent in England and France, he had known himself to be a foreigner. And yet, thanks to those two humans, he could never be natural, of easy comfort, in his home town.

Lizzie separated herself from the group. “I am going to present you to the crowd later tonight. You and I should dance together, too. Is that all right?”

Hand promised that if Tyler was happy, he would be pleased to do so.

“Would you take a minute to reassure Mr. Burnett?” Hand checked over her shoulder: Monboddo continued to sit by the window. “He has asked for a meeting. I worry this means he wants to cancel his subscription.”

Hand was glad for the excuse to talk with the judge. He and Diarmid walked over to the window. Hand pulled up a chair and took some time explaining the financial health of Lizzie's future theatre.

“Eh?” asked Monboddo, pointing his ear at Hand's face. “Eh?”

“The theatre, sir. It's doing very well.”

“Won't be made on the Shambles, not now. Tha's good. Glad to hear it.”

Hand had no knowledge of any connection between Burnett and the Shambles.

“Why, sir? Why is it good that the Shambles be preserved?”

Monboddo blinked, pursing his lips, the movement of his wrinkled face revealed a great animation of thought. “Keep the country, country, and the toun, toun. Aye.”

“But why the Shambles, in particular?”

“Grand old place. Every mid-summer night, you know? Every year for Lord knows how long. Women dancing with whoever they fancy. That's wha' my paw told me. Free, they were, the women. Not what I saw, of course. Quieter now. Most of the time it's quieter now.”

Diarmid leaned in: “There is an annual festival, in the hamlet besides the Shambles? How many Edinburgh men attend it?”

Monboddo gazed at Diarmid for some time, and then said, “Aye.”

“And it's on mid-summer night?” Hand asked. “The same night as Lizzie and Tyler's wedding?”

“I cannae say about a wedding. But the festival, aye, the middle of the summer. A good time. Nothing a Christian man should worry about, if tha what you're thinking.”

Hand thought back to Hutton's warning, the suggestion that the Shambles was precious to many people in Edinburgh. How had he lived his entire life, he wondered, in the city, without ever hearing about this mid-summer ritual? To his surprise, Hand seemed to hear Hutton speaking in his mind, reminding him that he, unlike most of the men he associated with, had come from lowly origins, from a tier of society that only knew the closes and the high street. If Edinburgh's society had each year attended a countryside festival, he would never have been invited.

Hand knew he had to keep Monboddo's pledge in the theatre's account, so he did his best to talk up its prospects, suggested that the location might be determined later, and that the Shambles' festival would continue, regardless.

Monboddo was nodding, seeming pleased, and Hand leaned back, relieved to be able to report to Lizzie his small success. He did not get any sense of malevolence in Monboddo. He did not receive any intuition that Monboddo was connected to the city's nightmares.

Diarmid asked, "Sir, can I ask you about your essays on natural philosophy? I want to ask about your intentions. There is disagreement in Glasgow whether you are truly in earnest, or intending to be Scotland's answer to Jonathan Swift."

Monboddo's eyes opened wide, and his faint smile appeared to say: ask me anything.

"Do you truly believe, sir, that mankind is descended from monkeys and apes? That the Lord created us not as we appear now, but rather in the form of a lower animal? Are you serious when you propose this belief?"

“Aye, sir, I do! I do believe it! I tell you plain: your great-great-granddaddy was a orangutan. And you would believe me, too, if your mid-wife hadn't hidden the proof.”

“Please,” said Diarmid. “This is absurd.”

“Your mother cut off your wee tail when you were born!”

“There, surely, you must be joking. I have seen a number of new-borns, and none of them arrive in this world with a tail. None.”

“You saw,” said Monboddoo, delighted, “only what those fine women wanted you to see. They cut-cut-cut the bairn's wiggling wee tail before they allowed you in the room!”

There seemed no way to maintain the conversation after this point. Once they were free of Burnett, Diarmid seemed to need a little restoration of his own. He gulped at his wine. “Mad, mad. He is a madman.”

“Who is worse,” Hand asked, “Burnett or Hutton? Who will damage the church more?”

“Oh, Hutton, obviously. Lord Monboddoo is merely a comedian. His ideas will be forgotten within a few years.”

“But all Hutton is saying, according to you, is that the world is very old. He does not claim that babies are born with tails.”

“The age of the world is a singular question, however. Think about it. Really think about it. Perhaps not many fellows accept that the world began exactly how the Bible says. Not every Christian requires, for the sake of his faith, that the world began on October 22nd—or whatever the latest estimate is. Perhaps the world is ten thousand years old, or forty thousand years: it makes little difference, yes, neither to the faithful nor the

learned. But a million years? A hundred million? Imagine, if you can, the endless years of a silent planet, shaping itself in the darkness of endless space, developing according to a pre-made, self-regarding system. Why, to those shaping forces, all of our years will seem a single night.”

“Perhaps that was simply how long the Lord decided to take,” said Hand. “Perhaps He is more patient than Hutton.”

“That is a fair reaction, yes—certainly it is. But give it a little more thought, and you’ll see it doesn’t work. When you put yourself in the perspective of all those countless eras, the whole planet shifting and remaking itself, you grasp that this world has very little to do with us. An abyss, that’s what John Playfair calls it. An abyss of time. That’s the whole point: there is no way to make Hutton’s system fit the proportions of mankind. Do you think Homer was long ago? Do you think the pyramids of Egypt and their bird-headed gods came from a dark, unenlightened era? No, they exist in the same heart-beat as ourselves. They are as close to us as the people of this room.”

Lizzie was gesturing for Hand to approach. Tyler had left her side; Hand could not see him. And the musicians had ceased to play. He came over, unsure what she wished him to do, but she merely gripped his arm, told him to wait.

“Marshall,” she said, beaming in pleasure, “has agreed to play.”

She called the night to silence, and announced that she wished to give her congratulations to Mr. Hand McLeish. The room’s eyes turned to him, and in the front line of watchers, he saw Marian watching, her gaze full of admiration. Edinburgh’s society applauded as Lizzie detailed Hand’s many accomplishments.

At last, she made a gesture to the Duchess of Gordon's entourage, and the whole room applauded again as a solid, firm-chinned man raised himself from his chair—Will Marshall, whom Hand knew vaguely as the Gordons' steward. One of the fiddlers passed Marshall a spare instrument. Players and audience waited alike, in a hush, as he checked the strings.

Marshall gestured in irritation, flicking the bow as if to swat a fly. "Talk to yourselves, for God's sake! It'll only be a minute." This produced a few chuckles but no talk. Hand was happy to be standing beside Lizzie during this performance—although he had little ear for music, he knew how much such playing meant to her.

William Marshall struck up a reel, a melody the other fiddlers clearly enjoyed, and they joined in behind him, accompanying him in support. Hand liked how they did him homage, softening their play during the more complex parts, letting Marshall's bow speak foremost, and then rousing stronger as the melody returned. Marshall's bearing was tough and grim: he looked like he would be a frightening teacher, and he seemed more interested in correctness than evoking a mood. Perhaps to an expert, Marshall sounded exceptional, but Hand heard little different about his fiddle playing. A moment's break, however, the briefest lift of his bow to the air, and Marshall began to play the same song again, with an even faster pace and fresh elaborations. The notes, too, seemed of a different family to those played before, fierce strikes that edged almost to ugliness. Across the room, the resumed piece made men and women sigh, and the three fiddlers ceased playing, unable to keep up, smiling to each other and shaking their heads.

Marshall ventured on alone. It seemed as though he were building a great structure through his bow, a tower of many balconies and intertwined staircases, one tower leaning across and meeting another, the music departing that first structure to climb the second, only to depart it afresh. A future was foretold in that song, Hand could tell—a future growing and becoming only more inevitable with each fresh digression. But Marshall paused again, relenting, and he beckoned the other players to join him once more, returning the song to its prior, customary shape. The crowd let out great cries and stamping of feet.

Lizzie's face was shining. She stood alone, immobile, not appearing to breathe. Hand loved to see her so happy.

Marshall waved away the room's cheers. He promised to play one more thing, a song dedicated to the Duchess. What followed was soft, mournful, terribly sad. Marshall's bow pronounced great loneliness, a muted despair, refusing the usual up-down of a dancing number. People were turning to the Duchess, observing her afresh, many whispers passing. Hand wondered if this were a mistake by Marshall—the piece revealed too much. Jane Gordon, however, seemed fearless, and her eyes glowed at the song.

When Marshall gave up his fiddle and bow, and the original players began a light melody, Hand expected the party to break out into massed dancing. Instead, however, Lizzie indicated that they alone should take the floor. Hand looked around for Tyler but couldn't see him.

The song was at a walking pace, all but a slow air, and Hand felt too self-conscious, holding Lizzie at some distance from himself, worried that they were creating a scandal

by moving alone. He did not think he danced well, and he kept glancing at Lizzie's face, unable to see what she was thinking.

Soon, however, he heard others moving behind him, and the song changed, other couples taking the floor, and he was able to take a full breath.

Lizzie said, "That's what I want." She did not seem to be speaking to him. "An actual world of art, you know? Complete on its own. Absolute creation, originality."

"What do you mean?"

"Doesn't it feel like this, this—it was what we lost, when we were thrown out of Eden? It's so hard to get it back."

Before he could ask her what she meant, Hand was diverted from her: men and women were coming up to him and congratulating him on his rise. He accepted a fierce embrace from Marian, and a handshake from a great many worthy men. He still could not see Tyler Cavenar anywhere.

When he next met Lizzie, she looked afraid.

"Have you seen Tyler? Where is he?"

"Is he outside?"

"No," Lizzie said, her voice rising. "His friends can't find him." This seemed only curious, at first, but grew less so when the two Chinese servants went looking around the estate, reporting no glimpse of Tyler. His carriage had not departed, either. Diarmid led a few men to check among the gardens and stables behind the house.

Hand tried to help direct the search, although the grip that Lizzie maintained over his arm kept him from complete focus.

“He shouldn’t be out, not this late. What if he’s wandered into the sea?”

“It’s a warm night,” Hand said, attempting to be encouraging.

Lizzie’s merely shook her head. She looked so afraid, Hand was preparing to invoke his own particular powers, his gifts of time and clocks, when a cheer went up from the front door, and a coachman helped a blinking, pale Tyler back into the room.

“Sorry for the alarm,” Tyler said, weakly. “Continue dancing.”

“I found him,” said the coach driver, “walking along the road to Edinburgh. He did not know where he was.” Tyler was swaying on his feet when Lizzie and Hand reached him, and he inspected them as if from far away.

Lizzie turned to the rest of the room. “A little too much wine, I’m afraid.” Although the comment provoked sarcastic applause, Tyler’s sharp gaze did not seem, to Hand, to be at all inebriated. His arm felt cold, and his lips had turned pale.

“What happened to you?” Hand asked.

Tyler shuddered, a look of pain crossing his face. “I saw the horned man.”

“Shush, love,” said Lizzie.

Hand urged everyone to move back, to give Tyler room. “What horned man?”

“The giant in the woods. He must be growing impatient with me.” Tyler’s customary distance and gentility had vanished. Now he regarded Hand with an unfamiliar urgency.

“He was holding a ship in his palm, a leaking ship. He was holding it up to me, like an offering. Water was draining from the ship—cascading down.”

Hand could not ask any more questions because Tyler was led away.

Hand wavered on the edge of sleep as Marian's coach took him home. It seemed as though he had split his body up earlier in the day, and each copy of himself had attended a different dance: as the coach headed for the new town, one by one his doubles rejoined him, each of them adding their fatigue to his.

The coach stopped at Marian's house. "Come in," she said. "Have a wee glass."

"No, I can't," he said. "I cannot drink anything. I need to sleep."

"I insist," she said, with a strange intensity. "I insist you come in."

Despite the hour, Marian's house was still well lit, and candles burned in her sitting room. A young woman sat alone in a chair. Her dress was simple and unadorned, and she did not smile or look up at his arrival. Her long dark hair was unbound, and the candle light danced upon it.

"You wanted to meet Arabella," Marian said. "Here she is."

"You," Hand asked, uncomprehending, "are Miss Carver?"

She nodded.

Hand, blinking, went to sit with her. Marian placed a glass of port in front of him and withdrew, closing the door behind.

Arabella regarded him coolly, calmly, and Hand wished he did not so smell of wine and dancing. His clothes surely reeked. He resisted the urge to massage his temples, wipe his eyes.

"The countess," Arabella said, "told me I could trust you. I won't speak to anyone else. Just you. After we speak, you cannot come looking for me, neither. Don't follow me tonight."

“Someone came to you,” Hand said, “and told you to accuse Douglas Farweather.”

“Do you promise? What I say will be a secret?”

Hand agreed.

“Yes,” she said. “Yes, I was threatened. My life. Worse than my life. I had no choice.”

“Did he appear to you—at night? In your own house?”

Arabella looked at him. “Aye. In my own house, and elsewhere, too.”

“It was,” Hand tried to find the right words—“like a nightmare?”

“It was. He appeared to me many times, until I couldn't sleep, until I was almost broken with fear for my soul.”

“Did you see a giant? A huge figure, in the woods?”

Arabella nodded. In the room's near-darkness, Hand felt a great shock of recognition. Arabella made no effort to hide what had happened, to explain away the impossible. Granny Wynd spell was, at long last, reaching its true form. Soon her spell would be no secret in the city.

“Who was the man, the one who spoke to you? Did you ever see his face?”

“I could not. But he told me who he was.”

“He did? Why would he do that?”

“I told him I would not endanger my soul by lying to the court. I said I would flee. I said I would leave the city rather than let him to destroy my mind. He just laughed. I would have to do what he demanded, he said, because he was a rich man. He could

destroy me anywhere in the world. Even if I left Scotland, he could find me in Europe, in the Americas. Anywhere. He said that his family's business stretched all over the world.”

“Which family?”

“The Cavenar family. He told me he was the ruler of that family, that his name was Tyler Cavenar. That's when I knew I had no choice. I could not flee him. How could I—” She couldn't finish, staring at him in the flickering light.

“I don't believe it,” Hand said. “It couldn't have been Tyler. He's a good man.”

“But I did believe it. That's why I surrendered, why I gave up fighting. He said he could punish me no matter how far across the seas I fled.”

Chapter Ten

It could not be true: Tyler could not be Granny Wynd's ally, the master of the horned man. Hand refused to believe it. Arabella had to have been mistaken, or, just as likely, the figure she had met in her nightmares had lied. The irritable, peculiar Lord Monboddo seemed a likely contender. So did the tanned, imposing colonial, Mr. Tavish. But not Tyler. Indeed, from the evidence of his collapse the night before, it seemed like Tyler was as much the victim of this “horned man” as McNiece and Arabella. Tyler seemed even more sickly than Hand had suspected.

There was only one option: at the first trace of morning, Hand forced himself to rise, to dress himself in the overcast half-light, and set out for Tyler's house. He wanted to check on his friend's health, and, he hoped, reassure his own doubts.

Lizzie's house, the Farweather residence, sat at the bottom of the much larger Cavenar estate. The Farweather house had once been a hunting lodge: when he and Lizzie had begun their engagement, Tyler had redesigned and expanded the cottage, giving his intended and her father a respectable home. The two houses were far enough away to dissuade gossip—although everyone was curious about this dreadfully lengthy engagement—but still, they stood close enough to one another that a skilled golfer, swinging from Lizzie's front steps, might hope to knock a ball against the high Cavenar gates.

Hand walked through the early morning to reach the Cavenar estate, his shirt growing damp, accompanied the second half of the way by a small party of invisible

buzzing things. He had never liked the Cavenar family home. Enormous and austere, it loomed above the fields in an unappealing mix of country retreat and Norman castle. Even as a child, Hand had found the numerous wings ugly and confusing to navigate, and as a grown man, with a better grasp of architecture, he felt exactly the same. The high, grey walls, with their ungenerously thin windows, gave the impression of newly arrived conquerors.

A silent young lady drew him through the entry hall. Much of the vast ornate house was dark, and the fireplaces in the halls merely slumbered, casting no light on the marble balustrades, the dark mahogany furnishings. At the door to Tyler's office, Hand paused, looking inside. The room was a mess, with letters and record books piled on Tyler's desk, the floor littered with shipping orders and bills of sale. The Cavenars did business all over the world: Tyler had uncles and cousins trading, litigating, and seizing territory from Java to Brazil. For decades, the family had owned great swathes of the commerce with the American colonies, and they continued to petition both governments to cease their conflict. They had backed the losing side of the Joseph Knight trial, the case that had outlawed slave-owning in Scotland, treating it as a personal attack on their business empire. During that trial, Hand had sat through one long and painful family meal with Cavenars, listening to Tyler's relatives give thanks for mankind's divinely ordained right to own property.

"Mr Cavenar," the servant said, "is in the library."

Hand found both Tyler and his cousin, Conley Cavenar-Dunley, seated at a long table. Tyler was examining one of the many pages strewn across the table's surface; Conley was dozing in his chair.

Hand did not sit. "Last night, you said you were being chased. That someone had been following you."

Tyler shrugged. "I drank too much."

"Are you all right now?"

Tyler stared at him, as if there existed a great unspoken understanding between them. "I am."

Hand sat. "I had an interesting conversation, by the way, with Lord Monboddó. He claimed that the Shambles is beloved by the men of Edinburgh. He said there is a festival there, every mid-Summer eve. Did you know that?"

"Maybe," said Tyler. "I don't think so. As you can see, I'm busy here. Family business. I hoped you would be willing to help out."

"But isn't it a little unusual that your wedding, and this festival, are on the same night? Isn't that an odd combination of dates?"

Tyler smiled. "I will be mortally offended if you skip my wedding, even for a pagan ritual—if that's what you're about to ask."

Conley laughed at this, his eyes still half-closed. Tyler's manner was so open, so modest, Hand could not maintain any suspicions about his friend.

He tried one more time. “I spoke to the other claimant of the Shambles, by the way. Arabella Carver. She said that she was threatened by a strange man. This stranger forced her to accuse Douglas.”

Tyler showed no sign of worry at this news. “Good work! Will she reverse her testimony?”

Hand explained that Arabella was too frightened, and refused to come forward until Hand could guarantee that the other witnesses would also change their evidence. Tyler's interest seemed completely genuine, and Hand decided, to his relief, that his friend could not be the villain behind the Shambles and its nightmares.

“What,” he asked, lifting over a chair, “are you trying to do?”

“The war in the colonies: it has revealed just how much of my family's money is caught up in activities that I wish did not exist. I'm trying—I'm trying to divest the Cavenar family of certain assets.”

Hand took a guess: “Is that how you produced the money for Lizzie's theatre?”

Tyler nodded. “I was glad to have the excuse. You may not be aware how many human bodies are shipped across the Atlantic each year, nor the proportion of those bodies that become corpses during the journey. If not, my advice is not to look into it. Equally, don't look into how the East India Company and its allies, such as myself, are establishing control of Bengal.”

“Your family is—”

“We aren't slave traders, not exactly. But we lease some of the ships that do that trade, and we finance others. We are involved, and we make a healthy profit from being involved.”

“Who are your enemies in the family? Who opposes you?”

“My uncles, of course. They want to make money any way they can. And Conley, too. He is my worst enemy.”

Hand did not know what this comment meant.

Conley coughed. “Tyler is joking. He's saying that I am the heir to the family, if he passes away without offspring. I am the next in line. But I am not his enemy, not at all. I approve of his moral approach to trade and enterprise. And I pray that he and Elizabeth will be happy and fruitful.”

“You? Next in line?” Hand asked. “But you to live in poverty.”

Tyler nodded. “Until recently, there were other cousins in Conley's path. They died at sea. We are not a long-lived group, us Cavenars. But so far, Conley has been kind enough not to shout in outrage as I go about selling family assets.”

“I approve,” said Conley, piously and unconvincingly, “of Tyler's ethical concerns.”

“I am grateful for your support,” said Tyler, smiling in a melancholy, distant fashion.

Hand hated to see his friend so upset: it seemed like Tyler could so easily rid himself of these unhappy interests. “I thought Hume told you not to worry about this kind of thing.”

“And I can't take his advice. David, for all his moral genius, seemed to have an odd blindness in this area.” Tyler smiled. “I see what you're thinking: it's me who is too

sensitive. And you're not the only person who thinks so. It's just—whenever I am home, I can't forget where my money comes from. I see those ships in my dreams, like I'm a crow drifting above the ocean. I wake up shivering, panicked—” Tyler caught himself.

Hand felt concerned for his friend, so tormented and so unwell. “Let me see what sense I can make of this. What's the top priority? The slaving ships?”

“Today's concern is piracy and pillage in Java. What my uncles are doing there is obscene.”

The Cavenar house was a sufficient distance from Edinburgh that Granny Wynd's spell had little power, and Hand took a deep breath, accepting a series of records from Tyler, asking for explanations for each, letting his genius rise up. The more he read of the trading business that the Cavenars did in Java, the more excited his clocks became. They whirled and chattered as Hand took in more and more facts of the matter. Conley left the table, and came back with a hefty cup of coffee, but Hand was not conscious of drinking it, noticing only hours later when Conley pressed another cup into his palm. He could almost see it: the real world, many oceans away, rising from the charts, from the ships' logs, from the records of profit and loss. Tyler asked questions, and Hand was able to answer.

The dinner hour was approaching.

Tyler, for the first time that Hand could remember, looked relieved, his burden lightened. “This is wonderful, my friend. You are a genius. Now I know what to do.”

Hand felt tired, so very tired. He could not focus his eyes on Tyler's face.

Tyler stood, coughing. "I am going to write those letters right now. Excuse me. My uncles will angry, I'm sure, but, well—excuse me, gentlemen."

Hand pressed his fingers into his forehead. The large room seemed to have grown smaller. His skull seemed to swell, as though it were pushing through his skin, and his own sweat seemed particular pungent, forceful. He had seen the pirate ships, and the villages on the coast set aflame. The murders of hundreds felt like it had happened in the next room.

"That was remarkable," Conley said slowly. "You unpacked the family's operations in only a few hours. You and I could work very well together."

"Very good, sir," said Hand. "Thank you. I should get back to the city." The time had escaped from him, and he was due to meet his colleagues in an hour, so he could take a look at the Shambles himself. In all the time Douglas had worked on the plans for the theatre, Hand had never actually visited the intended site.

"Hold on," said Conley. "You need me, Mr. McLeish. You need me."

"I'm sorry, but to speak plainly," Hand said, "I do not see how I need you."

"I don't want her," Conley said. "I don't desire her in any way."

"What are you talking about?"

"Tyler is dying. It's very close now. I guessed he would have told you."

"Didn't tell me what?" Hand was furious to hear his own whispered reply, speaking like a fellow conspirator.

"Tyler's winter. His winter in Nice? A disaster! It's the end. It's obvious now—the end."

“A disaster? Did he propose the incorrect dance to a Bavarian princess?”

“Blood, Mr. McLeish. I am talking about blood. Blood on pillow cases, blood on fine white shirts. Blood scrubbed off hotel floors. He is dying, Mr. McLeish. This winter was the turning point: when his condition passed the point of plausible return. The Cavenar inner circle has given up on him. Until Nice, his apparent health had reassured everyone, and the terrors of the past years were mostly dismissed. I was next in line, but, as you said, I might as well have been a McLeish for all the respect it gave me. You should see how the elders of the Cavenar clan treat me now! Oh, it is quite something. A full transformation.” Hand tried to recall how Tyler had seemed upon his return from Nice. He had come back later than expected, certainly, and he had seemed tired, playing little role in the social calendar.

“I am walking away from this conversation, sir.” Hand urged himself to get out of the library. Not only was this a terrible subject—to have Tyler overhear!—but Conley himself seemed a dangerously peculiar fellow. He acted as though Hand should be delighted by this news of blood.

Speaking slowly, keeping every word clear, Conley said, “I don’t have any interest in Lizzie Farweather. That’s what I’m telling you. She can be yours.”

Hand felt hotly numb. He wanted to reach out into the air and stuff those words back into Conley’s mouth.

“She will be available—”

Hand grabbed Conley’s jacket by the lapel. “Whatever stupid ideas you have concocted—”

Conley did not seem concerned. "Sorry if this was too much, at all once."

"Forgive me, then, if what I'm about to tell you is also too much. If a man slanders me, I will take action. You will not enjoy the result." Hand released Conley and stood, backing away from him. Conley continued to regard him pleasantly, not attending to his rumpled coat.

"We'll speak again," he said.

Late in the afternoon, Hand met Diarmid and the firm's chief foreman in the the hamlet called the Bray Shambles. The air was dry, and the sky was dappled with high, thin clouds. The village was exceedingly simple: five turf houses, a common vegetable garden, a few small pigs, and one chicken coop. In contrast, the Shambles' inn, which stood on the edge of the so-called "wood"—a stretch of wild overgrown shrubs and young, vine-besieged trees—was a fine building, boasting sturdy stone walls, and a thatched roof in good repair. Hand recalled the tale Monboddo had told of the Shambles, how its festival stretched back into ancient times, but neither the inn nor the mud houses seemed particularly old. It was hard to tell the age, however, of poor establishments, because they lacked the resources to leave a mark on the passing of time.

Diarmid made lighthearted comments about the sad poverty of the villagers, but Hand was not in the mood to reply. Conley's offer of an alliance still disgusted him. I am not waiting for my friend to die, he told himself. I am not. Tyler was a good man, with an admirable ambition for his family's business empire. He and Lizzie would marry, and be happy. Her theatre would be built—and it would be built here, on the grounds of the

Shambles. Hand wished his own heart would calm down, that his thoughts would cease circling.

Carina Thompson, the on-site leader of the firm's most challenging projects, emerged from the hamlet's inn. Carina locked eyes with Hand as she approached, annoyed. She had real work to do, her look reminded him, and he was yet again taking her away from it. Hand volunteered for too many things, Carina liked to point out: he was forever trying to impress someone or other. This was fine for him, perhaps, but it left the rest of the firm overwhelmed, their work never as polished as it could be.

Carina brought with her with a rotund and mostly bald fellow, the inn's proprietor. He wore loose trousers which would have been helped immensely by the addition of a belt, and his lower teeth were troubled, dark stubs in a fleshy mouth. He blinked at Hand.

Carina's glare told Hand: this is a complete waste of a good afternoon.

"Can you show me," Hand asked, "where the mid-summer festival is held?"

"It's nae a big thing. Just a night they do."

"They?"

"The people here."

They walked to a patch of shorter, downtrodden grass, a rough circle about ten feet wide, a stone's throw from the broken fence which bordered the woods.

"What happens?" Hand asked.

"Just some of them gather. It's nothing to be worried about. They say thanks for the year."

Diarmid asked, "Is there dancing?"

“It’s the Edinburgh folk who like that.”

“And what about a giant figure, a horned man? Someone frightening, who comes out of the woods?”

“I don’t know about that. Sirs, you don’t need to be worried. I cannae even tell if we will have it this year. The lass who liked to start it—she went away last winter, took her bairns away with her. She has an aunt in Paisley, you know?” Hand felt frustrated at the story’s threadbare nature. He had hoped for a real explanation.

“The inn,” he said, “is a handsome building. Do you have guests standing upstairs? Edinburgh guests?”

“We used to. A while back,” said the innkeeper.

Diarmid asked, “But not now? Why not?”

“No, sir. It’s been let for a good while now. Fellow always pays on time. Best tenant you could hope for.”

“Who is it? Who is staying there?” Hand asked. Now he was really listening. If he could find out who this renter was, it seemed likely that the same fellow would be connected to the mystery of the Shambles. This surely had to be the bitter, sea-crossing gentleman that Granny Wynd had described.

“Oh, he doesn’t stay here much. Not so very often. Once in a rare moon, in fact.”

“Please, sir. It’s important. Who is it who pays for the room?”

“The Cavenar lad. The rich one. He’s been paying me every month for the last year.”

“Tyler Cavenar? He’s the one renting the room above the Shambles?”

“Aye, that’s him. You know him?”

Hand stood in the warm, slanted sunlight, hearing Granny Wynd's laughter on all sides. Her voice seemed to rise up in his mind: "He will kill Lizzie Farweather, on their wedding night."

Chapter Eleven

Lizzie was not available that night, and neither was she free until late the following day. Hand received regular notes from Montrose, promising that she was still guarded, but still, he fretted, sleeping poorly. Tyler did not seem like a trafficker with demons and dreams, but appearance alone was no proof. Everyone liked to talk as though they were exactly what they seemed. Every man presented himself as though his mind was a bright coastline, entirely visible to outsiders, while making diligent efforts to keep his truest feelings hidden far away, secluded in fog-enshrouded hinterlands, feeding and encouraging the incomprehensible desires that lived in the mind's remotest highlands.

Tyler was dying. Might he, quite reasonably, have longed for a way to survive, and, if survival proved impossible, might he have sought for a way to take revenge on those who would outlast him? Why marry a woman like Lizzie, after all, in the full poetry of young, ill-fated love, only to see her, after a year of dutiful grave-side visits, settle down with her true husband, her actual spouse, the companion of all her long years? It could be understood why, in that extremity, Tyler could have reached out, cried against the darkness of onrushing oblivion, and, due to Granny Wynd's curse, her intervention of insane magic, made contact with something in the darkness. Unlike all the men and women who cried out against death, and heard only the echoing mockery of their own despair, who begged for futile mercy from the unmoving vaults, when Tyler had railed and raged, something outside the day lit world had replied. Something of that inhuman, endless night had listened, risen up, and had come to serve him.

Or, more simply, perhaps Tyler had gone mad, and his madness had been strengthened and spread and shared by Granny Wynd. Tyler had sought for a fresh way to understand his implacable demise, just as all living beings sought, but he had found not Christian hope, not Attic forbearance, but rather, in the whispers of Granny Wynd's spell, and in the city's tales of a paltry and provincial mid-summer ritual, the inspiration for a gruesome revenge, a way to shift his own terror on to everyone else. He would enact his murderous horror on the longest day of the year, the day he and Lizzie were to wed.

Lizzie was not safe, but Hand had no idea how he might tell her so. If he were not very careful, she would reject his worries outright. Hand only managed to catch up with her at Anderson's Library, which was the first moment she had available. He hurried into the Library, his head down, with a dozen possible arguments debating themselves in his mind. He was stopped, however, immediately on arrival, as the shop was packed with men, men who stared at him in displeasure, acting as though he were terribly ill-mannered.

"Oh my Lord," said a young fellow, blonde and bearded. "Are you Kelly? Please tell me you are not Kelly."

Hand said, "I am McLeish."

"Yes, yes, but are you also Kelly? On the page?"

"He cannot be Kelly," said John Playfair, in a kind, warm voice. "Hand's poetry is terrible. It's bad, very bad."

Many of the men nearby, however, continued to look down their noses at him, and Hand recalled, suddenly, why the library was so crowded. Today was the announcement of the shop's annual award for the best poet in North Britain.

“Who is this Kelly?” Hand asked Mr. Playfair.

The blonde, bearded young man sighed. “He is an unknown writer. Not without talent, certainly, which makes it obvious that the name is a ruse. If he were truly an unknown writer, we would already have heard of him! Disgraceful.”

Playfair added, “It seems likely that Kelly will place in the contest. His evocations of highland life, the simple, heartfelt emotions of our country's women and children, are quite moving.”

“That's why Hand cannot be Kelly,” said a third man, “because Hand lacks personal experience with the traditional way of life, the farmers and their fields.”

“No,” said Playfair. “No one needs to worry. Hand is simply not gifted in that way. I have read his verses.”

“You had me throw them into the fire,” Hand replied.

“I promised you would thank me for it one day.”

“I do, sir, I do.” Hand noticed Lizzie, standing on the other side of the room. He was pleased to see that she was accompanied by a young, sour-looking man, one of Montrose's fellows.

“It's annoyed to have a guard, my dear,” she said. “I told Montrose it wasn't necessary, but he didn't listen because I'm a woman.”

“It might be necessary,” Hand promised. “It really might be.” Her told her about his discovery that Tyler was renting the room in the Shambles' Inn.

“So? Tyler has several hideouts. He had a nice little cottage near the village of Portobello, too. Has he shown it to you? You would need a hideout, too, if you had his ghastly family.”

“But it just seems like an odd—”

“Have you interrogated Arran Thomas yet? That would be my first step.” Hand did not want to involve the crime lord in his investigation. He did not trust Arran. Nor did he believe Arran would know anything about the more shadowy aspects of the case.

Lizzie gestured for Hand to sit.

“You need to be careful,” he attempted.

“I have spent my entire life being careful. Now. Take a seat before they are all taken.”

The library had cleared some space for chairs, but there were far more poets than seats, and Hand felt awkward taking the one next to Lizzie's, hearing whispers from the back that he could definitely not be Kelly.

“Did you know about the contest?” Lizzie asked. “It has been a very vigorous year for Scots verse. Some impressive writers have submitted work.”

He tried to ask her about Tyler's knowledge of the Shambles, but he was shushed by poets on all sides. He waited in frustration through a long and dull speech from the head of the poetry society. The library was thick and musty, and there were far too many people to comfortably fill the space. Someone in the row behind coughed forcefully into

the back of Hand's head, and he wondered why Lizzie was so diligent in her attendance of these minor cultural events. He had to convince her she was in danger, but he saw no way to do that without revealing his conversations with Peter McNiece, and with Granny Wynd.

Lizzie refused to acknowledge Granny Wynd's existence, and grew furious whenever anyone even raised the subject of witchcraft.

The old fellow at the front came to the end of his speech. He smiled at the crowd.

“I can now reveal the winner of this year's contest. This writer, previously unknown to the judges, is a man of exceptional skill and feeling, who possesses a sensibility both beautiful and original. His love poems, I have to tell you, left more than one of our judges teary-eyed. Additionally, this writer speaks so movingly of the heritage and traditions of our country, the everyday lives of the moors, the mountains, and the islands.” The judge smiled. “The society's gold prize for poetic letters goes to a writer with a great future ahead of him: Mr. S.M. Kelly.”

By his side, Lizzie gasped, covering her mouth. She slapped his knee, as though Hand was insufficiently pleased on Mr. Kelly's behalf, and, feeling jealous, he looked around the room, hoping that the winning poet would not be handsome. To his surprise, however, Lizzie stood, and asked to be let through the chairs. Mutterings rose as she explaining to the judges that Mr. Kelly was not able to come to the ceremony in person. She would take the prize, as she had been the one, she confessed, who had submitted the poetry collection on the poet's behalf.

The judge examined her with friendly suspicion. "Miss Farweather, can you tell us if 'Kelly' is indeed this poet's real name?"

"I believe," Lizzie said brightly, "that it is a pen-name. I don't know, of course, because Kelly and I have never met. The poet may, in truth, be female. It's just a hint I've picked up, here and there." She met Hand's eye, delighted. He had not known that Lizzie wrote poetry, but it was not a surprise that she could: she seemed blessed with every talent.

"And is this person," asked one of the younger judges, "who publishes under the name Kelly, truly acquainted with the lives of farmers, of the highland clans?"

"I believe," Lizzie replied, "that everyone has a piece of the highlands, deep inside."

Once the silver and bronze prizes had been announced, and the room was allowed to stand, Hand crossed through the crush to reach Lizzie. "Congratulations on your success."

"Kelly's success, not mine: you must congratulate the actual poet, Miss Kelly," Lizzie said, too happy to be a believable liar. "I am merely her messenger."

"You are very amusing when you want to be, Miss Farweather," he said.

"No, sir. I am not amusing at all."

Hand found himself staring at Lizzie helplessly. I love this woman so much, he thought. Far, far too much.

"I don't believe," murmured the blonde man, who had not won any of the prizes, "that Kelly could be a woman. I still suspect Mr. McLeish is behind this ruse."

Hand did not have time to refute this claim, as he and Lizzie were being called. The shop's assistant was calling for them to come to the door, and when they had made their way through the crowd, Diarmid was waiting outside. When Hand saw who Diarmid had brought with him, his spirit sank. Diarmid was standing beside the elderly criminal lawyer, Sir Leicester, one of the more ruthless and disreputable figures in Edinburgh's courts. His presence meant that Diarmid had hired him, and Diarmid would have only done so if Douglas's case had not been dismissed. They would be proceeding to trial. Preparations for the trial would take weeks.

Lizzie swore. "Lord! The theatre is dead. I am dead."

Diarmid confirmed the bad news. "The trial will go ahead, in a month's time. I mentioned that there is a chance that both Arabella and Peter may recant their testimony, but the judges felt that was not sufficient, and they will allow the prosecution to make their case. There is a third witness, that's our problem. He—or she—first brought the case against Douglas. Arabella and Robert are being used to support that first witness's testimony. "

"Who is it?" Hand asked.

"The prosecution shared the knowledge with the judge, but they are not yet required to tell me who it is."

"When do they have to reveal the name?" Hand asked.

"Too late for our theatre," Lizzie replied. "We have so little time before the city's mood changes."

Diarmid removed a letter from his bag. "I'm sorry, Miss Farweather. This is a message from Lord Monboddo. He asks your permission to withdraw from the theatre's fund."

Lizzie closed her eyes. "He is the first." Her face looked worn and pale, and Hand longed to help her.

Hand said, "We have to find out who the third witness is. The courts know who it is. They can tell us."

The elderly lawyer, Sir Leicester, shook his head. "They won't tell us. Not until they have to."

Lizzie's smile was painfully sad. "I don't think there's time, my dear. There's no more time."

Hand did not speak as he and Diarmid walked to the firm's office on Princes Street. Hand paused for a moment on the bridge, looking across the hollow at the new town. It looked very incomplete. The houses of the well-to-do seemed small and inadequate, and the space between them very large. Hand wondered if Lane Waller's criticism of the new town, that it was too much road for too little town, might in fact be accurate. The spire of St. Andrews seemed rather forlorn, and while the pleasant dome of the Register House looked over the bridge, the building was not yet complete, its final shape prevented by endless funding delays. Yet despite these limits, these setbacks, Hand was not willing to give up on the new town. It seemed to him, in that moment, that Douglas, Lizzie, and the new town were all the same thing. He had to protect them.

In the records room of Farweather and McLeish, one of the younger clerks, Tim Bucknell, was dozing in the cluttered room's corner, a blanket pulled up to his chin. Hand cleared the great table in the middle of the room, lifting record boxes and stacks of order forms down to the floor.

"Can I help?" asked Tim.

Hand put a finger to his lips. He didn't want human interaction, not now. He was going to find out the name of Lizzie's third accuser, and he could not bear distractions, not when he needed to reach out across the North Loch and discern the pattern of the coming day. He needed to perceive only rhythms, systems, routines.

Tim stayed on the floor, watching him.

Diarmid asked, "What are you doing, Hand?"

Hand paused. He would need Diarmid's help. "You work for me, right? Now that I'm a partner with Douglas?"

"I do, sir. Why?"

"I'm going to do something that is not illegal, but which might look a little strange, viewed from the outside. You are going to promise not to tell a soul about it."

"Why? What you trying to do?"

"Learn the name of the third witness."

When he finished piling up boxes, Hand went to the room's cabinet and unrolled the largest map of the high street that the firm possessed. He laid it down on the table and looked around for paper weights: without speaking, Tim moved around the map's corners, pinning it down. Hand nodded his thanks but did not meet the boy's eye. He felt

uneasy about using his genius, to just burst in with his own strength, but he saw no other option. There was no more time.

He examined the map, leaning over the picture of the city as though he were a gull whistling down the high street. Here on Princes Street, in the new town, Granny Wynd's spell was not as strong, and soon the map glowed in Hand's sight, the individual lanes shining with the paths and journeys intended for the hours of the day. People, people, people, and their routines. Hand surrendered himself to that vision, letting go, the room fading away as the city's pattern rose up and expanded. He concentrated on Parliament House. How could he get at the festering, damp halls where the minutes of court hearings were kept? What paths did he need to adjust?

He saw it. He closed his eyes, letting go. Tomorrow, they would enter Parliament House and read exactly what the court had been told. Hand smiled as a colossal headache burst into his consciousness.

He waved absently at Tim, still not wanting to look at the boy's face. "Get me the whisky bottle."

Chapter Twelve

The morning arrived slowly, the sky blustery, with a dry, cloudless gale blowing without pause from the north. Summer seemed to have taken a day off, yet people still crowded the high street around St Giles and the Luckenbooths, overflowing into side lanes, their many voices raised as they shopped, quarreled, and asked to be let through. From the open windows of the nearby lands, children and servants looked down at the business of the day, rapt.

Hand had crossed the North Bridge on foot, and he felt he had adjusted moderately well to the debilitating effects of Granny Wynd's spell. The ache emanating from the base of his skull had so far restrained itself. And was good: he would have to exert himself today. He held a picture in his mind of Parliament House, its offices, courtrooms, and subterranean floors, its many occupants and visitors walking up and down. If he avoided contact with other people's talk, their questions, he could hold that picture up, keep it safe, like a servant carrying a full water pitcher.

Diarmid McDonald, walking beside him, asked what Hand hoped a visit to Parliament House would accomplish.

“We're going to look at the court's records. We will read them—see who brought the case against Douglas.”

“How can we—do you know someone?” Hand, still concentrating, wished he had not needed Diarmid's company. But Diarmid knew the permutations of the case, and he

possessed, far more than did Hand, a proper understanding of the language used by the legal profession.

“Once, when I was a child,” said Hand, looking at the ground, “my family were struggling terribly, too poor even to buy bread or water. I had to find some way to provide for them. Even though I was a mere bairn back then, I liked to watch the high street. I studied its patterns, its life. I had the idea that if I could adjust things, intervene the smallest bit, I would be able to bring my maw a good dinner.”

“Did it work?”

Hand recalled the coins that Granny Wynd had passed him, and the pit the guardsmen had lowered him into. “Eventually.”

Together, they gained the Close, where a great many merchants were clutching their hats to their heads, carrying out their business in the open air. Around the front steps of Parliament House, a greater number of men in legal black loitered: a few made a show of hurry and busy thought, pretending to be busy with cases, but most merely stood and dawdled, their eyes scanning the square in the hope a new client. Several of the older attorneys had noticed Hand's appearance, and were already weaving their way through the crush, hoping to offer their services.

Hand pushed past the five legal gentlemen who were inquiring with some force whether he and Lizzie Farweather needed their services, and made his way to the seed merchant, Clive Clay.

“Where's our bridge?” asked the cheerful Mr. Clay, his chin up, pleased for the chance to argue. Hand tried to shoot back an answer, but he was jostled from behind as a

mass of unemployed lawyers swept around him. One man calmly pronounced his expertise at writing contracts for players and playwrights; another screamed that he was the city's authority on the purchase of timber and brick.

“No bridge for the Cowgate yet,” said Hand, brushing away a grip on his coat. “Unless you and your fellow merchants will pay for it.” He was conscious of faking his usual enjoyment of bantering with Clive: the effort required to hold up his picture of Parliament House absorbed too much of his attention.

“Pay? We pay for the bridge? That is a stunning admission of defeat,” said Mr. Clay, feigning outrage, glancing at his fellow tradesmen for encouragement.

“Remember, gentlemen,” said Hand, “that there is an indoor market—a fine indoor market—which the city built for you. Stop shaming Edinburgh by carrying out your business in the street.”

Clive smiled. “But everyone is here.”

This was true, but Hand could not reply with a retort, being pulled and tugged by the crush of men trying to get his attention. He met Clive's eye, suggesting they would talk later; Clive winked back. He accepted from Hand three letters, which he passed to his boy to be delivered. Hand was grateful for the merchant's help.

If he had planned his visit to Parliament House correctly, those three letters would help him set up the perfect distraction. Like his attempt to steal a chicken—only far, far better prepared.

Inside Parliament House, among the sudden quiet, the slower pace of talk and movement, Hand went over to the young man and woman known, by every member of

the court, as the Tobacco Siblings. He needed them to complete his plan. These two were siblings of paper, not of blood: the two most likely claimants to a huge, and fiercely disputed shipment of tobacco, a vast haul removed from the port of Boston just as the government lost control of that city. American diplomats claimed that the tobacco had been stolen; the original owner, an Edinburgh Scot, had died before the transport had crossed the ocean. The tobacco had long been sold to European markets, but the profits from the sale were held up in the courts. Whoever could claim the rights to the shipment would immediately become wealthy, but as the years drifted on, and the case grew sourer, many suspected the siblings would in the end receive only a receipt for legal fees.

Although the brother and sister despised each other, they were forever standing together, with one refusing to let the other get an unobstructed moment in court. The first, Alexander Swann, was tall and jovial; Ruth Grange was more forceful, with a powerful temper. Of the two, Hand preferred to speak with Mr. Swann, but before he reached him, Miss Grange stopped him short.

“You have information for me?”

“No, ma'am,” he told them both. “But I suspect that your lawyers have been negligent.” Hand hated to mis-use the siblings, but he needed them to provide a small piece of his overall distraction. According to the intuition of his clock-sense, these two seemed the best way to force an adjustment in Parliament House's business, and so he needed their unwitting help.

“Why, Mr. McLeish?” asked Alex Swann. “What have they overlooked?”

“If you have news,” said Ruth, “tell it to me alone. Understand: you risk everything by talking to this—this foul chancer, this painted beggar. When the court grants finally me my fortune, I will remember only those who showed me proper respect.”

She did not move away, however, when Hand explained the rumour he had overheard of their lawyers' collusion. The siblings were famously suspicious of their legal advisers, known to share a disdain for the trickery of the law, yet they lacked the will to abandon the progress of their case. As Hand spoke, they glanced at each, growing in wrath and disgust.

Once the siblings had departed, Diarmid asked, “Was that true?”

“The questions they will ask will be useful.”

“Lad. It is a low deed to trick two paupers.”

“I know. Follow me.”

With Diarmid behind him, Hand descended the many stairs below the Great Hall, passing down uneven staircases towards the record office. The floors sank ever lower, irregularly positioned candles failing to overcome the gloom. Hand kept his picture of the House clear in his mind, even though the effort required grew with each step. A loamy murk grew stronger in the air, as well as the reek of men's pipes. While the descending passageways seemed intent on falling forever, dropping down towards hell or Australia—depending on the soundness of one's Christian faith—the stairs still offered the occasional small window, offering, if one chose to look out, a brief view of humble backstreets of the Cowgate below.

Hand had not explored these staircases in many years, not since the night he had visited Lane Waller.

Diarmid asked, “Is there a plan? I mean—for getting at the records without anyone’s knowledge?” Hand nodded. He opened the door to the office and followed Diarmid in.

Their entry did not break the room’s sleepy silence. The chief records keeper, one Mr. Alan McLode, was a young man with short white hair. Hand did not know if MacLode remembered him from their youth, from Hand’s visit to Lane Waller’s office. Whenever they had met, MacLode always seemed to treat Hand as a distant acquaintance, someone whom he was pleased to encounter for the second time.

In an alcove some way from MacLode’s desk, two clerks were regarding a set of papers without motion or comment, as though expecting the pages themselves to speak. The room was dark enough that Hand pitied the eyes of its occupants: high in the office’s side wall, a pair of small windows offered limited natural light, and the faintly sighing fireplace failed to share the slightest ember.

Hand explained his made-up reason for visiting. His throat was dry and he felt like he might lose the contents of his breakfast, but despite his nausea, he felt that his plan would work. He could feel the changes he had made coming together, the day bending to his alterations. His picture of the House was quickly becoming more vivid, and more real, than the House itself.

MacLode said, “I hate being down here. If I could get a good trial, you know? With a wealthy client. Just one.”

“Mr. MacLode,” Hand told Diarmid, “is a skilled courtroom debater.”

“Not skilled enough,” said MacLode, “I keep myself fed by this awful work. Papers!”

“He prowls the court like a wolf. Like a wolf scenting a wounded lamb.”

“Sadly,” said MacLode, “few clients are interested in hiring a wolf-man. So I starve.”

Hand encouraged MacLode to elaborate on his unhappy times, and perhaps twenty minutes had passed before he heard the anticipated knock on the door. An angry-looking lawyer made several requests on behalf of Lord Kames, a challenge which consumed all the room’s clerks. One clerk had carried out a set of boxes from the archives, and had placed them on his desk, when the door opened and another visitor required his time. He dropped the boxes and made to leave.

MacLode looked up. “Where do you think you’re going?”

“The Tobacco gentleman, sir. Alex Swann. He wants answers to something.”

MacLode sighed. “Those are court papers. You can’t leave them lying around.”

“But—”

“Go. Go, if you must.” The clerk ran out. A few minutes later, a letter was hand-delivered by the boy of Clive Clay, the seed merchant; the boy did not look at Hand at any point. Once the remaining clerk had opened that envelope and read its contents, he begged for an hour’s leave, put on his hat, and departed.

Hand and Diarmid were left alone with MacLode, who listed the legal objections that Lizzie’s theatre might have to confront. Outside in the corridor, a great commotion rose up, with excited calls echoing down the stairs and many boots thumping. MacLode, blinking, went to the door and asked why the noise.

Hand could not see the man who said, "It's the Cavenars! Against Joseph Knight!"

MacLode begged more questions of the men outside. Hand was proud of his invention: the Cavenars loved to spend money, they loved to bring cases against their opponents, and a desperate lawyer like MacLode would lunge for the chance to offer his services.

MacLode glanced for his clerks, only now noticing they had both gone. He grabbed his wig from the table and fitted it to his head, hurried to the back room to gather papers. He asked if his visitors would like to accompany him for a short walk.

"A walk?" asked Hand, putting a little temper into his voice.

"Forgive the suggestion, sirs. Please remain as you are. I must—I'll be back very soon. Wait—just a minute."

"What," asked Diarmid, "is the case?"

"Joseph Knight, the former slave, has been spotted in Edinburgh. Lord! The Cavenar family has enticed a sheriff to arrest him. They want him charged with theft of property—they argue that Knight has stolen himself!"

"You are going," Hand asked, "to offer your services to the Cavenars?"

MacLode stiffened. "Never. I go to Mr. Knight, to offer him whatever help he needs."

They were left alone in the room.

"A good man," Hand said.

"Has this Knight really returned to the city?" asked Diarmid.

"No. But now we can see the name of our third witness."

Diarmid sighed. “We have been lucky. But how are we supposed to find anything in all those archives?”

“Simple. The records are on that clerk’s desk, among the boxes he left.”

“You’re joking. Are you joking?” Hand sorted through the three boxes, finding the one they needed, beckoning for Diarmid to come see.

“I am working with a magician,” Diarmid murmured, flicking through the browned papers. Hand watched him work. He found himself hoping, wishing, that the records would not name Tyler as their enemy. Let it not be Tyler, he begged.

“Here it is,” said Diarmid. “Here is the hearing. This is where my request to dismiss was discussed, and rejected. It is very, very wrong of us to read what these papers say.”

“Do it.”

Diarmid pulled a stack of pages free from the box and flicked through them. “The third witness. He is one Mr. Thomas. Arran Thomas. He claims that Douglas intimidated him, threatened his life. He is the third witness.”

Hand closed his eyes, bewildered. “God’s hooks.” Douglas was accused of threatening Arran Thomas? This made no sense at all.

Chapter Thirteen

Shakespeare Square, despite its grand name, was an ugly part of Edinburgh.

Although the square sat on the new town's side of the loch, it always felt to Hand like an outpost of the ancient city, an ambassador of that damp, tight air. Its only landmark was the Royal Theatre, which by its outward appearance seemed intent on confirming every criticism that moralists made of the stage. The square's business was dramatic performance, cheap penmanship, and prostitution. In closet-sized shops and stalls, scribes wrote letters and copied out documents for tiny sums; in the rooms above their heads, women and girls attempted to entertain the client of the hour without suffering theft or injury. Even a rake like Boswell disdained the commerce of Shakespeare Square. The awnings and eaves sagged, and, in the corners, debris of vegetable skins and fish bones encouraged the local rats to grow corpulent and haughty.

Hand's foreman, Carina, met him outside the theatre. "Arran Thomas is inside. The play won't be done for a while yet, but he's just waiting back there, in the lead actresses' room. They say he dotes on her."

Diarmid asked, "He has guards with him?"

"Just one. A bad-looking lad."

"The man at the door?" asked Hand.

"The man at the door has been paid." Hand nodded to show his appreciation. Carina was very competent.

She looked at him: "Are you sure you want to do this?"

“He’ll talk to me. I knew Arran Thomas when I was a boy.”

The play was only now reaching its most tragic passage, and at the front of the theatre, a great many Edinburgh folk of humble character were streaming in, eager to catch the “best bit” for the cheapest ticket. Carina walked Hand and Diarmid around the back of the theatre, guiding them to an unguarded, unmarked door. When Hand looked back, he saw Carina waiting in the lane, regarding him nervously.

The inside of the theatre shook with the laughter and shouts of the crowd. When the audience cried out, scolding one actor or another—the tragedy on stage seemed to be reaching its climax—Hand felt as though he too were standing on stage, his secrets exposed. Outside the star actress’s private room, a short stocky man was standing guard, alert and sly, his hand going to his belt.

“I would like to talk to Arran,” Hand said.

“He’s not expecting you.” The top of the man’s cropped head was covered in round black marks, like he had been splashed with ink or tar, and his eyes were frightening in their cold intensity.

“Tell him he knows me. Hand McLeish. We share the memory of a tragedy, the death of his brother.”

Arran Thomas was sitting in the actress’s changing room, his big form hunched in the corner. He looked weaker than Hand remembered. His dark eyes still stared with covetous intent, but the tiger’s strength—the huge shoulders and arms which had so terrified Hand as a boy—had grown lank and long with age. In the smoky glow of the small room’s candlelight, Arran’s face bore the damage, familiar to everyone who lived

in Edinburgh, of a lifetime's terrific and outrageous drinking. His crutches, resting by the chair he lounged in, also displayed the traces of use and struggle, chipped and stained down their length. They were, however, Hand noted, considerably thicker than was usual among crippled men, almost like a fishing boat's oars, stout and heavy. Arran might be stronger than he looked.

"Long time, lad," said Arran, watchful, curious. "How did you know I was here?"

"Do you want to preserve The Bray Shambles? Are you trying to prevent their development?"

Arran examined him without warmth. "I regret already my decision to allow you in."

"You are listed as a witness in the case against Douglas Farweather," Hand said.

"Are you aware of that?"

"I am."

"You are accusing Douglas of intimidating you. You have formally accused him of extorting you and others."

"I was asked to say that, yes. That's the role I was asked to perform."

"You admit this?"

"Why not? We are old friends, right?"

Hand fought the excitement rising in his blood. He was at last close to an answer, but he could not allow Arran to trick him.

"You admit lying to the court. Tell me, Arran, that you will come with us, and repeat those words to the judge. We will have the entire case thrown out." If Arran would recant, Hand was confident he could persuade Arabella to change her testimony, too. She

seemed eager for a reason to do so. And once two out of the three had withdrawn from the case, either Pete McNiece would back out, too, or Sir Leicester could use his dubious expertise to have the case dismissed.

Arran turned his head, looking vaguely at the ceiling, as though considering the request. “No, lad. I won't.”

Hand said, “I will tell the court what you just said, that you admitted you lied. You will be summoned.”

“You work for the defendant. You'll be believed, over me, an innocent citizen?”

Diarmid took a step forward. “Sir. If you are being forced to cooperate in this case—”

Arran laughed. “I am being paid. No one forces me.”

“Who,” Diarmid asked, “is paying you?”

Arran considered, looking from Hand to Diarmid and back. A shriek from the stage made Hand jump. Some female character had just been given her death wound, and the audience hushed, waiting.

“Miss Elizabeth Farweather,” Arran said. “She is paying me. She wants her father locked up.”

“Oh, good lord! No, no. Stop lying.”

“I am not lying, lad. She is a basilisk, that one. A modern medusa. A gelder of men.”

“Why would she lead a case against her own theatre?”

“Malice. A woman like that? She doesn't need a reason. She loves to break men and leave them crippled, just for the pleasure of it. She wants her father broken, led weeping to the gallows.”

“What proof do you have of this?” Diarmid asked.

“I don't need proof,” said Arran, smiling. “I know it, because she is paying me.”

“Why should we believe you?” Hand asked.

Arran shrugged. “Because she is breaking your neck on the same stone. She is your ruin, boy! She is the witch's apprentice, the collector of poisons. Think about it. She has corrupted you, made you fawn over her, and now she loathes you, hates you. She longs for the moment where she can at last snap you in two, and reveal how wretched you are in her eyes. That's what women are like! They plot and undermine without reason, without logic, without a trace of shame. They can't help it, and they don't want to help it, neither.”

Applause broke out across the theatre, a massive, all encompassing wave.

Hand said, “You are just trying to get revenge on Lizzie. Because of the past.”

“I am being well-paid to co-operate in this case. Very well paid. And even better, I loathe the Farweathers. Those smug, self-righteous dealers with the wickedest of dark powers! I regret every day I did not order their deaths. Aye, this work, to pretend to be her father's enforcer, was a pleasure for me. I was more than happy to oblige. If you want me, instead, to help that same family, you had better reward me far and beyond my current reimbursement.”

Diarmid asked, “How much?”

“I want Elizabeth Farweather's theatre. Hand, you are the treasurer. You control the books, the funds her family has raised from men all over the city. You will turn over the books to me. I will keep the money intact, more or less. The damn building will still go up. But I will draw on the funds as I see fit, and repay those withdrawals at my leisure. You will conceal my involvement from the Farweathers, too, doctoring the numbers and so on. And then I will withdraw my accusation against your Douglas. That is my offer. The theatre in exchange for your master's freedom.”

“We will tell the court about this threat,” Hand said. He could never surrender the theatre fund to Arran. Lizzie would despise him if she ever learned of it.

“No,” said Arran, absolutely secure. “I doubt it. Because I will tell them, in return, that you too have abused the sanctity of the law. You know things you should not know, aye? My name, for instance. It was agreed that my name would stay secret, for my own protection, and yet you have learned it. How? You have been naughty little lads, haven't you?” Hand could not think of a reply. He did not know how to compel Arran. There seemed no way forward.

The theatre rocked with a second round of tumultuous applause. Arran raised his massive arms, accepting the praise being showered on the stage. “Now you must leave. Yes, you must go, move along. My lady love comes to visit. She has been murdered. I must restore her to life.”

Hand and Diarmid walked back to Farweather and MacLeish in silence. The fog was heavy, chill and damp. There was no way forward, not without Arran's cooperation.

At the door, Diarmid asked, “Did you credit anything he said, about Lizzie being the villain of the piece?”

“Not at all. He hates her for an old feud of theirs. But I don't know what's behind the lie. I don't know what he is hiding.” Arran, as before, seemed to defy insight, opaque to calculation. He was a monstrous force, far beyond anyone's grasp.

“You can't do what he says. You can't give him the key to the subscriptions.”

“Oh, I know. Still. There must be some way to intimidate him, force him to tell the court the truth.”

Hand walked into the office, calling on his clerk to get the fire going, brew them some coffee. The day's damp cold had seeped under his coat, and the inside of the building was no warmer than the outdoors. He went to the sitting room and found, in the chair in the corner, Miss Sahar, Lizzie's maid. Lizzie was standing beside her, dressed for cold weather.

As he looked at Lizzie, Hand found himself, despite his wishes, recalling Arran Thomas's crude slurs, his talk of Lizzie being a demon, a medusa. She met his eye with a discontented, frustrated air.

He said, “You were right about Arran Thomas being involved.”

“But he isn't our real enemy, is he? You were right, it's turned out. Something strange and bizarre is involved. It isn't just Arran's revenge.”

Hand felt very curious to hear Lizzie talk like this. Perhaps she was closer to discussing the events of their youth than he had imagined.

Lizzie put her hand on her maid's shoulder. “Tell them, Sahar, please.”

Miss Sahar did not rise. "You are looking for Mr. Tyler Cavenar's properties."

"I was." Tyler's name had been nowhere in the court's records. He had to be innocent.

"You are trying to find the different properties he keeps. That's right, isn't it? Well, he has one you don't know about. Tyler keeps a room down in the Grass Market."

Hand looked at Lizzie, uncomfortable to have her standing there, overhearing this. "He has a few houses."

"Not this one. Not like this. Someone has taken it over, and made it awful. It's a dirty, terrible room. I took a glance at it myself. It's full of drawings, weird pictures. Got strange old masks on the wall. It's like this person was sketching out pictures of a wood, a forest, and pinning them up everywhere. It's mad."

"Pictures of a forest?"

"It stinks. It's filthy."

Hand looked at Lizzie.

She shrugged. "I thought you had better know. I'm certain this isn't Tyler's own work, these crazed pictures and masks. But you need to see it."

Diarmid asked Sahar, "Will you take us there?"

She looked at Hand. "I will, but I want to talk to Mr. Hand, alone, first. It's private."

Lizzie looked annoyed. "Just take us there, please, Sahar, before the rain comes back."

“I will take you,” Sahar said, “and you're lucky that I will, because you'd never find it otherwise. But there's one condition. You'd better wait in the other room for a quick minute.”

Once Lizzie had left, and the door was closed, Sahar leaned forwards, and indicated for Hand to come close. “Do you want to see this room? Aye? Well, you have to promise me something, Mr. McLeish. It's about your children.”

“I don't have any.”

“The children you will have. With Miss Farweather.”

Hand was concerned he might be blushing. “Sahar. Lizzie is about to marry someone else. She is due to marry Tyler.”

“I will believe it when I see it.”

“What? You have seen it! Lizzie has made her decision.”

“It's the wrong decision! She shouldn't marry Tyler. She loves you. It doesn't make any sense to marry Tyler.”

Hand couldn't reply. Lizzie was in the next room, and he felt too aware of her presence to speak.

Diarmid asked Sahar what promise she wanted Hand to make.

“I want you promise, Mr. McLeish, that when you are a father, you won't lead your children into atheism. Not like you are.”

Hand took a few moments to comprehend her point. “But I'm not an atheist.”

“I know you are.”

“I attend church every Sunday!”

Sahar tutted this point away. "You can't be questioning everything, you know, the way you do, not when the wee ones are around. Asking this, asking that. If they end up like you because of their own wills, that's one thing. But you have to give them time. You can't block God's love from coming into their hearts."

"Then you'll show us where Tyler's secret house is?"

"Aye." It would be easy to offer Sahar what she wanted: it was an unenforceable contract. If Tyler had been drawing pictures of the horned man, Hand had to see it.

Diarmid nodded. "That seems reasonable, lad. It seems a reasonable request."

"I am really," Hand asked her, "so terrible?"

"Aye," said Sahar. "For most women, aye. I would tell any lass to run away from you. But Lizzie is a special case, and you suit her. That's why I approve."

"The trouble is, she told me to forget her. To find someone else."

"I cannae tell what she's doing! We talked and talked about it, of course. Talked and talked and talked. At last, she decided. She was going to let Master Tyler down. She was going to ask him to release from her promise. He frightened her, you know? She didn't know what to say to him. But she was going to do it, to ask him to let her go, so she could marry you. She had made up her mind. And then she didn't."

"Was," Hand asked, "she afraid what society would say?"

"When is she ever worried about that? Nae, she was ready. And she went out for a long walk, to make up the last piece of her mind, and when she came home, she looked me right in the face and said she was still going to marry Tyler. I told her she had to be paralytic, that she was a fool. I said she didn't have to marry neither of you, if she was so

undecided. She could forget both of you and find someone else. She insisted. It was going to be Tyler. That was her choice.”

Diarmid asked, “What made her change her mind?”

“Don't know. No clue! She just needs time to see she's wrong. I think she's distracted, right now, what with all that's going on. Her father locked away. The theatre in trouble. She's not sleeping. If we could just take all of that away, and she had time to properly think things through, she would—”

Hand asked, “How do you know that the house is Tyler's?”

“I was there when he bought it.”

“Very well,” Diarmid said. “Please, take us there.”

“First, he has to promise. About their children.”

Hand crouched down in front of Sahar. It would very simple to give her the right answer: for one, he didn't think he was an atheist. But he felt Lizzie close by, in the next room, standing among his records and boxes of papers, and he knew what she would hope he would say.

“I'm sorry. I'm very sorry. But everything you've said about Lizzie has inspired me. I'm imagining what she would say, in my position. Would she agree to this promise? She would not, wouldn't she?”

Sahar glared at him.

“I can't promise to hide from my children who I am,” Hand said, “or how I see the world.”

“You are a pompous bastard,” said Diarmid.

“Now, I do promise,” Hand said, “to raise any children I might have with a strong regard —”

“Those poor wee bairns!” Sahar cried. “Those poor wee things, lost in the dark without any guidance. I hope the Lord has pity on them. All right. Let's go. I'll show it to you.”

Lizzie and Sahar walked some distance ahead in the misting, cold rain.

“Would it have been so very hard to have just reassured her?” Diarmid quietly asked, annoyed.

“I didn't want to—”

“I know, I know. But you should have, though. You should have agreed.”

“I should have told her a lie?”

“It's not really a lie. It's that simple, not anymore. You'll see. Soon enough, all declarations of faith, at least for a certain class of society, will be a lie. Soon enough. You'll see. It'll be a sympathetic lie, in which we play along, we act out a part, in order to support the faith of those below us. We will enable them to have faith on our behalf. We will protect them, lie for them—lie *to* them—because we know the value of what we've lost.” As they walked down West Bow, Hand could not decipher the plain meaning of Diarmid's comments. The poor were hardly the bastions of religious feeling. In fact, the poorest people he knew did not even go to church. They couldn't afford standing room, let alone a pew, and even if they could, they likely wouldn't make the time.

“Lizzie is in love with me,” Hand said, watching her walking twenty feet ahead, in conversation with Sahar. “But she is going to marry Tyler.”

“Have you considered, perhaps, talking? You should. Find out what's in her mind.”

“I have!”

“It doesn't sound like it.”

“I did. She told me to abandon her.”

“I don't mean talking *to* her. I don't mean *you* informing her what *you* feel. I mean you listening. Really listening. What frightens her? That's very interesting, isn't it? What's holding her back from jumping ship, of getting clear of Tyler? I'm curious of it myself.”

“I don't know, to be honest, if she would be comfortable doing that. Expressing feelings, you know? It's a very manly way of behaving. I once asked Johnson about this, about the way that women experience love, and he said—”

“Aye, aye. I can well guess what the Doctor said. A pile of horse-shit, most likely. A complete romantic failure—that's who you turned to for advice? The great Dr. Johnson! A man who has lived alone his entire life, who has been utterly unsuccessful in love of all kinds!” Diarmid's raised tone made Lizzie glance back, and Hand waved to reassure her, afraid they would be overheard.

Diarmid kept going: “What does that say about you, Mr. McLeish? What does that say about you, that you would seek romantic suggestions from a man like that? From lonely, melancholy Johnson! If he had given our Boswell a proper kiss on the lips, while they were out there in the highlands, camping on whatever sad hill they visited together, I maybe, possibly, would have begun to admire him. But no, by all accounts, he couldn't

manage even that. Nor did he behave decently with Mrs. Thrale. A romantic cripple, he is, and yet he tells young men what to believe about love. Do you see? Do you grasp it? You have to understand: there is a myth out there, a myth that all sorts believe in. The Doctor was just repeating it to you, thinking he had dreamed it up himself. The whole story about Adam and his Eve, yes? You'll be happier when you see that it's just a story. That's the point. It's just a miserable story."

"Hold on," Hand said. "You're the evangelical. And you're telling me that the Garden of Eden is a myth?"

Diarmid smiled, his eyes suddenly full. "Well—"

"We're here," called Sahar. "It's down this way."

She led them to a beaten-down narrow lane, one that Hand didn't think he had ever before explored. Washing hung overhead from low-strung lines; food scraps and rags were piled around each house's front steps. These shabby houses possessed neither youth nor stature: they seemed old enough to have survived from some past Edinburgh, some remnant of a predecessor city, from before the flood. From the doorway of one house, a pregnant woman with a pink round face observed Hand and his guide, smiling at them.

Hand turned to Lizzie. "Would you have ever guessed Tyler would rent a place like this?"

She regarded the humble street with concern. "This is not what I pictured, no."

Sahar led them to one house's side entrance, its frame fallen nearly a foot underneath the street proper. She gestured for Hand to come first, to follow her down a run of eight or so stairs, a brief uncandled flight that led to the cellar's door.

“You ladies had better let us go in alone,” Hand said. “Wait here.”

Sahar shrugged. “I’m the one with the key.”

“This could be dangerous.”

Lizzie was not impressed. “It’s my theatre.”

Hand could only watch as she followed Sahar down.

The door to the cellar was unlocked. The room, aside from the faint shine of a corner window, was dark and completely still. The stink was terrible, sheets and clothes too rarely changed, food scraps left inside too long. On two walls a great collection of masks was mounted, foreign masks of grinning gods and horrified demons. Many masks of Far Eastern provenance stared outwards in the gloom, all of peculiar design. In these shadows, even that amiable fellow, the Buddha, seemed a menacing, cruel bully.

“Good Lord,” Lizzie said, covering her mouth.

As Hand eased in, something of considerable size shook and rattled on the door: he reached round, finding on its back the head-dress of an African spirit, a tall mask of wavy shape, at least three feet high from chin to brow. He ran his fingers over the mask’s curves, admiring the maker’s skill, the wood cut so thin and fine. More such masks were piled up on an unmade day bed. A few books, too, had been stabbed into the walls, thick heavy tomes with ornate covers that someone had nailed into the wood.

Diarmid closed the door behind them. “What is wrong with our Mr. Cavenar?”

Lizzie turned. “This isn’t Tyler. He’s not interested in masks.” Hand was not convinced, but he refrained from saying so. “Someone knew Tyler wasn’t using the room. This person turned the dingy little place into his hideaway, his own private bedlam.” She

examined one of the books on the wall, shaking her head. “This is a copy of Newton, with the first half missing. Is our mysterious friend opposed to gravity?” The books had been cut down the spine by a hasty, repeated hacking. This, Hand felt sure, was the work of Granny Wynd's rageful, sea-faring gentleman. Here was his hideout, the place where he boiled in anger against the city. Where he plotted Lizzie's death.

Diarmid asked Hand to join him on the other side of the small room. He spoke in a whisper. “Hand. What is going on here? You seem far too unsurprised. You believe this tells us something about our case. But what is it?”

Hand could not tell Diarmid anything about Granny Wynd's pronouncements, not with Lizzie close by. “Someone is opposing Lizzie's theatre for very extreme reasons.”

“You think the trees drawn by this madman are supposed to be the trees of the Shambles? Have you seen the Shambles? It's a sad little patch of weeds. I have known sunflowers taller than those trees.”

What Hand had previously taken, in the gloomy near-dark, to be blank spaces on the crowded walls, he now saw were hand-drawn paintings, dark rough sketches that depicted jagged forests, each trunk a violent upwards strike with the brush, or oddly distant mountains, with nothing penciled in around them. In three different pictures, Tyler, or whoever had decorated the cellar, had drawn a silhouette of a head with long, vertical horns. One depiction of a forest, the brutal pines crossing the whole length of the three-foot page, however, seemed somehow familiar in its proportions—the sheet of paper itself, not the picture—and Hand peeled back the corner to find, on the reverse side,

an architectural map of Edinburgh's new town, one of Craig's original designs. It was strange to see Tyler interested in architecture. Had he stolen the papers from Douglas?

"There's something special," Hand said, not wanting to tell Diarmid too much, "about the Shambles themselves. Or at least, that's what our enemy thinks. He thinks it's important to preserve them. The Shambles matter, to him." Outside the house, in the street, a flock of birds swooped, turning in the breeze, exchanging sharp quick calls. Their cries were louder than Hand expected, and he forgot for a moment that he stood underground. The pressure that Hand felt everyday in the city, the force of Granny Wynd's spell, the constriction which enclosed his skull and made him long for each evening's glass of wine, seemed to pulse, rising in power.

"Look at this," said Sahar, leaning over a desk heaped with scribblings. "He's talking about you."

The script was crude and jagged, and much of what had been written was impossible to make out. Granny Wynd's spell waxed, its waves of force making Hand wince, and he had to struggle to make out the words scribbled unevenly on the page.

"...As the birthing day approaches, the mothers retreat, shun the community, the distractions of normal life.... Hand McLeish is among the principal reasons for the city's decline... A plague-carrier..."

Lizzie was leaning against Hand's side, pressing against him without thought.

"Birthing day? Who is this fierce little lunatic?"

Diarmid took in a breath, turning. "What was that?"

Upstairs, the door to the street was being unlocked. Diarmid glanced around the crowded, fetid room, searching for a hiding place. Lizzie, gripping Sahar, backed away against the one free wall.

Hand heard the house's door swing, and footsteps come down the stairs. Just one man's feet, he guessed, feeling relieved. Who was this? Was it Tyler? Sahar was staring at him, standing perfectly still, trying not to breathe. Hand prepared to explain their presence to the man on the stairs, but through the door, it was as though he could almost see Tyler there, his shadow replaced by a huge, horned giant. There was nowhere to hide in the room, and the only door was the one they had come through. He glared at Lizzie, letting her know she should have stayed above ground. Again, the whirl of wings rose up like a thunder clap, seeming very close, as though a flock enclosed the entire house. A fresh breeze drifted on the air.

The door was shoved open. Sahar screamed. A man came in, heavy of shoulder, his right arm outstretched, his head hunched low. He was not Tyler. His face was unclear in the room's half light, and he held a pistol. Diarmid threw a mask at the intruder, who ducked, unconcerned. He seemed startled, however, by the number of people in the cellar, and although he held his ground, he seemed unsure how to handle the room, pointing the barrel first at Diarmid and then at Sahar. It was Arran's guard from the Royal Theatre, Arran Thomas's henchman, the man with the freezing cold eyes. He was a killer, Hand already knew. He would use that pistol.

Hand shouted, begged the man to lowered his weapon, but instead he seemed to settle on a target, pointed it at Lizzie, as though ready to shoot. Hand charged at the

criminal, shoving him backwards. The man staggered, knocked against the door frame, and he waved his pistol in Hand's direction. A flash in the dark, and the air burned with gunpowder, and Hand was knocked by a terrible strike to his chest. The impact shoved him back, knocking him down, whipping out all his air. Hand stumbled back across the room, his balance gone, and he fell back against the desk, his side numb. Voices were crying out unclearly. A woman – Sahar? – gripped his side, and he tried to stay on his feet, a sear of agony lurching through him as he lost his grip on the desk's chair and fell.

He heard the sounds of a brawl, a struggle. Shouting. He tried again to stand, and the pain made him cry out. He thought he heard his attacker run back up the stairs, and the door slam behind him.

“Oh my God.” Lizzie was leaning over him. “Oh no.”

“Go,” Diarmid was telling her. “Get help, both of you. Make sure there's no one waiting outside, and find a doctor.”

Sahar asked, “But what about—”

“Go.”

They ran, leaving Diarmid and Hand alone.

Diarmid unbuttoned Hand's shirt, and once he had opened it, he looked scared, very scared. “Stay awake, please. Stay awake.”

Hand did not think he would fall asleep. The room was dark and he had to get out, had to talk to the doctor before any decisions about surgery were made.

He opened his eyes. “Arran tried to have us killed.”

Diarmid was checking his coat's pockets, searching his bag. "Maybe. His henchman did not appear very well prepared." Through the ceiling, the birds cried out, sounding oddly close now, as though they had flown into the upstairs rooms. The breeze, too, seemed to sweep in with them, as though a window had been thrown open.

Diarmid pulled a handkerchief from his lawyer's bag, and folded it, pressing it down on Hand's ribs, showing Hand how to staunch the wound.

"You can breathe," Diarmid said, "so your lungs weren't hit. Only, you keep bleeding. That's our problem."

Hand felt afraid, suddenly, afraid of death. All thought of Arran Thomas and the Shambles fled from his mind. He understood, in the next moment, that despite what he had told Sahar, he had no faith in a life after this one, no faith at all. He saw only darkness ahead, and the absence of everyone he loved.

Diarmid pulled off his own coat, and rolled it up, placing it under Hand's head. "Is there anything clean in this whole damn house?"

Above, the birds had grown louder still. The sharp calls of the finches had been joined by shriller, longer calls, and the room's old stink had been blown from the room, leaving only a cold air of just-fallen rain and the sharp tint of forest pine. The masks, the cluttered day bed, the heavy chest in the corner: their edges seemed to lack clarity, somehow, as though their physical presence had become ambiguous. Hand had felt in pain before, and his feet were cold, but now his breath caught, his heart racing. His throat tightened and he found it hard to breathe. He could feel the gathering force of Granny

Wynd's spell. It was gaining in power. The spell was being drawn into this one room, focusing, solidifying. Something terrible, he knew, was on its way.

“Diarmid,” he said. “You have to go.” Diarmid didn't hear him: he was searching for a clean sheet or towel. The spell grew stronger, its force sinking on Hand, crushing his chest. A fog seemed to be drifting across the ceiling. The walls, too, seemed to have grown further away.

“Diarmid. The horned man.” Something was coming.

Diarmid turned around. Hand saw him start, look left, right. Diarmid's eyes seemed unfocused, as though he no longer saw anything in front of him.

“What is happening?” Diarmid asked.

Hand reached for the desk, taking hold with great effort of the desk's smooth leg, commanding his body to obey. He pulled himself to a sitting position.

“Go!” Hand cried. “You have to go.”

Diarmid shook his head. “I can't see the door. I can't—”

The enclosed, underground room was gone. A grey, wintry light had filled the space. And when Hand reached for the desk's corner, to properly get himself upright, he found himself reaching back and gripping a ragged, splintered tree-stump. His palm was damp from the lichen, the damp ivy, and the jagged trunk stabbed against his fingertips.

Everywhere he looked, he saw only a trackless, unbroken forest. The trees were immense and endless and they blocked out the sky.

“Oh, Jesus Christ,” Diarmid said, barely in a whisper. “Oh my good Lord.”

Hand could not make out what Diarmid had seen.

“Jesus Christ.” Diarmid was backing away.

“Run,” said Hand, “don't let it—”

Stars swam across his vision, and yet Hand managed to straighten his knees, get himself almost vertical. He looked, not believing his eyes, refusing to accept the great, cold trees standing in every direction. The city of Edinburgh might have never existed. This forest was deeply, impossibly wrong, and he would have vomited from nausea had he not been so weak. Hand's time-sense spun widely here, unable to make sense of any dimension.

Diarmid groaned, pointing. Hand could not see the tall, shadowy figure clearly: it was like in dreams, where you could not catch sight of the form that chased you. Very tall the creature was, his arms hanging low, too long to be a man's. Diarmid backed way. The horned man ran after, lumbering, unhurried. It gave chase with no urgency at all, already knowing the outcome.

Hand pushed himself up. His ribs screamed, stars blossomed in his sight, and the pain made him stumble, going light-headed. He fell, the ground swimming upwards to meet his face. He had to spit out a damp leaf, his hands mud-stained, the loamy scent of wet earth heavy around him.

Diarmid was screaming, screaming, screaming.

Hand jammed his eyes closed, reaching behind him for the tree he had abandoned, hoping to use its support to stand again. It was smooth. The bark was a smooth surface, not knotted and ridged at all. Smooth like the side of a desk.

Hand looked back, seeing only tree, only endless misty cold forest. But the smoothness on his fingertips remained. He could almost feel the cellar, the traces of the Edinburgh they had left behind. This place wasn't real. Despite the magic, these woods were still mostly dream, or whatever impossible substance it had been created from.

Hand closed his eyes. It's not real. Diarmid's cries were terrible, unbearable, but Hand just repeated his claim. It's not real here. It's not real.

Diarmid fell silent. The only sound was the chill wind. A massive shadow rose, walked over without haste, the leaves soft and wet under its feet. He stood over Hand, looking down. The giant was breathing hard, watching him, preparing to carry out the same murder he had just inflicted on Diarmid. This isn't real. Hand tried once more. He pushed as hard as he could, and, without warning, time, countable, human time, seemed to burst into this nightmare scene. The clocks of the city returned, whirring in confusion at this strange pocket of make-believe. It wasn't real. As the familiar world returned with a shudder, the giant shadow flinched in fear, taking a pace back, fading from sight.

The birds swooped and shrieked around him, and then fell silent. The breeze faded, and the smell of mud and pine drifted away.

Hand looked around. The stink had come back, and the forest's steely afternoon light had been replaced by the cellar's deep gloom. He was back in the cellar, and despite the leaves scattered across the floor, there was no sign of a mysterious wood, nor a giant with long arms. In the room's dark corner, he could make out Diarmid's body, thrown against a wall. Diarmid was not moving.

Hand could not keep his eyes open. He heard shouting upstairs, and people were coming down into the cellar, but he was fading, his strength gone.

Chapter Fourteen

The reek of the surgeon's tobacco-breath. Hand was in the firm's office, laid out on the table in the record room. He felt cold in his chest. This doctor busied about him, chattering to Calum, but Hand could see nothing of the man's face, as though his stink was so strong it broke down all other senses. Hand glanced around, the motion stabbing his chest with pain: Carina was also in the room, holding Miss Sahar by her shoulders. The doctor cut away the layers covering Hand's injury and peered down. What he saw there did not cheer him.

"A duel, lad? Foolish."

"It wasn't a duel," said Lizzie, from a place in the room Hand could not see.

"Where is Diarmid?" Hand asked. "Diarmid McDonald?"

"He hasn't lost that much," Calum pointed out, his voice sharp-edged. "It didn't hit anything bad, you said."

"Aye." The doctor's face, finally coming into Hand's sight, sported many broken veins, and his white hair bunched outwards over his ears. "But that doesn't mean he isn't dead." His fingers explored Hand's chest, and his second touch made Hand flinch away, crying out.

Hand sent his time-sense winging out, pushing his clocks to show him what was coming. But all he saw was a blank darkness, its indistinct borders close by. He lay on the edges of an endless opaque sea, and every passing second carried him a little further down the shore, drawing him closer to the still, dark waters. He pushed his clocks on,

urging them to go into that ocean, explore further, report back on the reaches that lay beyond death, but, as one, they recoiled, unable or unwilling to show him more, as if all the horrors of life, all the misery and fury, were not equal to one brief glimpse of death's great mansion.

Long contact with the jovial David Hume had broken Hand's trust of an afterlife. All his desires now centered about his own existence, the life he had tried to live until this point. He wanted, most of all, to speak to Lizzie Farweather, to ask her what was in her mind. He twisted round, looking for her, and the pain rose up and closed his eyes.

He came to in his own bed, aware with a start that considerable time had passed. His thoughts crawled with a groggy softness, like his brain was clothed in a wool glove. His back ached, however, like his spine was coming apart. Carina came in with a wine goblet.

"I feel—something's wrong."

"That's the laudanum. Drink more." There were so many pressing questions and fears—how much time had passed, for one—and Hand insisted he to be allowed to rise. He needed to talk to Diarmid, to see how the man's wounds were fairing. Carina, however, succeeded in getting him to absorb another dark cup, sinking him back into anxious blank sleep.

He was awakened by muted argument. The room's windows were wide open and the sunset was in full summer bloom, a great array of scarlet and cloud. In the room's corner, Carina was protesting the doctor's dosage levels, while the doctor and Lizzie were hushedly insisting that the planned schedule continue. And then, what felt like a moment later, Hand was alone again, and the room was bright with the noon sky. He lay there, the

sun in his eyes, glad for its warmth, the need to blink and squint feeling much like the pulse of life itself. Soreness ran down his side, and his chest felt squeezed to bursting where the bandage clasped him.

Diarmid was dead. The horned man had torn Diarmid apart.

He should have been prepared. He should have guessed that Arran would have alerted whoever had paid him, whoever was behind the case against Douglas. Was that Tyler? If so, Tyler would have to pay. As much as he liked Tyler, as grateful as he was for all of Tyler's help, justice would be done. Hand tried to think back to the cellar, the clues it contained, but against his will, his mind wavered from the tragedy, roaming from one thought to the next. Images from his own past flashed by without warning. He saw the town of Brighton again, and its pebble beach, where the air had been so warm on his face, the sea so cold. He saw his friend Evan, his companion in school, pouring over a dusty, manuscript, and he saw his old teacher, the miserable Mr. Frederick. Both of them had long ago been carried down to death.

He woke to find Lizzie sitting in the chair by the window. He tried to speak to her but did not seem able to open his mouth.

"I can't stop seeing his body," she said. "How—who could have done that? Maybe it was the horned man, just like you said." Hand did not remember saying this. But he was aware that he had lost track of time, and he did not know what he had said, or to whom. He wanted to reach for Lizzie, tell her to stop talking. She did not sound in good spirits.

"I can't deal with it. I'll never be able to sleep. Where did all those leaves come from? You could have killed him, someone said. That would actually make sense. While we

were gone, you could have killed Diarmid. But it's not possible, not wounded like that. Then I wondered if you had tricked me, if you had only pretended to be hurt. You pretended to be hurt so we would leave and you could kill Diarmid. Wouldn't that be better? It would make sense. It would be satisfying in that way. Only, you were hurt. And you didn't kill him. So you couldn't have done it. I still wonder where the leaves came from. There was a feeling in the air. It reminded me of something. The air felt like that night when Mr. Lane Waller died. When we did something. Something—I don't remember what it was. Only the city was changed. We must have done something because we wanted him dead, and then he was dead. Horribly. He was horribly killed. He killed himself. He killed himself. The air was different in that room. “

Hand begged her to stop, to stop tormenting herself, but he appeared to have made no actual sound, because after looking out the window, she continued.

“Do you remember we listened to Marshall play? I wish he would have played more songs. Isn't he remarkable? That was such a magical experience. That was it, I kept thinking. It. That really was it. That was life. People think that washing clothes and eating potatoes, they think that's life, but it isn't. That's just our punishment. Life is when it all makes sense, every moment. Every fraction of every moment making sense.”

She paused, considering thoughts private to herself.

“And then Tyler walked off. He nearly died out there. And you were asking him all your questions. It's like the two of you know a secret, the way you talk. You know, I often think that I have to turn away, stop marching towards—stop walking away from life. When Marshall played. That was it. That really was it. And when I wrote those

poems. That was a good time. But then you and Tyler start talking, and I know there's no hope. It's like I'm walking in a garden, beyond life, and I'm too far away to turn around.”

Hand, desperate to console Lizzie, commanded his limbs to move, tried to turn on the bed so he could sit up, but when, at last, he managed to twist himself, turn on his side, Lizzie was gone. He was alone in the room, and someone had changed his clothes.

He saw Diarmid at an unfamiliar kitchen table, three women hard at work behind him. It seemed as though they had been talking for a while. Diarmid was explaining in careful detail the meaning of the myth of Adam and Eve, smiling kindly while he spoke, and Hand was conscious of receiving a great revelation, but when that scene faded, Hand could remember nothing of what he had been told.

He heard people moving around downstairs, and he understood that all the time he had been injured, friendly bodies had occupied the house. He was being watched. Where was Arran Thomas? Would Arran's assassin return? His thoughts wandered on. He stood on the Leith links with Tyler, and, despite all the odds, and the iron-stiff breeze, and the drizzle misting in from the sea, he had watched his golf swing perfectly connect, the ball rising high and flying straight. Tyler raised his arms, admiring the hit.

His clocks whispered a great many things. His time-sense appeared more potent than usual, more excited, as though his clocks rejoiced to be free of his mind's customary control. He had been in bed four days, they told him—four days and five hours. He learned who had passed in and out of the room, and how many times the doctor had done an inspection. Tomorrow, Carina would run out of assigned tasks on Princes Street. She would need a new project.

Stranger sights came into view. Hand saw again his old vision of the two cities, flickering there in their immense sprawl, the future Edinburgh of good and evil. He trembled, afraid even to look upon them, but given no power to look away. The grand, gleaming, clean metropolis, its people free and self-taught, with vast storehouses of food and water. Its awe-inspiring streams of travel and communication, rapid roads firing ideas and human interactions across the land and sea. A great equality of healthy, joyful souls. And next to it, within it, alternating with it, the dark city, cruel and bordered, mindlessly productive, the population hurrying themselves to make, make, make, only to see the results of their restless toil dissipate in the breeze, their work forgotten the moment it was completed. Like the first city, the dark city's streets were clean, but to keep its stores full, to keep the city hale and well-fed, in far off nations, slaves in their millions dug fingers in the sewer-drenched mud.

Hand shook himself free of that vision, demanding his eyes to focus only on real city, the sunset and rooftops outside. But his clocks ran faster and faster, swirling back and forth with their unnamed rhythms. Wars of impossible scale paraded in his sight. Through the room's open window, he saw the summer sky interrupted by the flight of terrible engines, a hundred slender wings outstretched. Beneath them, whole cities burned in flames of eerie white and green. A flock of iron ships, birthed in the depths of unimaginable factories, raced across the night to destroy. This one awful flight, he assumed, watching in despair, would cast life from the Earth forever, the devastation too great to survive, a ruin to make even retaliation obsolete. But soon he saw his mistake. There appeared to be no end to death. More flying waves came and went, again and

again, firing from within the sea and from among the clouds, the death of one day so great that it contained within itself the sum of death of all past centuries. And war was not yet done. Hand jammed his eyes shut but continued to see: explosions assaulted city walls while inside the inhabitants starved. Women and children of a dozen different races wailed as they burned in terrible factories; cannons splashed acrid fluids on forests and melted them away. Soldiers recited sacred poems while the land upon which they fought became a graveyard of rock and steaming ooze. Armies of men were set on fire by blinding lights from the sky: above the planet, weapons untouched by human aim turned to look down on sprawling cities, silently extinguishing their life.

Hand cried out, begging to be released, and yet he still saw more destruction still, unable to make the visions cease.

Chapter Fifteen

He had stayed in bed too long, he knew. It would soon be mid-summer night.

Tyler was sitting beside the bed, watching him. The day was gloomy, and rain soft, the air fresh and clear. Tyler's face was shockingly pale. His eyes had lost their sharpness, and he appeared to hold himself upright in the chair only with discomfort. His extravagantly tailored blue coat only reinforced the weakness in his face.

"You look like you're going to survive," Tyler said. Hand could not tell, from how Tyler spoke, whether he considered this good news or bad.

"Is Elizabeth here? I need to talk to her."

"I wanted you to die, you know? When I heard you had been wounded, I mean. It would have been a lot easier for me, morally speaking, if you had died. But I'm glad to see you. You spent a few days worse off than me, but then you began to climb back towards health. I can practically smell the vitality."

"Did you murder Diarmid? Did you have him killed?"

"You already asked me that, remember? The first time I visited? Now, I need to ask you to behave. I understand you were nearly killed, and you watched a terrible thing happen to your friend, but I have a wedding to plan—and I can't have it interrupted. I just don't have the strength. Do you really not remember what you told Lizzie? You said that I was a monster, and that I sent a man to kill you. You said that I loved forests and hated people. You spoke about wars fought in the air, by flying ships."

"Aren't you the force behind the horned man? You control him."

Tyler looked at him. “The figure in my dreams? Maybe. I don't think I control him. I failed to do what he asked, I know. But I tried. I thought if I did what he asked, I would be allowed to keep on going – at least until my wedding.”

“What was that? What was he asking you to do?”

“He wanted me to save the world. That's what he was telling me. That it was on my shoulders. Only, I was a disappointment.” Tyler shifted in his chair. “I'm so glad we can talk like this. Just you and me. Here's something else: I know what you want me to do. I do, and I don't disagree with your arguments. It's very reasonable!”

Hand did not know what this meant.

“I know what you want me to do. And I can't blame you. You would like it if I backed away, surrendered Lizzie. After all, I am sick. Very sick. It would make sense for me to give up my hopes for her. The interesting thing is, I agree with you, intellectually speaking. But I'm not going to do it.”

Hand raised himself up. His chest was still bound, but he could move himself without bringing tears to his eyes.

“Did you see,” he asked, “the cellar? Your cellar?”

“I didn't. Remember, we told you? Someone started a fire in that house. After you were carried out, and Mr. McDonald's body was removed, someone broke in and burned everything in the cellar. The whole house was ruined.”

“It was your cellar! You rented it.”

“I paid the rent, yes, but I hadn't visited it in months. I explained that. I have no idea who was using the room. Someone connected to Arran Thomas, I suspect.”

Hand watched Tyler, unsure if he had falsely accused the best man in Edinburgh, or if he was looking at a lunatic, a murderer.

Tyler said, "I thought about it. Over the winter, I actually made a vow. After Nice, and my—my attack. To give Lizzie up. I couldn't ask her to marry this heap of worm-food, could I? No. I should leave her to another man, a good fellow who cares for her. Only, when I arrived home, I found that I couldn't. I couldn't do it."

Hand felt chilled by Tyler's eerily calm manner. "Why don't you delay the wedding?" he asked, wondering how Tyler would reply. "There seems to be some kind of conspiracy attached to mid-summer night. Postpone it a few days, and I promise, I'll tell everyone I was wrong to accuse you."

"Come now. Don't lie. You would do anything to poison me in Lizzie's ears. You have even turned her servant against me."

"Because I am afraid for her life."

"Oh, no need to justify yourself. I don't judge." Tyler's eyes seemed to shine with pale fire. He stood. "I have endured too much for that, you understand?" Although he spoke softly, his voice seemed to have grown in force. "I don't care what you try to do. I am too much for you, Hand. I could buy this little enterprise of yours without blinking. I could have you locked up for anything I feel like. That's what it means, my money. That's what I can do. It was me who raised you up, remember, me who introduced you to the grand and the good. It was me who paid your way in London and all those other cities. I'm not suggesting you owe me a thing: you don't. Only that you cannot prevent me from getting what I want. I am going to work very hard to please the horned man, and

then I am going to get married. After that, if the whole world is no more, I won't much mind."

Hand still did not know for sure that Tyler was his enemy. But the evidence was too great.

"I'm leaving now," Tyler said. "Don't hurt our friendship any more, all right?"

The next morning, Hand drank coffee with Carina and Calum downstairs. He learned that ten days had passed without his full consciousness, and now Lizzie's wedding was only a week away. At first, the firm had held back a funeral for Diarmid, hoping Hand could recover in time, but when he had not, Diarmid had been buried in a quiet ceremony. Douglas had been allowed out of house arrest to attend.

"How is Lizzie's theatre doing?" Hand asked. "The subscription fund?"

"Poorly," said Carina. "People are withdrawing. Maybe half the money is left." The warmth of the coffee soothed Hand's hurts. He throbbed all down his back, and his legs were weak, trembling under his weight when he walked.

Calum said, low, "You remember the dream my wife had? She had it again. The same dream, but worse, this time. She woke with a black eye, like someone had thumped her. What does it mean?"

Hand sipped his coffee. "It means there's no more time." He had been holding back. He had kept his genius out of sight. But no more. Now he would use his powers to their fullest.

Calum went to the record room, and came back with a wicker basket. “You got a lot of gifts. You can have a look when you feel ready. But you might be surprised about this one. Someone we haven't spoken to in a few years.”

The high-brimmed basket bore the stamp of William's, the butcher. It contained packages of salted beef and smoked hams wrapped in wax paper, decorated with sprigs of dried rosemary and thyme.

The card read: “Best wishes. Granny Wynd.”

Hand carried the basket of gifts back to Granny Wynd. The climb up the stairs of Tallow's Land knocked out his strength, forced him to stop halfway for breath. He found Granny Wynd waiting for him. She had no customers and on the landing, the little girl, her niece, watched him pass without words. Hand closed the door behind him.

“What have you done to Tyler Cavenar?”

“Nothing.”

Her mockery roused Hand's anger. “You knew that Douglas Farweather would have created the light city, the good city, had he completed his design. So you attacked his plans, turned his friends against him.”

“I am glad to see you are well. I wondered whether I should visit, help you heal, or press a pillow down on your face. But I decided, I regret to say, to let your fate be your own.”

“You showed me a city. That night we—with Mr. Waller. The night we killed him. You showed me how you wanted the city to turn out.”

“When we dispatched that so-superior lawyer? That was a special occasion, indeed. But I saw no cities that night.”

“You showed it to me.”

“I received a sight, yes, as you say. Received it, but did not give.”

She continued to jab at him with riddles. He could feel, too, that old original Granny Wynd force, that hurricane brewing inside her skull.

“This horned man. That's what Tyler called it. This monster—”

“He will appear to the city on mid-summer night. That's the moment his creator has chosen. He will appear at Elizabeth Farweather's wedding. He will murder her. And then he will walk into Edinburgh, and cause quite legendary destruction.”

“Who is the horned man? What is it?”

“The horned man is two things, as far as I can see. He is a harmless village tale, a festival that the Shambles has carried out in recent years. Welcoming the summer, or the forest, the harvest, or whatever people in the country have festivals for. The village simpleton, if one is handy, is asked to play the horned man. But then there is the other horned man, the one you encountered as you bled from your bullet wound, the horned man that your bitter sea-faring gentleman believes he has found. This is the creature that he brought with him out of a nightmare, the shadow that was given life by the spell you and I cast. Now, privately, I think your gentleman is merely confused. He attributes his own rage to a harmless village ritual. But the result is the same. Now, that small, provincial festival will unleash something remarkably destructive.”

“Many people have seen this horned man. He has attacked my brother's wife.”

“Yes, indeed. Your enemy is teaching it to roam, to know what malice is. It is learning, slowly.”

Hand paused. Granny Wynd might have just revealed more than she intended.

“So,” Hand said, “if I tear down the Shambles, burn every plant and weed, raze it from fence to fence, won't the horned man be weakened? If he is tied to that place?”

Granny Wynd looked at him. “You won't have the chance. The master of the horned man is quite resourceful. He is well-poised in Edinburgh.”

“Do you mean Tyler Cavenar? Or Arran Thomas?”

“He is too cunning for you. He has blocked all your efforts.”

“Only because I was holding back,” Hand said. “That's over. I'm going to free Douglas. I'm going to destroy the Shambles. And I'm going to destroy your horned man.”

“Understand me, child. I have created this spell, and even as it changes itself, grows beyond my grasp, I will keep it safe. I will defend it even if the effort to do so means a struggle with you, with your friends, with this entire wretched town. I will fight you, even if it means my own death.”

The high street was crowded with families loading their possessions onto coaches, departing for their country homes or for journeys abroad. The city was frightened, and many who should have been out, walking the high street on their daily errands, stayed indoors.

Hand walked the street with Granny's warning livid in his ears. She frightened him, would always frighten him. And he was not yet healed, his chest aching, his breath frail.

But if she believed that he was boxed in, trapped, she was mistaken. Already, his clocks were whispering. The first step was to find Arran Thomas and get the truth from him. Since the arrest of his killer, Arran had been dodging the search parties of the guard, who wanted him for questioning. But Hand had abilities that the authorities did not, and he knew Arran Thomas had not left Boxer's Close. Arran was hiding out in his own house.

Granny Wynd thought she could stop him. She was wrong. Hand told himself this, over and over.

Boxer's Close had grown only more crowded with time. In the last ten years, the surrounding lanes had grown heavier with occupants, and the close, once the shunned orphan of a universally gregarious city, was itself now something of a social heart. Hand limped into the close, out of breath and sore, the bandage around his ribs gripping him like it meant to squeeze the air from his lungs. He overheard many northern accents, as well as the Gaelic of the highland types. Everyone seemed to have something for sale: poverty in great enough numbers, it seemed, had brought its own kind of jovial, erratic peace. But as Hand passed through the small, shadowy square, no one tried to win his attention. The scowl which he wore seemed to isolate him from the close, his eyes not recommending approach.

Hand did not care who tried to stop him. He knocked on the door to Arran's land and, when the door opened, he pushed past the large man who blocked his entrance. He expected resistance, but instead the other man fell back, losing his footing, seemed to struggle for breath. Hand did not waste any time looking back. He heaved himself up the spiral staircase.

Arran Thomas's great room was as large as Hand remembered. Instead of sitting on his great chair in the room's middle, however, Arran was relaxing by the fireplace. The lawyer, Sir Leicester, slouched in the seat that faced him. Men moved to stop Hand, but Arran waved them away, amused. The woman who had been refilling Sir Leicester's coffee stepped away.

“Hand!” said Arran, licking his lips. “I am sorry for your injury. And I had nothing, absolutely nothing, to do with your friend's unhappy end. It was never the plan. That truly was not my goal.”

“Mr. Thomas,” said Sir Leicester, “has told you the truth. He played no role in those unfortunate accidents.” Hand was dimly aware that he should be outraged that Sir Leicester, whom Diarmid had hired, was also working for Arran Thomas, but he could not find the space to be concerned. He simply wanted the truth from Arran's mouth.

He stared down at Arran. “You lied to me. You said Lizzie had hired you.”

“Why would I try to deceive you? We are allies. Allies against the female sex.”

Arran's smile, mocking and superior, only pushed Hand into a deeper rage.

“Who is the horned man? Who, really?”

Arran pointed a scolding finger. “You seem to be forgetting your manners. This is my house, remember? You assume I will allow you to barge into my home, babbling about this and that.” His eyes said: whatever my actions, there is nothing you can do.

“You are going to recant your testimony. Take it all back. Douglas is going free tomorrow, do you understand?”

“No, boy. I won't do anything of the sort. Unless you have come to offer me the full rights to your theatre, in which case—”

Hand sent his clock-sense into Arran's form, examining him, listening to the old man's heartbeat. He saw the great wildness of Arran's life-force, his erratic, tiger-ish pattern that obeyed no reason but its own. A thriving jungle that lived in his brain. Hand grabbed Arran's wrist—Arran tried to snatch his arm away, but was too slow—and, meeting Arran's blinking eyes, he squeezed. Hand's anger pushed all thought aside, and he pressed down on Arran's life. Arran was crying out, shaking, but Hand did not stop. Without knowing how, Hand called down one of his clocks, a dull, lengthy rhythm, one that took several hours to make a single beat, and he urged that clock into Arran's chest. Arran's eyes sprang wide, his mouth opening for air. He twisted, shaking, lunging his wrist free of Hand's grip. Hand let him go, but kept up his control: the old thief shook in his chair, unable to breathe, his lips purpling. Although Arran's men surrounded Hand, they only stared down at their employer, choking in his seat.

“Who hired you?”

Arran waved an arm, begging for Hand to release him. “Lizzie! I said! She's a demon!”

“Tell me the truth.”

“I don't know! That's the truth! I don't know! I was just paid to make a testimony. I don't know who asked for it. I don't! I promise!” Arran was choking, his voice weakening. “I only told you it was Lizzie because I hate her.”

Hand released him. Arran's bodyguards backed away.

“Sir Leicester,” Hand said. “You are going to take down a new testimony from Mr. Thomas. He is going to recant his accusation. He will admit Douglas's complete innocence. Isn't that right, Mr. Thomas?”

Arran, shaking in his chair, tried to shout, but his breath had not come back to him: “Never.”

Hand took a step forward, and Arran shrank back, cowering away.

“I will! I will! I'll do it. Now get out of here. Go, you bastard.”

It was night before everything was in place. At Marian's house, Hand met the two lawyers he had hired for the occasion: Sir Leicester and the white-haired Mr. MacLode. In the countess's sitting room, MacLode took down fresh testimonies from both Pete McNiece and Arabella Carver. Candles burned as Sir Leicester explained, line by line, the statements they would sign, and the contract with Hand's firm that they were agreeing to.

“If I sign this,” Arabella said, “your firm will pay me the agreed amount?”

Hand nodded. “The money from the sale of the Shambles will be yours. And you will be kept safe, too.”

The two heirs to the Shambles would be taken out of Edinburgh by couriers, brought to a town on the other side of Scotland, where they would be hidden until mid-summer night had come and gone.

Hand watched as first Arabella, and then Peter, signed the papers. It was done. The case against Douglas would tomorrow collapse.

Hand went over to his foreman, Carina, and checked the couriers were ready.

She nodded. "Everything is ready. It'll be a bumpy ride, but they'll be safe. McNiece will be in one coach, and Arabella will be going with her companion in the other." Hand turned, following Carina's eyes to Arabella Carver, whose face was gently illuminated by a nearby lamp. Her servant, or friend—Hand was not sure which—waited patiently as Arabella spoke to Sir Leicester.

Carina sighed. "Beautiful, isn't she?"

Hand had to agree. "Maybe while she and Peter are in hiding, romance will blossom. They now both have a livelihood, after all. They are quite eligible, suddenly."

Carina seemed amused by his comment. "You're not so observant, are you, sir?"

Hand did not know what this meant. "Explain."

Carina shook her head. "If you need to ask—"

Marian came over, bringing Hand a glass of port. She reached for his chest, brushing his coat with the faintest of touches.

"You can't die," she said. "You cannot. Who would take me dancing?"

"Everyone would."

She shook her head. "I'm so, so sorry about Diarmid. He was a good man."

"He was."

"Have you been to his grave? Have you said goodbye?"

"I will. Soon."

"Lad! You've won. You've done it. Tomorrow Douglas will be free."

Hand thanked Marian, but he knew it wasn't true. As Granny Wynd had said, his enemy was resourceful. Before anything could happen with the Shambles, he had to cut Tyler down to size, remove from him the awesome scope of his wealth. Tyler thought he was invulnerable, but he was wrong. The way to weaken him was shameful, and it turned Hand's stomach. He could feel the absent Diarmid staring at him, disgusted, but he had no choice. Even if Lizzie never spoke to him again, Hand could not allow Tyler the chance to retaliate.

The next morning, Hand stood in front of a long table in the Cavenar mansion. Outside, the day was bright, but the room was so large, and its windows so short and thin, that the faces of Tyler's relatives was hard to make out. Although Hand's throat was dry, and faintness swirled in his head, he stood and made his case about Tyler's ill health, watching the expression of Tyler's mother as he spoke. Conley Cavenar-Dunley stood by his side, nodding as he spoke.

Tyler's uncle, William Cavenar, one of the cruelest members of a family renowned for amorality, surprised Hand with his hesitant tone. "Tyler is an enemy of this house. And, personally, I despise him. He has gone behind my back over and over. He is openly trying to ruin us. But he is the heir. Even if he is sickly, as long as he remains breathing, he is the heir. That is the law."

Hand accepted that this was true. "But it is worse than you think. Tyler's mind is gone. He no longer knows reality from fantasy. I saw the cellar where he kept his worst artifacts, his diaries. If the East India Company were to learn about his state of mind—"

An elderly power of the family, Augusta Cavenar, waved for him to stop. “We are not radicals. God gave man the right to own property. The Lord created society so that our property might be defended. It is the one thing that sets us above the animals.”

Tyler's mother spoke. “I spoke to the girl, the servant who saw Tyler's little art studio. It sounded peculiar, very peculiar. We have to appreciate the warning Hand is giving us.” She seemed more willing to cut off his son's wealth than the rest of the clan.

Conley cleared his throat. “I don't think Hand is asking the family to formally remove Tyler. Just to limit his access to money. You should force him to use his own resources for whatever whims or ambitions drive him.”

William Cavenar laughed without mirth. “I can agree to that. As long as Conley is ready to take his place. Informally, that is. Conley, do you feel prepared to inherit early? Are you willing to take on the heaviest burden a man can imagine?”

Conley stepped forwards. “I am, sir. I am. I will gladly take that burden on.” Hand felt scared by what he had done, but there was no choice. The horned man had to be stopped.

Chapter Sixteen

The high street was quiet under the clouded sun. The city could see that Hand remained injured, and his acquaintances offered sympathy; unexpectedly, many men and women knew of Diarmid's murder, and they wished Hand speed taking his revenge. His attackers, more than one person assured him, were in league with the American rebels. Signal fires had been spotted up and down the coast. Traitors were being paid, men said, to see the city looted and ravaged, as soon as they could guide Paul Jones's pirates to the city's gates.

Hand assured his friends that he was well, and encouraged them to visit Parliament House at noon, when Douglas would be formally released. With the witnesses against him recanting, the case had been dismissed.

Clutching his side against the pain, Hand called at the hiring master that his firm regularly employed. Douglas had already paid to keep a team of farm hands on call, ready to burn, cut down, and plough the Shambles, and Hand intended to confirm with the hiring master that there were men available to work later in the day. He wanted to set the fires as soon as Douglas was free. Hand discovered, however, that the master had taken leave of Edinburgh for the summer, and had left no clue how existing contracts would be carried out. Annoyed, Hand rattled the door and received no response.

He knew of another such tradesman, however, and went down towards the Grass Market to find him.

At the turning to the lane, Hand found his path blocked by a small crowd, one that spilled out of the McBrides' much-beloved shop of petty luxuries. Hand tried to get a view over the heads of the onlookers: two closed coffins stood among the McBrides' candles and collections of perfumes. A minister was writing something in a book.

Hand had known the couple his whole life. He had bought his first scent from Mr. McBride, a vial rejected for regular sale, supposedly offered on a deep discount: at the time, Hand had known his youth and inexperience were being taken advantage of, and yet he was glad for it, grateful to be indulged in that moment when he had so little money. The last time he had visited them, both man and wife had seemed perfectly well.

He eased himself forward, trying to keep his wounded ribs protected. The three adult children of the departed were lined up in front of the shop's counter, their mourning clothes suiting the two plain coffins, set out on low tables. The shop itself remained a gaudy sight, the Turkish drapes and Chinese fans left untouched, as if retaining the McBrides' joyful and light-hearted nature. The backs of the mourners in the front rows, however, resisted the arrival of newcomers, and Hand might have turned around had not a woman's voice began crying for him to be let through.

It was an elderly lady, the one his brother called Old Maggie, who had tried in church to ask about her distant son. She shoved at men's backs, demanding that Hand be allowed to approach.

"He knows," she announced. "This is Hand McLeish. He knows what it was that killed these folk."

Greg McBride, the angry eldest son, swelled up, reddening. Several people gasped, and a child began to wail. Hand was hemmed in tight, unable to retreat. Greg, looming up, stuck a finger in Hand's face.

"How dare you?" he demanded. "How dare you come in like this, telling folk—"

Old Maggie said, "He has the sight, Greg. He knows. He has caught the Devil's footprints here. He saw him coming. He knows the monster's lair."

A great many sighs around the crowd, but Hand appealed to Greg McBride: "I'm sorry, friend. I don't know anything."

"Carved up!" cried Maggie. "Those poor folk, sliced and cut to pieces in their own beds! The devil is unveiling his bloody claws."

Greg, swearing, shoved Hand back, throwing him into the arms of those behind. "Get lost! Get out of here!"

Voices inquired of Hand: "How did the devil do it? Why did he choose those two?"

"I have no idea!" Hand shouted, unable to stay upright as the crowd focused on him.

"Don't think about hurting him," Maggie said. "He is going to save us. He's going to catch the devil in a sack." This statement was repeated backwards in whispers. Somehow, it did not seem to reassure anyone: they backed away from Hand.

He turned and walked back up West Bow, going as quickly as he could. He would leave the meeting with the hiring master for later.

Hand stood in the hall of Parliament House, under the grand high ceiling, waiting with a crowd of friends for Douglas to be formally released. He was watching the door,

but at the same time he was conscious of the hour: noon had passed, and there had been several delays with the court. Hand wanted to get the teams working on clearing out the Shambles that same day. He also felt annoyed by the small number of well-wishers who had come. Sir Leicester was there, as was Lord Kames and John Playfair, but neither Lizzie nor Tyler were in attendance, and much of society had departed the city. Douglas, the leader of the city's future, deserved more of its support.

Hand was distracted by Lord Monboddo's appearance, who strode up to him, looking annoyed.

"Now you'll break it all down, won't you? The Shambles?"

"Yes," said Hand. "As soon as Douglas is set free."

"Damn you," said Monboddo. "Damn ye and everyone in Edinburgh."

As he stomped off, Lord Kames whispered to Hand not to worry, not to listen to the old man's prattlings. Hand would have replied but the hall began to cheer. Douglas, unwigged and blinking, was led into their midst. He accepted handshakes with his right arm while pulling Hand close to him with his left, gripping him affectionately, kissing his forehead. For the first time, Hand felt genuinely on an equal footing with Douglas, as though he were being embraced by an older brother.

"Well done," Douglas said to Hand alone, "well done."

"It wasn't easy."

"I am sure. But even a bullet couldn't stop you."

"It complicated things, though. You would have been released a week earlier, if I hadn't been shot."

“I was worried for you, not for myself. I knew you would get me out. I knew it! I was always confident.”

Hand looked around Douglas's delighted admirers. “I'm happy we have so many people here to celebrate your release. They respect you so much.”

Douglas leaned close. “And in a week, they will all be dead.”

Hand, startled, looked up at Douglas.

“What?”

“Oh,” said Douglas, smiling, drawing away. “Nothing.”

“No,” Hand said, reaching for him. “What did you say?”

He was interrupted by Lord Kames's arrival. “Mr Farweather, Mr. McLeish: the court formally returns to you the deeds to The Bray Shambles. The property is once again yours, and you are free to treat the land in any way you see fit. We are delighted to see this awful matter resolved.”

Hand accepted the papers gently. “Work on the Shambles,” he announced, “will begin this afternoon.” The room politely clapped. “The reformation of the Shambles begins today.”

“No,” said Douglas. “Unfortunately, it will have to be delayed.”

Hand did not know how to respond. “Why, sir?”

Douglas shrugged. “I had to let our workers go. Many of them were needed in the fields. So I paid them and sent them on their way. The work will happen, but after my daughter's wedding.”

Hand kept a tight grip on the papers that Kames had given him, the deeds to the Shambles. What was Douglas doing?

Hand said, trying to keep his tone light, "Gentlemen. I think my partner is fatigued after a long and unjust detention. In fact, we will be starting work on the Shambles as soon as possible—"

Douglas, seeming quite relaxed, shook his head. "I think Hand has grown a little too accustomed to running the business by himself." Men laughed, awkwardly. They were watching him, waiting his reply.

"Excuse me, Mr. McLeish?"

Hand turned. A clerk of the criminal court was waving to him from a doorway, beckoning him over.

Lord Kames frowned. "Better see what he wants."

Hand carried the deeds across the hall. "What? What is it?"

"You are wanted in court, sir. The city guard are looking for you. Is Sir Leicester your attorney? You might want to bring him along."

"Why, in God's name?"

"You are being accused of murder."

Hand laughed, but the clerk seemed quite serious. "This is insane. What murder?"

"You should bring your man with you, really. The case against you is strong."

Hand called for Sir Leicester. Looking back, before the door to the great hall was closed behind him, he saw Douglas standing in the middle of the men of Edinburgh,

joking with them, telling a story. He seemed perfectly content. And yet, his remarks had been so bizarre, so unsettling.

Sir Leicester whispered, "What is the charge?"

"Murder." Perhaps this accusation was Tyler's doing, taking his revenge.

"What evidence do they have?"

"I have no idea."

In the quiet court of criminal justice, Granny Wynd was standing in front of the bench. She looked huge. She seemed undaunted by the grand men she addressed, despite her unruly hair and shabby clothes. Hand had never seen her outside of Tallows Land before, and while she seemed less threatening here, hemmed in by the mundane city, she clearly intended to do him terrible injury.

Granny Wynd was speaking. "There. There he is: Mr. McLeish. He killed Diarmid McDonald. He killed him in hideous fashion, and yet he is allowed to walk free. It is an abomination." Hand expected the court to laugh the accusation away, but instead he felt the furious eyes of many in the gallery, staring at him. Granny Wynd had a lawyer with her, a man Hand did not know.

Hand walked up to her, unable to believe this was happening. "You have no evidence, ma'am, because it didn't happen. I did not harm my friend in any way. I'm still recovering, by God's own blood, from the wounds the attackers gave me."

"Evidence, my lords," the unfamiliar lawyer said, "is so plentiful that the bench may grow weary of hearing of this man's guilt. You will grow old listening to its corroboration. As well as the respected Miss Wynd, I have brought many witnesses."

Hand looked at the trio of bystanders, waiting by the wall. He saw the pregnant woman with the round face, the same one who had smiled at him as Sahar had led them down the lane. And he thought he remembered the sad-eyed young man beside her, too: he had seen this fellow in Granny Wynd's house, coming to her for advice.

“Why?” he cried. “What reason could I have for killing Diarmid?”

Boos and jeers sounded from the court's audience, and the volume of their fury made Hand pause, guard his chest. Sir Leicester urged him to keep his voice down.

Granny Wynd turned to him. Her voice was low, hoarse, and she spoke with complete certainty. “Hand is in the pay of John Paul Jones. He is in league with American pirates.” Behind Hand's back, someone gasped. Another voice cursed him for a devil. “Diarmid found out the truth. He was going to reveal Hand's treachery, and so Hand and his fellow conspirators killed him. They tore him to pieces!”

Hand said, “This is a fantasy.”

The judges, however, had already made their decision. Hand would be placed under house arrest until His Majesty's interrogators arrived in Edinburgh.

Hand nodded. “Very well. But I have work to do. For my firm.”

Granny Wynd shook her head, feigning outrage. “Look how he disrespects you, sirs! The arrogance. No wonder he was willing to take American gold.”

Hand spent the rest of the day in the same house in Blair's Land where Douglas had been imprisoned. In Sir Leicester's company, he answered hours of questions from agents

of the Crown, quiet, watchful men who gave no hint whether they thought him innocent or guilty. They also refused to say how long his detention would last.

Once they were alone, Hand asked his lawyer how any of this was possible.

“We are at war,” Sir Leicester weakly replied. “The government is watchful.”

“Get this accusation dismissed,” he told the old lawyer, “and tell Arran Thomas he needs to visit me. Today.”

Lizzie was the first friend to visit him. She looked at him in disgust.

“You have done a cruel, cruel thing. You persuaded Tyler's own mother to reject him! I can't believe it. Just from jealousy, you would break his heart. I wonder now whether I ever perceived you correctly. I think I was imagining someone, a fabrication of my own mind.”

“No, you don't understand. I am trying to save your life.”

“Oh, please! You have ruined my wedding. The Cavenars have refused to let Tyler use the family estate. Everything I designed! It's all gone. You really are that petty. That cruel.”

Hand worried that Lizzie might be right. Perhaps he had accused Tyler unjustly.

“Lizzie, have you spent much time with Douglas, since his release? How does he sound to you?”

Lizzie ignored the question. “I am angry with myself, really. Angry to have spent so long—” Hand tried to follow her as she departed, but the guard at the door blocked his path.

Lizzie despised him. And what was worse, she would soon despise him even more.

Arran Thomas's face was flushed from climbing so many stairs. He set his crutches down, sighing, his eyes never leaving Hand. His obscene confidence was gone.

“You're like her, aren't you? You're like that witch.”

Hand was not interested a long conversation. “I have a business proposal for you. It is not optional. You will hire enough men to destroy the Shambles completely. Burn everything that can be burned. The men will start work immediately.”

Arran regarded him, accepting the detailed plans for the work that Hand had prepared. He read through the order page by page, pausing only when he reached the copy of the deed to the property itself.

“How will you pay them?” he asked.

“Look at the last page,” Hand said. “I also want the people who live there re-located and their houses pulled down.”

“How will you pay?”

Hand offered Arran the thin blue book in which the subscriptions for Lizzie's theatre were written down. “Borrow the money on these names. Pay yourself for your time, too.”

Arran's mood brightened. “You'll steal the money for her theatre, and spend it on this? The money will be gone, you know? It'll never be built. Why? Did she break your heart?”

“The work must start immediately. Do you understand?”

Arran's feline smile returned. “I told you and I were friends.”

“Another thing. How much do you charge for arrange someone's removal from Edinburgh?”

“Removal? A permanent removal?”

Hand nodded. He hated to use Arran like this, but he was not able to leave the house, and he did not know when he would be free.

“Depends. Depends on the risk, the person in question.”

“I want you to deploy someone, or a team of such men, to watch Elizabeth Farweather's wedding. They are to protect her. I do not know yet who they should remove, but it is either her father, or her husband to be. One of those two. When I know, I will send you a message with the name.”

Arran had returned to his old self, watchful and delighted. “Aye, Mr. McLeish. I will set it up. Make sure your note comes before the appointed time.”

Chapter Seventeen

In the late evening, Hand's guard changed shift, and the replacement slipped Hand a letter written by Sir Leicester, explaining that this lad was paid, and would take care of Hand's needs.

Hand nodded. "In another hour or so, I want you to take me somewhere with a good view of the land north of the city. I want to take a look at the country."

The guard promised it would be arranged. A knock sounded on the door. The guard went to check, and called Hand over.

Tyler was standing in the doorway. He had lost a terrific amount of weight, and his jaw seemed to have grown.

"Did Douglas know," Hand asked, "about your little house in the city? The place with all the drawings, the masks?"

"Sure," said Tyler. "He and I did some heavy drinking in that room, maybe a year ago. Why?"

"I worry," Hand said, "I've made a terrible mistake."

"Oh, I really don't blame you," Tyler said, "for turning my family against me. It's for the best. I thought I could do good from within their ranks, but—well—perhaps I was deceiving myself. The horned man doesn't seem to mind."

"He is still talking to you?"

"Every night. He thinks there are other ways I can do good. And the wedding is still going ahead. I'm now going to marry Lizzie in a little inn I know. She has some

remarkable festivities planned. She has taken the change of location in her stride, as you would imagine, and we are now embarking in a Shakespearean direction. It's a pity you won't see what she has done, but that's probably for the best, also."

Hand had prepared to beg Tyler's forgiveness, to say he had been wrong, and that Douglas, in fact, might be the mad one. But Tyler's comment chilled him.

"Is this inn," Hand asked, "in the Shambles?"

"Aye. It's a good place, don't you worry. Most of the festivities will be outdoors."

"Why did you choose it?"

"Oh, it just made sense. The theatre, you know? We discussed a few options and this was the best."

"Tyler. You've been corrupted. There's a curse on the city—"

"No, I feel quite the same person I always was. It's just that for me, time has run out." Hand recalled the bleak darkness he had seen as he had suffered from his injury, the coming nothingness. "Anything I want to have, I need to obtain now. You see?"

"You want to kill Lizzie. On her wedding night."

Tyler smiling, did not deny this. He put on his hat. "This is goodbye, my friend. It's unlikely I'll ever see you again."

Once he had gone, Hand got a sheet of paper and wrote Tyler's name down. He asked the guard to pass the note to Mr. Arran Thomas, immediately.

It was the day before the summer solstice, and the sun would barely set at all. With his guard standing nervously beside him, Hand stood on the roof of one of the city's

north-facing lands. Far in the distance, disciplined lines of smoke rose. Hand could not see any detail that far off, but the smoke told him that his men were working on the Shambles. Arran had done his part, and a great many axes were now hacking at the weeds and brambles of the ancient plot. Lizzie's theatre was now bankrupt, or close to it, but Hand promised himself he would earn the money back, make sure it was built.

His guard led him back to his house through quiet alleys, avoiding the busy streets. At the door, a boy was waiting with good news from Sir Leicester. The court was ready to dismiss Hand's case. A certain Conley Cavenar-Dunley had come forward, and his persuasive comments had been very effective on the judges' minds. However, Hand could not be released until the Crown's intelligence agents had similarly been convinced, and this would require waiting for a letter to arrive, which might take as long as a week.

Lizzie's wedding would take place the following day.

The boy said, "You have a visitor, too. He's waiting inside."

Hand exchanged a worried glance with his guard. No one should have been allowed in the house. The door had been locked, and if this visitor had discovered Hand's absence, he could be in serious trouble.

"Who's the visitor?" Hand asked.

The lad shrugged. "Tall bastard." Hand asked his guard to wait outside, and entered the house alone.

Douglas Farweather was reading a book in the kitchen. His coat was hung on a peg, and he was sitting in his waist-coat, with his sleeves rolled up. He winked at Hand.

"Warm night."

“Scotland gets at least one of those a year, it seems.”

“That's true! True. Surprised to see me?”

“You have a key to this house, so, not really.”

Douglas put the book down, sighing. “I don't want to waste time. My daughter is getting married tomorrow, and I probably should head over to the family house. It's nearly midnight. We won't be able to talk and talk, like we used to.”

“What can I do for you, Douglas?”

“Nothing. You can't do a single thing for me. I just decided that you're too dangerous to leave alive. I had always planned to kill you. As soon as I was released, I thought, but then you were so strangely arrested, accused by that ugly woman. I weighed up just letting you sit in your room until the horned man arrived. It would almost be funny, really, having you just wait for your death as the city died around you.”

“You had yourself arrested,” Hand said, shaken, wishing he could call in the guard.

“You had yourself arrested to protect the Shambles.”

“Yes. It was not a great plan, but I was short of time. And I assumed, correctly, that you could be manipulated. Do you think I owe you something? Your life? I don't think so. Until a minute ago, I wasn't sure what I should do, but then I paid you a visit, and you weren't even in the house! If you already gained the freedom to wander about the city, you are clearly too dangerous to ignore.”

Douglas's tone was entirely reasonable, as though he was outlining the case for one architectural solution over another.

Hand said, "I have always admired you. You have always been the person I associated with this city's best future."

"Interesting. I have long been revolted and appalled by you. In fact, I list you among the principal reasons for the city's decline."

"Why? What I have done?"

"Oh," Douglas said. "It's a long story. I would explain it to you, but, like I said, I have to get on my way."

"You paid Arran Thomas to testify against you. Those masks. The pictures in the cellar. Those were yours, not Tyler's."

Douglas shrugged. "I felt confident that you could be pushed to suspect poor Master Cavenar. And you've done even better than I could have hoped for. Now he will attempt to marry my daughter in the Shambles itself, where the horned man is strongest, far away from all help, all chance of escape. It's perfect! I will kill him, and take his place in the ceremony."

Hand looked for a pistol or knife on Douglas's person.

"I don't need to raise a finger against you," said Douglas. "I have an ally. You met that ally once before. You shouldn't have escaped that time, but he was weak then. Now he is strong."

"This ally," Hand said, "is from your own mind. You created the monster."

"No, I was merely lucky to find him. He is disgusted as I am by the shallow, dreary world you are trying to create. I reached out into the darkness, and the horned man

reached back. Were it not for that strange miracle, God only knows what pale nightmare you and your kind would have made of this city, of this world.”

Hand listened, reached out his senses. The pressure in the room was building, waxing and waning, just like before. However, it was far weaker than it had been in the cellar. He prepared himself for the spell to rise up, choke his breath, but it stayed low, trembling. The Shambles were already cut down, the trees burning. The horned man's power, at least here in the city, was gone.

“You've spent the whole day in Edinburgh,” Hand said, “Did you get a chance to look at the Shambles, by any chance?”

Douglas waved the question away, concentrating. “Counting, counting. That's you, Hand. Life reduced to a ticking clock. The soul watered down until there is nothing left, only a willingness to serve. A pathetic urge to obey authority, to seek instruction. I watched you romance my daughter, and I felt only revulsion. That's when the horned man spoke to me.” Unexpectedly, Hand felt the pressure rise, the tightness sticking in his throat, and he backed away from Douglas, wondering if he could run to the door. The objects of the kitchen faded, shimmering, and the grey light of the forest seemed, for a moment, to shine through the windows, but in the next moment, the pressure fell away, and the reality of the house returned.

Douglas whispered under his breath more urgently, but he soon opened his eyes, troubled, looking around.

“Sorry,” Hand said. “It looks like you can't do that anymore.”

Douglas closed his eyes, whispering again, but nothing happened.

“What have you done,” he asked, “to the Shambles?” He seemed more annoyed than afraid.

“I killed it.”

“From this little room? That was clever. But the horned man is still here. I can feel him. And you'll have to wait until tomorrow to die, rather than today. Tomorrow, he will appear, once Tyler and Elizabeth are dead. He will appear.”

Hand was already calculating. He could get the order he had sent to Arran Thomas reversed, put Douglas's name on the paper that the assassin would see. Hand called for his guard, and when the young man appeared in the doorway, Hand shouted at him to arrest Douglas, prevent him from leaving. Douglas looked back at Hand in contempt. The guard raised his club, but Douglas merely walked up to the guard and, with an open-handed blow to the head, knocked him to the ground.

The door to the house opened, and two other guardsmen entered.

Douglas lifted the man he had struck to his feet. “There. No harm done. You are dismissed from this duty, my good lad. You can't be trusted, obviously.” He turned back to the new arrivals. “Remove all paper and ink from this house. Block any and all visitors. Do not let Hand outside, even for a moment.”

Chapter Eighteen

The night passed slowly. Hand laid in bed, waiting for the city to wake. He dozed, and when he woke, the house was full of light, and, to his delight, he could breathe easily. The spell was gone.

There was no sign of the discomfort, the pressure, the madness which he had felt every day in the city, every day since he had helped Granny Wynd cast her spell. The spell had lifted, or had at least been dramatically weakened, by the burning of the Shambles. Hand shook his head from side to side, took a good deep breath. It was wonderful. His clocks sighed, delighted. They flew away, again able to chart the life of the city, the pleasure of its routines, its struggles.

It was the day of the wedding.

Hand washed his face and took a good while shaving. He applied an orange-water scent to his gloves. He dressed in his best silk coat, put on brand new stockings, and brushed down a modest wig. He burnished the gold point on his walking stick. It was a warm, bright day, and the journey to the Shambles inn would be uncomfortable in these good clothes. If, however, he would have to kill Douglas today, and he very much suspected he would have to, he should look his best.

He hoped very much that, over the course of the day, he could win back Lizzie's affection and regard, but he did not know how.

It was not yet nine, and the wedding ceremony was due to begin at noon. When he went to the door, he discovered three stern, unhappy men blocking his exit. He asked one of them to speak to his lawyer, Sir Leicester.

“You're not going nowhere, sir,” the man replied.

This might have prevented his escape, had the spell still been in operation. But Hand's genius was no longer suppressed, no longer maddened by the nightmare logic that had for so long drenched Edinburgh.

Hand offered the three men an apology and went back to the kitchen, taking a seat, sending his clocks out into the day. He had only a couple of hours to work with, but he suspected it would be enough. Soon he had identified each of his guards. A little after that, he could feel the city and the links that bound each man, through longing and obligation, to the patterns of Edinburgh's life. These threads winked in gold and silver, almost begging to be tugged, to be put to work.

Half an hour later, two of Hand's guards had made their excuses and left. When a kitchen fire in the floor downstairs forced the remaining guard to guide Hand down to the street, it was no work at all to distract the poor fellow, and get away from him.

Just like that, Hand was alone in the high street, well-dressed and unwatched. The city's traffic ran past, with no one aware he was supposed to be under arrest. His ribs felt better, too. The forced incarceration had given him time to heal.

Hand, enjoyed the fresh, clear air, the breeze drifting through the thick inhabitation of the high street, and, without pause or sideways glance, made his way to Boxer's Close.

The familiar crowd of male prostitutes, thieves, and the unlucky regarded Hand as he emerged into their square. They whistled at his fine apparel, laughing fondly at him.

Hand explained that he would like to purchase a loaded gun. His walking stick was passed between residents of the close, its gold point unscrewed and examined. It ending up in the hands of a woman in an apron. She pronounced the metal good, and, after a delay of several minutes, a teenage boy in richly applied make-up approached Hand with a small but heavy leather case.

“It’ll fire, as is? It’s loaded, and ready?” he asked, trying to conceal his lack of experience.

The square regarded him with friendly pity.

The woman in the apron nodded. “Aye. It’s ready. Go to your death, young man.”

Hand walked into the high street, ready to march on the Bray Shambles. Although many people noticed him, a few even stopping to shake his hand, no one seemed aware he was supposed to be under arrest, and while he kept an eye out for the city guard, and the agents of the government, no one seemed interested in his movements. After all, the journey was not a long one. Hand simply had to walk down the high street, reach the entrance to the North Bridge, cross the bridge, make his way through the new town, and then complete on foot the remaining distance over the fields. There had been little rain for days, and the road leading to the Shambles should be firm. He needed only a few minutes before he would be halfway across the north bridge, and the risk of capture would be largely gone.

Hand began to walk for the bridge. However, after ten minutes of walking, he found that, somehow, he was still on the high street. He did not know what had happened. He stopped, took a breath, and then walked at a fast pace in the direction of the bridge, only to discover himself going in the opposite direction, heading down towards the Cowgate. His face was sweating, and his fine shoes pinched. He stopped, turned around, and walked back, and was immediately trapped behind a slow procession of school children. They chattered to each other as they blocked his path.

Once they were gone, Hand tried again, only to discover he had missed the entrance to the bridge, and was making rapid progress downhill, going towards the Canongate.

The sun was hot, and Hand began to worry. He had to wait in a close while a pair of guardsmen hurried past. He emerged, checked the high street in both directions, and walked uphill. Yet, once again, he found he had missed the bridge, and had gone too far. In fact, he was pushing his way through the crowds of the Luckenbooths, passing under the shadow of the Tolbooth's gallows, as though he had completely forgotten his original intent.

Sweating, short of breath, his chest aching again, he stopped, tried to catch his breath. The city seemed to grow louder and louder, the crowd pressing in on him, the stink of the high street upsetting his stomach. He resolved himself. He had crossed the North Bridge a thousand times. He could get across it.

He took a firm, clear step in its direction, heading down the high street, and between two booths, a heavy, mud-stained pig dashed out, a household animal breaking from its

place under the steps. Hand jumped back, swinging his gun case at the creature's mouth. It bolted away, attracting laughter from the street.

It was Granny Wynd. She was not going to let him leave the city. This was her power at work, to keep him from reaching the wedding.

The top floor of Tallow's Land was silent, and there was no sign of Granny Wynd's family. Her door was ajar. Hand put down his gun case on the floor of the landing, and knocked.

"Come in if you like," she said.

She was standing by the fireplace. She was cradling the huge bible in her arms.

Hand said, "It's finished, Granny. The Shambles is gone. The spell is broken. All that's left is a man you made insane. Douglas Farweather." Hand saw, in a flash, the brilliant designs Douglas had made of the future Edinburgh, the bright city, logical and clear. They would never be finished.

"No," she said. "He is weakened, but he can still kill most of this city. Once the wedding is over, you'll see."

"But your family lives here, in this city."

"I hope they are among the few who survive. If not, I can accept it."

"Why?" Hand asked. "Why the spell, in the first place? Why give people nightmares? Why did you have me help you?"

"I had told myself that a little more truth would be a good thing. The age is turning, of course. You can feel it too, I am sure. I hoped, on the dawn of a bright new era, that if

our citizens were to get a hint of what lies behind this great masque, seeing, if only in a dream, what their great parade of falsity truly is, they might be cured of their own pomposity. Might it give them a little kindness? Just a touch of kindness and generosity, as they ease away the burdens mankind has so long suffered under? But no, it seems that even a small touch of reality has only sent them mad. Over the years, there have been so few successes. Your unwell friend, Mr. Cavenar, has been my only real victory.”

“Let me save his life, then.”

Granny Wynd put the bible back on its stand. She took an iron poker, and, looking down into the fire, pushed the dead coals.

“Tell me about this city,” she said. “The one you saw in your vision.”

“I saw two cities. Two different destinies for this place, this city. One was good. The other was a nightmare.”

“Strange. I saw an awful picture, worse than any city. There was no warmth to it. At first, I believed that you had offered me that vision—I felt frightened of you, because of it. That you would seem so inexperienced and weak, and yet would lash out, torment me. Yet, over time, I came to believe it was not your conscious doing, that it was more like a spark given off from a working forge, simply the impact of two great forces.”

Hand would not ask her what she had seen that night. He refused to let her trick him.

“Have you visited Carron's iron works?”

Hand nodded, surprised. This was the greatest site of industry in Scotland.

“A remarkable place. Immense and in constant movement,” Granny commented.

“The clash of a thousand hammers, hour upon hour. Well, when I touched your palm,

intending your unique abilities to help me, I saw, with my mind's eye, a masterful old man, ancient and cruel. He was the very last man to ever live. He was so old. Couldn't walk. Couldn't move. Couldn't breathe without the aid of a great engine to move his lungs. He could barely think without engines to fire power into his mind. Picture it, a sequence of giant steam pumps, a row of burning forges, working without human assistance, enabling this old man to breathe, to allow his very heart to beat. What a great, vile tyrant, festered and groaning at the end of time!"

"I saw a city," said Hand. "Our city, but many, many years hence. I saw the city Douglas Farweather wanted to build, and the city of horror that you desired. They were at war."

"Let me recount my vision. A vision of the last man and the last woman. Listen to me now, and you will understand why I can accept every grown man and newborn girl in this stinking metropolis murdered.

"When you and I worked together that night, I saw for an instant the dying moments of an ancient man. It was his hour to die. This was a man who had lived so long there are no words to describe how much time he had seen. He outlasted his society and those societies that replaced it, he outlasted his friends and colleagues, even his final expiring descendants. He had outlasted the heavens and the darkness, too. That's what I saw: a brutal, cruel mind who had dedicated his every thought and action to survival long after his universe had died. He had leached the life from whole planets to sustain his many centuries. He had built or stolen vast engines, immense machines that required no owner or operator, and they guarded him and protected him, his never-living servants, they who

built him a wall higher and higher against the ever-creeping power of oblivion. This man lived so long he saw the stars themselves grow old and die, or perhaps they had fled from him in horror, or perhaps they died not from age, but because he ate them. He continued to live in an empty sky, utterly without light save what his ever-loyal engines made.

“With him, on his world, a rock without life or movement, without breeze or a single bird or bug or even sand, was a single other living thing. One companion. She was a woman impossibly ancient to our understanding yet to him even less than a child. Why he kept her, I do not know. Perhaps there was something she could do for his wellbeing that a machine, no matter how enormous, could not. All I saw was this: his final moments, a frozen incapacitated old face, more like a stretched out web or puddle of slime than a thing of flesh. He knew at last that death had come. There would be no escape. What rage! All he had seen, whole worlds grown up and lost, a million gods and philosophies invented and discovered and forgotten, and yet he would still die. The hatred he screamed, if his mouth still could have screamed, at the universe’s great failure to serve his needs! He cursed everything then, cursed all the life that had once been. He cursed and died.

“Within the next moment, the same machines that had preserved him moved for his flesh. Within the next tick of the clock, they cleaned the bed in which he had long rested, wiping away the grime and near-flesh that had for countless years been the last man. The only person left alive was that woman, the servant or maid whom he had never once addressed, never once glanced upon. He had always considered her so beneath him, respecting her far less than his machines. Yet she had toiled for so many thousands of

years in his service. She had toiled so long that our own world might have been made and re-made a dozen times and she would still be toiling for that wretched, rageful thing.

Now, with that man gone, the machines offered their boon. It was all they knew how to do. Now, with the bed cleaned and ready, they offered to her their only gift, their blind provenance: they offered to preserve her life. They indicated that she should lie down on the bed and take on her master's role. She should rule the dead rock beneath her feet and the empty sky above. This is what I saw. I know that it will come to pass. Yet, what happened after that moment, I no longer know if I really saw it, or simply I hoped and wished for it and saw purely out of wishing.

“When the bed was offered to her, the last woman, instead of climbing into it, looked up at the starless sky, at the once-infinity of the heavens, and she said no. No, she said: I am not of this place. Finally, at the very last moment, she understood. And when she said no, all the thousand skies erupted. In every direction, the black and lightless heavens turned to fire, and the woman and her world was no more.”

Granny Wynd looked at Hand then, proud and satisfied.

“What,” he asked, “does that mean?”

She did not reply. In the hearth, without warning, the dead fireplace roared into life, the flames scorching the wall. They lit up her face, dancing on her bitter, tired features.

“Go, young man. Leave the city, but to the south. Let that wedding occur. Live how ever you please, and let the horned man come. Allow me to send my message to that woman in the future. Let me, via this one outburst of fire and destruction, encourage her to make the right choice.”

Hand closed his eyes. What was Granny Wynd? What was her life-pattern, her pulse?

She slammed the wall with her fist, and the huge fire that twisted and roared in the grate. "You will never let me be, will you? You cannot. And now I see it. Now I understand. You are that old, ancient man. You are the end of days. You are the death in life."

Hand felt the pressure on his chest again, the choking force of her spell. Her will descended. Without warning, without chance to dodge or protect his face, fire roared upon him, surrounding him without chance of escape, blocking his sight, singeing his hair, his eyes, the roof of his open mouth. He staggered back, arms up. Granny Wynd was laughing, laughing. The fire roared up a second time, buffeted him, pushing him back, and Hand had to duck his head, protect his face.

Yet he was still alive. He could open his eyes. His clothes were ruined, the silk of his coat blistered and blackened, his cuffs and gloves ash-stained. But he was unhurt. He touched his face, and felt no injury.

Granny Wynd stared at him. Hand heard his clocks whispering, encouraging him to stand, to meet her eye. They were no longer unmatched. He was not a mere boy, and she had used up too much of her strength, feeling the spell, encouraging Douglas's madness.

Granny Wynd pushed at him again, and he was again surrounded, the fire everywhere, with no escape. He did not resist. He reached for her, feeling his way through the flames, looking for her. What was she? What was the source of her strength?

Fire blocked his sight, and he saw Granny now purely with his strange genius. He saw not a woman but a door in the ground, a kind of trap door or covered entrance. It opened, leading to steps heading down. All of life stood on the ground, all of the world Hand had seen, the world that all of mankind lived and struggled on. What lay beneath it? What answer hid there?

Hand descended down. There was no time here, no light. Only a great emptiness, a great lack of purpose and meaning. A void like that which separated the stars, only it was far deeper and darker, and without break or end. All of the activity and light above, the whole of the world—it was a mere film, a surface covering the depths of this hopeless void. All of human life, every religious exhortation, every scientific discovery, appeared now as a brief, false flicker, a mistaken moment of hope. Time and thought meant nothing down here.

Hand recoiled from what he saw. It could not be. It could not be that everything he cared for, the city's future, his own life, was a mere illusion. He struck at the void, struck again and again, but he was like a child blowing against a gale. He railed against the awful sight, and the noise of his voice drifted away and was gone.

He could not stand it, the vision presented to him here. He fled, returning to the light of Tallow's Land, the fire and the breath, the fury that Granny Wynd felt for him, her inexplicable, fervent hope. But the darkness below remained. It no longer seemed tied to Granny Wynd. She was merely its conduit, its mouth piece. Hand tried to block the door. He sent his clocks to form a wall, to fill up and conceal the void, to push it down, to keep

it away from human life. His clocks in their thousands raced to form a wall, but there was still more of the void to cover up. It seemed to stretch endlessly away.

Hand reached for more things of the world: the keys and locks from Morgan's shop, the pots and pans of every kitchen in the city. They joined the floor he had built, and were joined by a flood of papers, the million pages the city's scribes had made. Baby clothes, and walking sticks. This was human life: it would not be denied. It would not ever end.

The wall he built grew: the high street itself stood over the darkness underneath, its high arc blocking off the night, the endless night. The door was closed.

Hand staggered, the room spinning. The outside edges of his sight shimmered. The fire in the grate had died. The walls and floor of Granny Wynd's home were blackened, and the wooden beams of ceiling had been cut through with fire.

Granny Wynd lay on the floor, unmoving. Her arm was stretched out, like she had been reaching for something. Hand, weak, stumbling, approached her. Granny Wynd's face was still, blank. Her body seemed even larger in death. Hand, looking at her, had the horrible feeling that he had made a fatal mistake.

She would have killed thousands of people, he knew, and yet he could not bear what he had done.

Hand, his head ringing in pain, turned away. The door to the house was broken, fire-blasted. He managed to get it open, and found the leather gun case still waiting for him outside, unmarked.

He had less than an hour before the wedding.

Chapter Nineteen

Hand walked across the North Bridge. His wig was gone, lost somewhere on his way out of the high street. Something was loose in his left shoe, and he could not see very well. He kept having to look down at his right hand, to check he had not dropped the case and its pistol. And Granny Wynd's death seemed to ring in his ears, as though a great awful change had been inflicted on the world.

Yet the new town, to his surprise, looked truly beautiful. Horses cantered by, and vegetable plots ripened in a row of gardens. The small houses on the hill, windswept and distant from the high street, seemed to his eyes like glorious pioneers, like the early settlers of Rome, ready to birth a fresh empire of thought and culture.

The new town, he understood, would be a success. The city would grow, expand, all through his life.

He passed through the streets, heading down to the river, and crossed it by a mill. The ground was dry. He didn't know what he would say to Lizzie, how he would explain what he had done. He just needed to arrive before noon, before the assassins would take their shot at Tyler.

His first sight of the wedding was a girl standing at the top of a slight hill, wearing gossamer wings. She held a basket of heather and wild flowers. His blasted and burnt appearance did not seem to trouble her.

“Are you here for the wedding of Oberon and Titania?” she asked, passing him a small bouquet of meadow flowers.

Over the ridge of the hill, Hand saw the ruined land of the Shambles, the charred and broken terrain that had once been a stretch of woods. Nothing grew there now. The old, stone inn still stood, but around it, the turf houses had been pulled down, and the pig pens were gone.

And yet, as he continued with flowers gripped in his left hand, he saw a great festival of life and song. He saw friends, citizens of the city, interspersed with uncanny characters. The landscape was a ruin, and yet Lizzie had turned it into something entirely new.

A short man in a laughing mask wandered past, pausing to bow at Hand.

He said, "I know a bank where the wild thyme blows, where oxlips and the nodding violet grows."

Hand smiled, looking over the man's shoulder. He could not see Lizzie, nor Douglas, in the crowd.

Two characters who Hand assumed, at first, were members of Bottom's troupe, shifty-looking types in worker's clothes, came up to him.

"You all right, lad?" one asked, peering at Hand's ruined outfit.

"Arran gave us your note," the other said. "The Mr. Cavenar, yes? We'll get him."

"No. The job is cancelled," Hand said. "You should enjoy yourselves. Get drunk. Have fun. I don't need you to hurt anyone."

The first man looked askance. "I don't much like it here. You know? Away from the city."

"Where is," Hand asked, "Mr. Cavenar?"

“He's upstairs, in the inn. We were working out how to catch him just when you showed up. You sure you don't want help?”

Hand decided he should not refuse assistance. He continued into the decorated space that Lizzie had made, but he was immediately stopped short, a goblet of wine pressed upon him. This was one of the men he admired most in the world, the designer and architect, Robert Adam. Adam was no longer quite young, and the last few years had added weight to his stomach, but his fiery smile and his cock-of-the-walk gaze were unchanged. Hand had noticed more than one lady's look when Adam's eye landed on her; now that same gaze was fastened on him.

Hand said, “Sir.”

“I was shocked to hear you weren't coming to the wedding party! Douglas said something vague about you being detained.”

Hand asked if Robert had seen Mr. Farweather, and Robert, obliging, pointed him out. Douglas stood in a fine coat and hat. He looked as though he were the one about to be married.

Douglas noticed Robert's gesture. He looked straight at Hand. He made his apologies to the people he was talking to, and walked quickly towards the inn.

Hand and two assassins followed him.

People wove in and out of his path, and small children ran about in delightful costumes. Hand found himself becoming only more aware of how little he knew about Lizzie, even though he had known her for years. He had no idea that this performance was what she would create for her wedding day.

The inside of the inn was dark and cool. Lizzie was surrounded by her friends, all in white. Hand had to stop, staring at her.

“What,” she asked, “are you doing here?”

“Where's Tyler?”

She did not respond, but her glance up the stairs gave him his answer. Hand made for the stairs, pushing through the crowded room. Someone stopped him, and although he saw the two hired killers racing up the stairs, he had to argue to get free of their grasp. He moved for the stairs himself.

He thought Lizzie was following him, shouting at him to stop, leave Tyler alone, but he did not look back.

At the top of the stairs, he opened the door to find Douglas leaning over the room's bed. He was choking Tyler's throat. The two assassins lay dead on the floor, stretched out and bloodstained. As Hand entered the room, however, the walls and furniture fled away, and he again stood in grey light of the endless forest that Douglas's imagination had conjured up.

Tyler, on the ground, was struggling, trying to fight Douglas off, but the tall man was far too strong. He held Tyler down while grabbing fallen leaves from the ground, stuffing them into Tyler's mouth.

Douglas was shouting something, but Hand could not make out words. Behind his back, he heard Lizzie's voice. She had joined them in this impossible scene, and her face had paled, her hands covering her mouth.

“I can't—” she said. “I can't—”

“Douglas,” Hand said, “let Tyler go.” He ran over to Douglas, pulled him clear of Tyler, but Douglas swung his arm, knocking Hand down. Douglas looked at him once, a mad glance of hate, and then returned to the man in his grasp. Tyler was spitting out leaves, protecting his face. struggling to escape. Lizzie, some way off, had fallen to her knees.

Hand unlocked the case, and took the pistol from it.

He walked over to Douglas's back, and, full of regret, fired the bullet. Douglas's body shook, and he released Tyler, grabbing Hand, spattering Hand's ruined clothes with blood as he wrestled him down. He struck Hand again and again, and then he paused, his eyes rolling back. Douglas's strength faded, and he fell on Hand.

Hand pushed Douglas's body off. The forest was gone. The grey light had vanished, and he lay on the floor of the inn's upstairs room. Lizzie had slumped in the doorway, and she was weeping.

Tyler, however, was already on his feet. He looked down at Hand, but did not offer him help standing.

“Thank you,” he said, wiping his bloodied mouth. “I'm going to get married now. I don't want you to speak to me, or my wife, ever again.” Hand watched him go to Lizzie, help her stand. Whispering in her ear, Tyler led her downstairs.

Outside, the crowd cheered their arrival, and the musicians began to play.

BOOK THREE

1791

Chapter One

A child entered the study, and with careful steps approached the deep, high-backed chair in which Hand McLeish reclined. This was Alan Richard McLeish, youngest son of Calum, Hand's brother, a slender, small boy. It was late morning, and the Hand's house was noisy with nephews and nieces and their friends. He had retired from their company as soon as he had risen from the breakfast table, called by his over-due work, but thirty minutes later, he had not moved from the chair he had allowed himself to drop into: either the morning's coffee had failed to take its effect, or the buttered scones had taken their effect too well.

Alan came up on Hand's left side, his mouth pulled tight in anxiety, his shoulders pulled in close to his neck. He was a nervous child, but he showed none of the verbal slowness that had afflicted Calum in his youth, and despite his many assorted fears, his young mind was full of questions and hopes. Hand was very fond of the boy.

“Would you come play with us, uncle?”

Hand said he was glad to be asked, but that he had to decline. His architectural proposals for the new district of Bellevue remained incomplete, and in the evening he was expected in town. He had a great deal to do.

“W-will—” Alan tried to asked.

“Yes, nephew?”

Alan paused, looked to the door, as though making sure what ever rule he was about to break would not be overheard. "Will Clara be coming over? Today? We were wondering."

Hand closed his eyes, his numb regret not protecting him from the sadness that rose to engulf him. "Your mother and father said not to ask about her, right?"

"Aye," said Alan, his eyes enormous in his small head. "Maw said she would knock me into next week."

"Clara is still in Glasgow, so she won't be joining us, I'm sorry. But she'll be happy to hear you asked for her."

The boy left the study, closed the door quietly behind, and went down to the laughter of his parents and siblings.

Hand was left alone. He was drowsy despite the early hour, and he felt with unexpected force the old longing for a draught of laudanum, the quiet absence of sensibility that came with a large enough glass.

In Hand's memory, he used to simply rise from his bed, take a moment with his clothes and face, and descend to the office to start the day's toil. He had owned almost nothing then, merely occupying the bedroom above the office of Farweather and Associates, later Farweather and McLeish. Most of his clothes and writing materials had fit into single a heavy travel case. Now, he possessed a warm, substantial house, employed two servants to care for his needs, and had designed a study arranged just as he wanted. Yet he found himself dawdling in the mornings, taking longer and longer over

his breakfast and coffee. These days, he took great pleasure—guilty pleasure—in reading a novel when he told everyone he was working, enjoying the view from the window.

The firm was anxiously awaiting his final version of the Bellevue proposal—his argument for the development of a new district, to the north of the new town—but there was no benefit in submitting an overly hasty application. He could not rush it. A failed proposal would merely waste everyone's time.

Elsie, his housemaid, entered with more coffee. She refilled his cup, her smile seeming at the same time fond and exasperated: she knew full well that he was beating himself up about his lack of industry.

“I am simply thinking,” he said, defending himself, “that I worked harder when I was younger—”

“Och, me too! Whan I were a wee bairn, I ran all over Edinburgh.” Ellie was no longer as light as she had been, and her cheeks were flushed from the stairs. Hand had to stop putting so much work on her plate. Perhaps he should ask her to hire a second girl. Only, it seemed excessive, when he was only one man, to employ three.

She took a ragged envelope from her apron's pocket. “Someone stuck it in the door. No stamp.” The damp, creased envelope bore his name at the bottom of some harder to read scrawl.

Hand took the letter. It was still sealed.

“It's not for you,” she said. “Says you're supposed to pass it on to a Mrs. Elizabeth Cavenar.”

Hand stared at the filthy, smudged spelling of Lizzie's name. There was no sender or return address. Whoever assumed that his door was a good way to reach Lizzie was very much mistaken. Hand considered sliding a knife through the soggy envelope's edge, to better judge if it would be worth the process of passing its message down towards London, or to whatever French city Lizzie had since moved. He knew the address of Lizzie's banker in London, because each month Hand dutifully sent her share of the Cavenar income, but his knowledge of her life ended there. He had heard ambiguous reports that she had left the city for somewhere in France, but she had not kept him informed.

"Hand!" Elsie was reaching for him. He had crushed half of the letter between his fingers.

Hand returned the envelope unopened. "If this person truly wished to contact Lizzie, and wanted my help doing so, he would have left his name."

"What you want doing with it?"

"Put it with the other rubbish."

Bellevue, or something very much like Bellevue, was inevitable, Hand reminded himself. Whenever his intentions failed to make sense on the page, he repeated the claim in his mind, as though it were a prayer. Edinburgh would have to expand. This was an undisputed fact among the learned. The only question was where the expansion would begin, and who would have the prestige of submitting the actual design.

The new town's uncertain youth had ended. Not only were the main streets of Craig's original plan built up—not only was the last piece, the grand Charlotte's Square, about to receive its final design from Robert Adam—but also, and perhaps more importantly, the new town increasingly felt like the city's true heart. Ten years before, only eccentrics, innovators, and the complacently wealthy chose to build a house in the new town. Hand still remembered the tale of the fellow who ordered two houses built side by side: the first for his family to live in, and second to protect the first house from the wind. Ten years before, many people of standing and means still suppressed a shudder at the idea of walking across the North Bridge multiple times a day. A woman of the new town should not merely kiss her visiting lover on the cheek, if he had crossed the north bridge to visit her, so the joke had gone: such sacrifice deserved a more substantial reward.

Now, however, if one met an Edinburgh worthy, someone of good family and stable employment, one assumed that they would live in the new town, or, if not there, in one of the new southern districts beyond the city's limits. Sometimes Hand met small children who could not believe that, in Hand's own youth, the city's entire nobility had lived in the crowded, unsanitary “lands”—that these distant relatives of royalty had each day emerged from the narrow archways of the high street's closes.

It was not just Edinburgh: the entire country was changing. It was hard to put one's finger on the exact alteration, only that there now seemed, to put it simply, more of everything. More varieties of food and clothing. More books and more post, delivered more regularly. More canals and better roads. Twenty years earlier, Hand would never have bought a house in Leith, so far from the city proper, but the Leith road had been

repeatedly improved in the last ten years that the journey to the high street was no great concern. And he had heard the mistresses of larger households complaining that their servant girls no longer had anything to do, and as a result spent hour upon hour reading novels. This was surely an exaggeration, but it was also true that if one was not impoverished, a woman could walk out into the high street and purchase a great many items which her mother and grandmother would have had to make themselves, via their own toil.

And, even better, while the recent events in France were a disaster for the French people, and had provoked much worried philosophy from nervous British temperaments such as Burke's, from a builder's perspective, the troubles of the house of Bourbon had come as a divine blessing. The collapse of the French state eliminated any threat of foreign war. Relations with the American government were good, and so, with France no longer a danger to the British Isles, the government was more inclined to fund architectural proposals.

Edinburgh would expand. The question was only which estates and villages would be absorbed first. Hand believed he had an airtight case for the lands of the former Lord Provost, Bellevue, but he had also heard whispers that Raeburn, the inheritor of the village of Stockbridge, was interested in reforming his property, turning it into a district of the city. If he could successfully propose the city's purchase and development of one—or both—properties, not only would his standing in Edinburgh rise, but the firm would likely start picking up business traditionally decided in London. At last, the company would start turning a real profit.

Around the dinner hour, Hand gave up on his sketches. He felt pleased by a new insight. He had sketched out the central square of his proposed new development many times, but now he felt sure that “Douglas Place” would look best as a circle—rather than a rectangle, as his plan currently had it. He had some interesting ideas about how he would lay out the smaller lanes around the circus. He even thought he could slide in an old drawing for the two half-moons of the park. And yet he closed his books with a grim, tense heart: the day was a Tuesday, which meant he was expected in the Cavenar office the following morning. Although he hated his visits to that place, he had grown used to the despair that his work for the Cavenars involved, but no matter how accustomed to the work he became, he could never do anything else in the rest of the day. He could not expect to return to productive, creative use of his study until late Thursday, when the work-week was already beginning its end.

Downstairs, the seven children were reading at the dining room table. Mary, Calum's wife, was watching them. Down the stairs to the cellar and kitchen, Hand could hear Elsie and her girls nattering to Calum as they prepared a small lunch. It was one of the pleasant surprises of life: Calum, in his thirties, had revealed an unexpected talent for baking and butchering, and despite his wife's raised eyebrow, he enjoyed every chance to come over and use Hand's more substantial facilities.

Mary saw Hand watching, and patted the empty chair to her right.

“Food is coming,” she said. “Have they been too loud for you?”

Hand promised they had not. He liked the company. It had been a year now since his wife had left him, and taken their one daughter, Clara, with her, moving back to her parents' house in Glasgow. The big house was far too big, most of the time.

“They won't budge?” Mary asked, quietly, unhappily. “They won't let you take her back?”

“Not yet,” Hand said. His wife, Maggie McLeish, had passed away over the summer, one of the many Glasgow residents stilled by a bout of sickness, but even though Clara now lacked the mother that had taken her away from Edinburgh, the girl's grandparents continued to keep her in their own house, with seemingly no intention of letting her go, and they had politely declined Hand's efforts to get his daughter back.

“You should sue,” said Mary, not for the first time.

Hand was about to reply, to say, not for the first time, that he did not want a war with his late wife's family. He did not want Clara to hurt in whatever strife ensued. However, he was distracted before he could speak, because he suddenly noticed a very tall young woman seated in the room's corner. She was no one he knew, and he was surprised that his brother could afford a tutor for his children. It bothered him that no one had thought to introduce her, either. More likely, she was employed by one of the other girls' parents, and Calum and Mary had avoided mentioning her because they felt awkward about visiting with so many wee ones in their company. She had long, poorly combed hair, and she wore a plain dress, more like something one saw in the country than in Edinburgh.

She was looking down at her hands, flexing her fingers, examining one palm. Hand had become aware that there was something odd about the woman's appearance, that she

was not as vivid as all the other objects in his sight, and that he could almost see through her, making out the back of the chair and the wall behind her, when she looked up and, smiling with absolute, implacable confidence, met his eye.

It was Granny Wynd. This tall woman was Granny Wynd, as she had been in her youth.

“Lord!” Hand cried out. The children around him jumped, and they raised their eyes from their books, staring at him, startled by his exclamation.

There was no one in the corner.

Mary held his arm tight. “It's all right, love. You'll get her back. She'll come back to you soon enough.” Concerned, she raised herself from her seat, and called for her husband to hurry up with lunch.

Hand kept glancing around. But there was no sign that Granny Wynd had been anything other than a momentary delusion, a flash of unwanted imagination. Granny Wynd was dead. He had killed her. She would not threaten him nor the city ever again. But as lunch was brought up, his worries remained.

Chapter Two

After dinner, his family departed, and Hand dressed for the charitable event he was required to attend. The weather was cold and damp, but rain had not been heavy enough to flood the ground, and the horse kept up a good clip down the Leith road. The coach jolted Hand in his seat, worsening the ache in his jaw. He had two bad teeth on the left side of his mouth, and he had deliberately been postponing medical assistance, as the last time a dentist had removed a tooth, Hand had spent the next two weeks in bed with a fever, unable to keep food down. The discomfort kept his attention from the chilly, dusk-dimmed countryside outside. Before he presented himself to society, he would stop somewhere, get a little whisky on his tongue, numb his mouth.

He hoped he had merely imagined the sight of Granny Wynd. Her appearance had been detailed: he could still recall how she had needed to angle herself on the chair, leaning her legs out to the left, because of her height. The way she had looked at her hands. And yet, he had heard his mother describe the witch as a young woman. He knew how she was supposed to look. And, as everyone knew, Mary Queen of Scots had also been a very tall lady. Perhaps he had assembled this fantasy from a wide range of component parts.

Edinburgh grew high upon the crag. Farmland and manor houses gave way to the city's outskirts, a brewery perched on the river, a humble inn with a thatched roof. Who, he wondered, had sent him that ridiculous letter? That fellow clearly overestimated Hand's closeness to Lizzie. After Tyler had passed away, losing his battle with ill-health

in the city of Nice, Hand had seen Lizzie several times in London, and, at first, they had been cordial. He had endeavored to help her, and he had defended her actions when others mocked. He had helped her set up in London as a young widow of means, and he had enjoyed watching her grow more renowned with each passing year.

She had congratulated him, politely, on his marriage.

Yet at a certain point, with each meeting—there had not been many—their relations had grown more strained, and their encounters had grown more brief. As Hand's own wife grew only more enraged and disgusted about the woman she believed was Hand's mistress, his “London lass,” the real Lizzie slowly gave up any pretense that she enjoyed his company. And then, with no warning, there was silence. Hand continued to send the money, and her bank periodically adjusted its requirements for the transfer of funds, but he did not see her.

A married couple that Hand knew, owners of a pleasant house in Kirkcaldy, believed they had spotted her in France, in the town of Richelieu, but they had not been sure.

Tonight, the city's well-to-do had been invited to attend St. Andrews kirk, in the new town, for a celebration of the efforts to rehouse families fleeing the unfolding crisis in France. “As we once accepted the Huguenots in their time of need, now must we accept...” was the refrain on nearly every mouth. And although Hand felt less moved by the grandeur of the moment than some of his contemporaries, he was still pleased by the work the committee had carried out. Homes and spare rooms had been located, funds had been raised, and, thanks to the many hours that Conley, the heir to the great fortunes of

the Cavenar family, had put into the cause, the city had come to see itself as a natural destination for the dispossessed French.

The church was already crowded. Conley, however, noticed Hand as soon as he arrived, and waved him over. Hand looked around for a glass of wine, but although his mouth continued to ache, he obeyed his summons. A number of the city's matrons had gathered around Conley, praising his rescue of so many French children.

"It is an obsession of mine," he said simply, without depreciation or excess. "When order falls in a nation, the most vulnerable are the first to be put at risk. That's what I've been trying to tell them, down in London. This is not a philosophical matter. It is not a time for smug self-congratulation."

Conley allowed the crowd to praise him for a short while longer, and then he took Hand aside.

"It's going well," he said. "We did good here."

"Aye," said Hand.

"Look. Can I ask you for some help? I need someone who can be discrete. Someone who can look into a matter for me, and not share what he learns with the world."

Hand hesitated. It was probably wise to agree. But the terms of their arrangement had been set long ago, and Hand's work on the French charity had already brought him closer to Conley's side than he wished.

"All right, all right," said Conley, glancing about, trying to appear calm. "I'll make it worth your while. Help me out, and you can take a week off from your work in the office."

Skip one of your weekly visits. The family's business will survive. And in return, you do something for me. A short task. Barely will take an afternoon.”

Conley's manner was peculiar and strained. Hand could tell that the matter was troubling Conley more than he let on.

“Tomorrow?” he asked. “I won't have to come in tomorrow?” The prospect was so sweet he had to stop himself from agreeing on the spot.

Conley weighed this up. “No, no. You're needed tomorrow. There's the business in Goa. Just—next week. Take next week off. Enjoy yourself. Finish your plans for George Drummond's properties.”

“What,” Hand asked, watching the people mingle, feeling envious of the men with a drink in their grasp, “do you need me to do?”

“The matter is about,” Conley said, “one of your fellow residents of the town of Leith. William Cavenar.” William Cavenar was one of the greatest powers of the family, even if his vitality had dimmed in recent years. He had been one of Tyler's fiercest critics, when Tyler had tried to reform the family's businesses. William had ridiculed the thought that he or any man incurred a moral debt through the pursuit of business. And after Tyler's passing, when Conley had officially inherited the family's riches without any of its good will, William Cavenar had declared himself fully independent. He had fought hard against the reconquest of the family, holding out the longest of any of the Edinburgh-based uncles. He was a ferocious opponent and a heartless business man.

“For some time, I have heard,” said Conley, “that William had been getting involved with strange parties. I heard that he had begun holding meetings with your local trade

unionists. Friendly meetings, too. He was negotiating with them, considering their demands.”

“William would be the last man I would picture—”

“Aye. But my reports come from a trusted correspondent. And I was not the only one who noticed. A whisper floated to me that the Government had grown suspicious.”

During most of the 80s, Hand, along with most of the business owners he knew, had ignored the demands of the trade unionists. There were always new workers available, new arrivals in the city, and if negotiation was ever necessary, it generally required few concessions on the owner's behalf. But since the French monarchy's fall, Britain's ruling powers had grown wary, watchful. And there was surely some truth to their fears. Some trade unionists certainly were Jacobins, and no one knew how many, or whether they actively plotted a revolution in Britain.

To deal with the trade unionists, or even to express sympathy for their cause, was, in the current political climate, quite dangerous. The wrong word from London, and one's life might be ruined.

“That was bad enough,” Conley added, “but a few days ago, William vanished. Or at least, he has not been seen all week. He has not appeared at family gatherings. He has not been seen at church. He has not even left his house. I am confused, and I dislike not knowing what is going on. Is my uncle still alive? Has a government agent knocked off his head?”

“Why not investigate it yourself?”

Conley smiled. "My uncles made me promise never to turn my eye on the family. It was part of our deal, when I replaced Tyler as the heir. They worried I would try to topple them if I ever found out too much. And I feel, moreover, like this job suits you. Your moral nature. Your reforming tendency. If William has gone over to the cause of utopia, he will sooner talk to you than me."

"Don't be so sure." Hand liked, in principle, the idea of paying a fair wage, and caring for his workers. It was a harsh industry that he had chosen. Builders threw away their little pay as though they would be earning a wage forever, yet Hand had seen enough on-site injuries, and had visited more than enough bereaved widows and children, to know just how untrue this was. By employing a man, you incurred some level of debt to him. You became, in part, like his father, and you owed him the best chance for a decent life. In theory.

In reality, as paternal as Hand's conscience wished him to be, he had to compete for contracts, just like every other business owner, and no client cared how well a company's workers were fed. To survive, although he keenly wished it otherwise, Hand aimed for the same efficiencies that his rivals did, and, generally speaking, this meant keeping wages low, and the trade unionists distant and unheard. It meant forcing their representatives away when they tried to spread discontent. It meant hiring new arrivals to the city, highlanders and Irishmen, whom the trade unionists despised.

All this he had done, simply to stay afloat.

“Likely,” said Conley, feigning a lack of concern, “you will find out what happened to William in ten minutes. Then you will have two weeks all to yourself. Isn’t that a good deal? Ten minutes? For two weeks.”

Hand knew he should haggle for better terms. Conley seemed agitated, and was trying unusually hard to hide it. He needed Hand's help more than he was letting on. However, Hand agreed to the deal as offered, pretending to be as just as nonchalant as his employer. If something was bothering Conley, if there was a crack in the vast power of the Cavenar empire, he wanted to find it. He wanted to discover Conley's weakness for himself.

Chapter Three

Hand made his way through the crowd, accepting the praise he received from many well-known faces, and succeeded in securing a glass of wine. He was about to sip when his wrist was grabbed, and he was unexpectedly embraced by John Adams, younger brother to the famous Robert.

Hand stared: “Are you and Robert here, in Edinburgh?”

John nodded. “The council wished to discuss the plans for Charlotte Square. We would not have come, if he had listened to me. He is not fully well. The old affliction hurts. It hurts him more than ever.”

John seemed genuinely glad to see him, which surprised Hand. Their relationship had been strained in the past, allegedly for a number of obscure reasons, but mostly because Hand could do John’s job far better. Robert was the artistic genius, one of the greatest minds of his century: John helped him, kept the firm running smoothly, made sure that Robert lacked for as little as possible. These were tasks in which Hand’s peculiar genius excelled, and Robert Adam made no secret of this disparity.

Hand expressed his regret at the news of Robert’s health.

“Then you had better come. We are just a few doors down the street.”

“But—” Hand said, gesturing at the party going on around them.

John laughed. “What I will show you is far more important.”

Hand allowed himself to be dragged out of the church, and he followed John to a house nearby. Robert and Adam and his brother had rented the top floor for their visit.

A table in the middle of the room took up the great majority of the free space, and Robert Adam was leaning against it, propping himself up with one elbow as he wrote. He had a house plan laid out in front of him, and although his penmanship was fine, Hand had been in the business long enough to guess what Robert's paragraph was about: every design which an architect would not personally oversee required copious instructions to the contractors and builders who, months or even years later, would actually raise the stone, cut the beams. A good design—a well annotated design—strove not only to reduce an individual builder's opportunities to abuse and pervert the original vision, but to also warn him against theft and trespassing, to set penalties for laziness, and to give reminders of the laws of the physical universe: the tendency of water to move downhill, for instance.

Robert did not move when he saw Hand, but his eyes were bright with pleasure. “They accepted it. They accepted the revisions! Show him, lads. Lay it out.”

Hand watched as two apprentices, under John’s supervision, gingerly lifted a broad narrow case. John removed and rolled up the house plan Robert that had been working on, and with the table cleared, the boys set down the leather case and undid its bindings, as though revealing some great religious secret. They slid out the first page, and Hand immediately knew what he saw: the plans for Charlotte Square. The paper was perhaps a yard in height and width, and was excellent quality, firm and coarse to the finger tip. The penmanship was clear and elegant.

“I had not known—” Hand felt too embarrassed to finish his thought: he had lost track. He had not known that Robert was so far along in completing his design, nor that

the council, in turn, was ready to accept it. He, of all people, should have been paying attention.

He looked more closely, gesturing for the boys to slide out the next page. John was saying something, but Hand did not hear. He had lost awareness of the distractions of the room, his breath catching in his mouth.

Edinburgh had been given an artistic masterpiece. Charlotte Square would be one of the splendours of the British Isles. Constructed with a unified facade, the viewer would not perceive a set of private residences surrounding a garden, but rather four continuous palaces-fronts, each residence merging with the next. Hand called for more papers, sharing the brothers' delight. The successive pages outlined the minuscule details of the design: the points of the front railings, the dimensions of each door. These were city homes: they were joined together on both sides, and could be reached from the high street. Their peace and good air relied on the park that they shared. Yet these houses were conceived with such elegance to outclass the abodes of royalty.

The papers left Hand half invigorated and half ashamed. He was filled with a potent, shivering joy; he was also aware how rarely he felt that way, how long it had been since he had delighted in something so completely.

“Other men,” said Adam, “will have to extend the city northwards. I have given them a few suggestions of how they might proceed. Poor Douglas would have done it brilliantly, had he not—not become so unwell. Now the burden falls on you, young man.” Adam winced, rubbing his his side. The pain had clearly grown worse since Hand had

last seen him, and Hand wondered if these “suggestions” of Adam's would be, in practice, the great architect's last gift to the city.

Hand nodded. “I will help—I will do my best—if —”

Robert leaned closer. “My friend. What is the matter with you?”

“I am well.”

“You are not.”

Hand put on a smile. “I hear this is only a short trip for you both. I'm sorry to hear that.”

John was nodding. “We have many projects to work on. Robert is taking on more and more.”

“Did you—” Hand patted his jacket pocket, assuming the sodden, dirty envelope was still inside, remembering a moment later he had asked Elsie to throw it away. “Was it you, John, who dropped a letter off at my door, for Elizabeth Cavenar?”

“No.” John shook his head, bewildered. “I see no reason to contact that—lady.”

Robert glared at Hand. “I want to penetrate this miserable cloud you are suffering under. You are still a young man. I could put in a word with Henry, you know? The Company would give you a position in a heartbeat.”

“Mr. Dundas knows I work with—”

John sighed with such force that Hand understood the brothers had discussed this topic—his career—at length. “Hand. Please, lad. No one in London cares for the Cavenars. They are a blight on our nation's good name. They are an embarrassment. If you left their side, no one would question your motivation.”

“You could take a plump post in India,” said Robert. “Raise a new town in Bengal: become brown and happy. Put on a little meat on your bones.”

Hand thanked his friends for their concern. They viewed him regretfully, unhappy with his failure to concur.

“At the very least,” said Robert, “take Douglas's name off the damn door. Poor old Douglas deserves our sympathy, yes, but his ghost does not deserve to continue to share the firm. It's your company. It has been for a very long time.”

Hand blinked. What did that have to do with anything?

“Edinburgh still respects,” he said, “the Farweather reputation.”

Robert snorted, looking out the window, exasperated.

John leaned close, speaking low: “Hand. There are no more Farweathers. Lizzie is the last one alive, and she surrendered that name when she married. Since then, she has surrendered more than just the name. She is a Cavenar, by title—and by action, too. If anyone associates Elizabeth with your firm, it is you who is elevating her, not the other way around. She is a pariah in London. She is not welcome. Not even among the society that we emigrant Scots maintain.”

“She is misunderstood,” Hand said.

“By Sir Danley?” asked John. “Did he misunderstand her when she was living under his roof?”

Hand grew warm. “She is a widow. She may—”

Robert gestured down at his design. “Look. I have completed the new town, as it was originally conceived. Craig can spend his remaining years in peace: his dream has been

completed, and in far greater grandeur than he can have ever imagined. Beyond that? Other men will have to create it. Why should that not be you?"

Hand watched as Charlotte Square, the culmination of a half-century's work, was carefully packed away.

In the church, Hand sipped wine until the ache in his teeth dulled. He still felt buoyed by the beauty of Adam's design, as though he and the city were one person, and he had been personally given a great gift. He disliked, however, the brothers' chiding of his work. He was trying, after all, to build the future of the city. That was the whole point of his Bellevue proposal. Robert, perhaps, did not respect it, the work Hand had done on that project, but that was Robert's choice.

In the church, Hand was drifting around the circles of talkers, feeling out of sorts, the prospect of earnest conversation seeming unnatural. He noticed a number of unfamiliar faces, watchful, quiet men who stayed on the edges of the room. He suspected these were agents of some kind, government spies, perhaps. One saw more and more of them since the fall of the French crown.

Alice Brook swung close, not stopping, merely taking a moment to tell him: "She's here. Isn't it remarkable?" Before Hand could ask what this meant, Alice had moved on. He worried, in a horrible moment, that he was being warned about Granny Wynd's presence. Perhaps he was going mad, and his closest friends were being recruited to complete his fantasy. But he saw no sign of a tall young woman.

Conley was waving him over. He was surrounded by two ministers, men unknown to Hand. They praised both Hand and Conley for their great work bringing French orphans out of Calais.

“The children,” one said. “I shudder at their fate. I see only ruin in that country's future. Ruin and fire.” He was a handsome blond fellow, with an academic cast to his features.

“It is too bad,” Conley replied, “that we could not save more.”

The blond man shook his head. “You did what you could. There is no remedy when a country abandons divine instruction, and raises up mankind's vanity and self-interest in its place.” Hand was reminded of his long-lost friend, Diarmid McDonald, whom, he was sure, would have enjoyed this conversation. Diarmid would probably have blamed the revolution in France on James Hutton, too.

Hand was looking away, amused in a melancholy fashion by this remembrance, when, across the room, he thought he saw Lizzie. He stared. Lizzie Farweather. There she was.

He had to cover his mouth. Lizzie looked no different to when he had last seen her, some years before in London. She was dressed in something dark and prim. Hand closed his eyes, wondering if this was a second apparition: Lizzie had not walked in Edinburgh since her short-lived marriage. But no: she was talking quietly with Anne Raeburn, wife to the painter. She was very much real.

People were glancing at her, and a few were whispering, but she drew less attention than Hand would have imagined. If she were the scandal that the Adam brothers had said,

then Edinburgh society had become either more polite, or more laissez-faire, than Hand had ever believed.

He excused himself from the conversation, but did not approach Lizzie. Their last conversation had ended poorly. He had, indeed, said some of the things explicitly that the Adam brothers had merely hinted at, and Lizzie had thrown his well-meaning advice back in his face. Now, however, they were both bereaved. Widow and widower, even if his marriage had lasted a great deal longer than hers.

The crowd parted, or he had been walking closer, and he saw her more clearly. He could not help it: his eyes flicked to her arm. Lizzie wore a deep brown dress, and yet, even through the kirk's poor light, he could just make out the thin black armband, the mark of mourning for Tyler that, against all sanity and custom, she continued to sport. She deliberately used her widow's garb to get away with things, he had always felt, a trick to avoid outright censure. If she wanted to visit a particular dinner club, or travel to France by herself, or spend years—years—living in a married man's house, she would present herself as the “mourning” Mrs. Cavenar, a mature lady, someone who had passed through youth and happiness, and whose desires could hope only to earn society's pity. It was all for show: she had been married to Tyler for barely a month when he passed away, and they had produced no children. The marriage might not have even been consummated, given Tyler's ailing health, compounded with the wounds he had received from Lizzie's mad father. Whether or not this was true, Lizzie could have claimed as much, at least, and few would have begrudged her the lie. Instead she had embarked on a

largely private life, one full of exploration and study, seeking nothing from Hand except money.

He expected to feel the strength of that old indignation, here in Edinburgh, as Lizzie looked over her shoulder and saw him watching. Instead, the sight of her arm band filled Hand, unexpectedly, with a vast, sorrowful self-pity. Lizzie had been married a matter of weeks, and she had buried her husband before the last of her wedding flowers had dried. Despite her limited claim to wifely status, however, she had filled a decade with Tyler's memory: she had brought her tokens of his loss to gatherings across Britain, to lectures in Paris, and salons in Rome. She was suffused with him—still. She was Tyler's ambassador from his mansions in the other world.

In comparison, Hand had met a woman of good health, with no outrage in her history, married her in the standard, acceptable fashion, and they had decorated a house together. They even had produced a child. Yet for him, unlike for Lizzie, the memory of that marriage barely held. It gave off no light. When that domesticity had slipped from his grasp, it had vanished from him like the stars slipping away with the dawn. His own wife had left him and he had gone on as before. She had died, far away from him, not even seeking a reconciliation, but no one in Edinburgh mentioned it.

Life had given Lizzie so much, and him so little.

Without anger or regret, Hand walked over, his heart empty of feeling, his mind open, ready to begin a new chapter in their acquaintance.

“I thought you were in France,” Hand said.

“They are having a revolution. Perhaps you heard.”

“I —” Hand wrestled with the disdain in her tone. “I don't want to fight.”

“Then don't. There are many other people you could be speaking with at this moment. You are quite popular, these days.”

“I have a letter for you. Someone dropped it on my doorstep.” He spoke before fully remembering that he had ordered the letter destroyed.

“Someone? Who is this someone?”

“No name. Strange, isn't it? He must have assumed I would know where you were.”

“Not really. You have no idea of the hate I receive week after week. If the letter is from a stranger, I don't need it. Please burn it, dispose of it. Whatever you prefer.”

Hand did not believe he deserved this chill mockery. They had argued in the past, it was true. But he had kept her alive all these years. It was his work with the Cavenars that paid for her life. He provided her with an income.

“Will you be staying in Edinburgh long? Should I send your money to a local address?”

“I will have my banker send you a letter. But don't worry. I only need one more payment: next month's. Then you'll be free of me. You can keep the blood money all for yourself.”

He stared. He had given so much to the Cavenars. The work had taken over his sleep, his private life, the awful things he saw driving his soul into hiding, and he had done it all so that Lizzie would have her widow's stipend.

She was just going to throw it away, as though it had never mattered?

“Why?” he asked.

“Why? You need to ask that? You must be even more Conley's creature than I had thought.” She turned, and walked away.

Chapter Four

The Cavenar offices occupied a narrow two floors in an old house close to the castle. The clerks had the run of the lower floor, and as clerks seemed wont to do, they had filled it with dust and ink. Each desk was cluttered with boxes of records, and loose papers piled up on side tables and book shelves. The air was bad, smelling of tallow and chamber pots. Despite the grandeur of their neighbours, and the family's opulence, the Cavenar empire's civil servants seemed to prefer to work in a self-made cave.

Men were already clearing books from a corner when Hand walked in: although the alcove was supposed to be Hand's own, because he only visited once a week, the detritus of official work had always claimed it by the follow Wednesday. Hand sat in the now-empty chair, waiting for the ordeal to begin.

He did not feel well. He had consumed too much the night before, both in Edinburgh and on his return home, his spirits blasted by his meeting with Lizzie Cavenar. He hated the work he did for the Cavenars, but he had at least told himself that he did it for a good cause. He had talked to himself as though he were a soldier, forced to do violence by the nature of his employment. Yet, after more than ten years of accepting the proceeds of Hand's work, Lizzie acted as there had never been any reason for it.

He looked at the door, wished he could get away. He let himself believe, for a moment, that if he were reluctant enough, the day's work would not commence, that he would be allowed to leave.

But the clerks did not notice his mood. Soon each man had his papers neatly stacked, ready to present. One fellow even winked at Hand, glad to see him for another week.

These mild-mannered clerks and secretaries, who ensured the smooth running of the many Cavenar businesses across the world, always amazed Hand by their seeming ignorance of the purpose and function of their work. Each of them bore an army's worth of murders on his conscience: the stooped, skinny man, who had run up, that morning, to open the door for Hand: he had guided the undermining of a wealthy principality in the Indian Ocean, and had cried out in delight once he had learned that the towns and villages in that small state were now in a state of warring chaos; the fellow smoking a pipe by the window represented the legal interests of a dozen of the worst monsters in Barbados.

The Cavenars grew wealthier with each succeeding year, and although the British government disliked them, and would have applauded the family's demise, there was no force in the land able to confront them. The Cavenars maintained an uneasy, watchful policy of non-interference with Dundas's much larger and more potent East India Company, and somehow they were always able to compete with his Company on nearly equal terms, although lacking equal resources and prestige. Outsiders conjectured that this peculiar strength came from the family's ruthlessness, its network of midnight agents, its many-paged accounts of gruesome debts. Their local captains and deputies always seemed to know the right move to make, the decisive act that would become clear to their rivals only weeks later.

Hand, however, knew the truth. That intelligence was largely his doing. He was the secret to much of the Cavenar's eerie strength. From the desks of this small office, coded

letters went out each week, offering advanced intelligence to operatives across the world. And so, he often told himself, the blood that he owned, the tally on his account, had to far surpass the total blood accrued by all these busy clerks, combined.

“Let's begin,” said Hand. His mood, he saw, would make no difference at all. Over the years, he had wavered between different approaches to this work, but whether he acted hostile and cold, or amiable and relaxed, he always did his part. He always did what he was told.

The chief clerk carried over a locked case. “Correspondence from Java.” Hand looked about the room. If Granny Wynd wished to appear to him, this would be the perfect spot. Here was brutality and death on a scale greater than she had ever been able to perfect. But there was no trace of her, merely the usual stink of unwashed men and their food. Hand settled down to read. He accepted a cup of coffee from an unseen helper. He read quickly, skipping over the entreaties and opinions, feeling for what had changed, what had developed over the past seven days. Another clerk brought him copies of captain logs from ships off Africa's East coast.

Letter after letter came. He accepted everything.

Although he came every Wednesday, and had been coming for years, still, the secretaries paused in their work, turning to watch him. No one tended the fire. At first, he remained aware of their eyes, but soon, as he read, the office fell from his mind. Edinburgh fell silent. The great expanse of the world rose up, the mental picture he had tightly grasped for so long now. He could never let it go, his imagined model of the Cavenar empire, its work going on across oceans and continents. He kept space for it in

his mind even while he slept, even while he ventured down to London, even while he drowned himself in drink. The gleaming, turning globe was there all through the summer that the country had suffered through the Irish sickness, all the through the weeks he had tried to mourn the dead. How his real life had been limited by this work, by his constant attention to the half-imaginary world, he did not know. Perhaps his ever-divided attention had been the cause of his stifled and strangled marriage. Or perhaps the marriage would have failed no matter what. He did not know.

He saw Spanish cities in the Pacific. He felt the ghostly half-outlines of a sea battle off the coast of Zanzibar, neither participant able to finish the other with his cannons, the yelling, terrified sailors on both decks cut to pieces with axes, their skin punctured with pistol shot. He confirmed his suspicion that the Cavenar supervisor in Charleston was taking bribes, and he wondered if he should stay quiet, and spare the greedy fellow's life.

It was not a real world. The information he absorbed took weeks to arrive in Edinburgh. By now, the floating bodies of those dead sailors had long been picked clean. Yet it was so vivid, he felt like he should have been able to step onto the Dutch privateer's deck, and warn the ship's captain that he was desperately outnumbered, and should flee.

At last, he was ready to speak. When he opened his eyes, the men in the room looked flat, unreal. He could not tell them apart: their faces had lost all distinction. They gazed at him, and, as always, he grew annoyed at their smallness, their anxieties, their need to be told things. He hated that he had to spend time explaining the world to them.

“Be careful,” he said, “of the Company's operations in Bengal. You are underestimating their force. Send a letter as promptly as you can, and hope it arrives before your men provoke a fight, and get themselves killed.”

The chief clerk blinked. He had scoffed at Hand's warnings the previous week. “How—why would the Company risk —”

Hand ignored the question.

“There is a growing problem for you in Carolina.” He would not, he had decided, spare the thief. “You are being Yankeed by one of your merchants—Mr. Dunn, who oversees the port.” Why should that man be spared? Why should anyone be spared?

They crowded closer, delighted. “How do you know?” Hand feared the person he became when using his genius to its full extent. He hated to walk around the city in the hours after his weekly meetings at the Cavenar office, unable to feel very much of the life around him, forced to merely wait for the flatness of the world to subside. The planet, in the latter hours of every Wednesday, seemed the refuge of the basest animals, creatures shouting at each other in their own need and filth. The happy shrieks of children in the street sounded ugly—ugly and repugnant. The only way to calm his disgust was to drink, to press his aching mind down into warm numbness.

Hand gestured for the box of accounts. “It's as clear as day.”

At last, the work was done. There was no more correspondence to review. Hand emerged into the cold, clear sunlight. His temples pulsed and he raised his fist to his bad tooth, pushing away its ache. He stood in one of the city's most pleasant corners, close to Allan Ramsey's house, yet he felt only a dull vertigo, a vague overtired disgust for every

diversion the city had to offer. After inspecting the whole world in his palm, actual life in Edinburgh seemed flat and small. He longed only to dull his consciousness, whether by laudanum or wine, but he dimly recalled the promises he had made to himself. He was tired, and his mouth hurt, but he would not drink himself to sleep. Conley had promised him a week off if he visited the missing uncle's house, sought out clues. And Conley had been afraid, nervous. Something worried him, more than he let on. Hand should find out what that was.

Children ran about in the close. Hand kept his eyes on the ground, not wishing to look at anyone's face until he had regained his strength: for the next ten or twenty minutes, faces would all look empty. He found his driver in the pub, and while he longed to join the man for an hour or two, he called from outside, and asked to be taken back to Leith.

Chapter Five

Ten minutes, Conley had promised him. Ten minutes' work to visit old William and understand what had befallen him.

Conley had said that William lived close to Hand, in Leith: this was not true. William's house was some way down the water's edge, close to the fishing village of Portobello. The house stood cold and alone, overlooking a narrow stretch of dirty beach, and if, on paper, the property possessed surrounding gardens or vegetable plots, you would not know it by looking. The long tangled grass that Hand walked on, as he climbed up to the house's front door, was flecked with sand. His boots cracked dull, faded shells, and his step was made uncertain by a proliferation of small artifacts of timber, remnants of broken and lost vessels, washed in by the sway of the sea. An endless expanse of trade and struggle crumbled and rotted on the shore.

The wind blew cold and without pause, cutting at Hand's ears and nose, forcing him to duck his head, keep his eyes on the ground. The air, however, was well suited for his purposes: no one would refuse him entry in this weather. He had been seen walking up, and the front door was pulled open before he could knock, and William's butler welcomed him in. In the entry hall, Hand rubbed feeling back into his face, glancing around, taking in the look of the house. His talents were not what they had once been: he reserved most of his strength for working for the Cavenars. However, even with the small remainder he had left, he could tell that something was amiss.

William's butler, a dark, well-fed, uncomfortable fellow, snapped at a maid to bring Hand something warm, and he directed Hand to the sitting room, where a boy, he loudly promised, would raise up the fire. The butler's discomfort, alone, signified little: Ian was a peculiar one, never at ease. Hand knew him only by the city's general understanding, a tale repeated out of the man's hearing: that Ian was, at best, a half-breed, and at worst a full pretender. Ian—Hand did not know his family name—claimed to be the legitimate son of Scots abroad, his parents and their money lost to catastrophe, a disaster always vaguely described. He had entered William's service long before, and was now about forty years old, and had lived on Scottish soil for the majority of his life, yet he still acted as though he had something to hide, which made the general talk of the city, if it ever took time to return its attention to him, only more eager in its suspicion. Ian affected at all times a broad Scots accent, and remained a heavy user of local terms and phrases, even those that most educated Edinburgh fellows scorned to use. Hand found it unfortunate: had Ian simply been honest, no one would hold it against him. It was no crime to have been born to a Bengali woman's womb, after all.

Yet other signs in the house, beyond the worried, frantic air of Ian's manner, hinted at trouble. The staff had too little to do: two girls gathered outside the sitting room door, and the maid, having brought Hand a glass of warmed wine, waited a few steps from the fireplace, watching Ian shove and bully the coals into life. The house seemed to have fallen into a cold, unhappy slumber.

“Where,” Hand asked, “is Mr. Cavenar? Is William expected home today?”

“He is away,” said Ian. “On—on business.”

“Really? When might he return?”

Ian merely smiled, his blinking eyes so pained that Hand had to look away, ashamed, as though he, and not Ian, had told the lie. Hand noted the faint dust sprinkling his chair's arms, and the heap of old material in the fire place, two piles of detritus that a servant should have removed, but which had instead been eased to the sides. These workers did not behave as though they expected their master's re-appearance—not any time soon.

“We are sorry, Mr McLeish. Perhaps you can visit us again another day.” The maid stared at Hand fearfully, unable to keep still, shifting her weight from left to right. She tugged at a loose thread on her sleeve. From the door, one of the watching girls gasped, and the whole room turned to stare out the window, but all that was visible was a trio of fisherman, trudging down the shore with nets and baskets on their backs.

Hand stood. “Tell me what has happened to William Cavenar. I know that you are trying to hide it, but you are doing a very poor job. Tell me now, or I go back to Conley Cavenar, the family's head. He will be displeased.” Most of the time, Hand wished that Ian would calm himself, and act as though he were simply another member of Edinburgh's bustling life. Today, however, Hand was glad of the man's uncertainty. Ian would be too weak to resist.

The maid looked at Ian, waiting for an answer.

“I believe you have been placed in a difficult situation,” Hand said, “and I notice that nothing has been stolen from this room. I will speak warmly of you.”

Someone outside the room—one of the listening girls—whimpered. Ian closed his eyes, squeezing them tight.

The maid stepped forward. “We dinnae know what to do, sir. We talked about it and talked. Ian told us —”

Ian looked at Hand. “The master has disappeared. He has been gone over a week.”

This made no sense. “Why not tell anyone?”

Ian pulled up a three-legged stool, and sat close to Hand, his eyes imploring forgiveness. The sitting room door opened, and the serving girls entered, silently.

“William,” he said, “often went away. He would leave us, on business. Business he did not like to speak about. He would meet some people, in Leith and Edinburgh, and when he left, I was not to tell anyone. We were to pretend he was at home.”

“Were these people,” Hand asked, “the local trade unionists?”

Ian started back. “Lord. How did you know that?”

Hand waved the question away. “You’re saying he left one day, and simply—?”

“No,” said a serving girl. “He left us in the night, without anyone hearing him. When we woke the next morning, we couldn’t find him.”

The men and women of the house followed as Ian guided Hand through the possible escape routes. The house had no cellar, and the master slept upstairs. Ian pointed out the lodgings of the two serving girls, and the alcove by the back door where the coach driver’s boy was supposed to curl up at night. Both the front and back doors, the servants claimed, had been locked and bolted before William had vanished. Around that time, the weather had turned for the worse, and so they had gone about the house with some care, locking the windows, double-checking the doors. The bolts had remained fastened the next morning.

Had the old man really left his own bedroom and crept through the house? Hard to believe he would have escaped unobserved. And he would have needed an accomplice, too, someone within the house, to follow behind and slide back the bolts. But what then? Would he, an elderly man of frail dimensions, have walked along the beach, in the late autumn night, risking the force of the storm? The servants had heard no coach draw up to the house, they promised, and no horses neither. Yet perhaps the wind and rain had covered such an arrival.

Ian led Hand upstairs. The other servants gathered in the hallway below, watching them ascend. The upstairs hallway seemed odd, and Hand's tired, duty-occupied mind required a moment to spot what was wrong.

“Was the house always so bare?” Hand had never visited William Cavenar before, but the accepted thing for any house of means was to decorate hallways and staircases with portraits and landscapes, usually of people and places dear to the owner's family. A few nails remained in this wall, indicating that, until recently, the custom had been obeyed.

Ian was slow to answer. “Mr Cavenar had—lately—become tired—of his decorations.”

Hand opened the door to William's bedroom. The style was unexpectedly feminine, with a cream carpet and pleasantly elaborate furniture, the legs of the wardrobe and the secretary rippling with arabesques. Yet everything looked faded and worn, the purchases of many years in the past. Unlike the other rooms Hand had seen in the house, this

bedroom had a grand double window, built of many sturdy, thick panes, providing a hazy view of the hillside below and, beyond it, the clouded waters of the Firth.

“This is madness,” Hand said. “How long did you think you could keep his disappearance a secret?”

“I didn't think!” Ian replied. “At first, I assumed he was coming back. He liked to go off on business, or prayer, sometimes. The first day, I was sure that's what he had done. Two days like that, and I knew something must have happened. I worried I would be hanged. Now, I know I will be.”

“Hanged for waiting?”

“For murdering him. You know what the people say of me. They hate me.”

Hand paused. “No one thinks anything of you.”

“They would accuse me of everything: of murdering him, or helping his murderer, or preventing his rescue by holding my tongue. They believe I am Indian. No matter what I tell them, they doubt my blood, yes? Think what they would say. How easily I would be chosen and tried. I already see it.”

“No, that's too much, far too much. Because of a little fear, you've risked the livelihoods of everyone in this house.”

“Oh, I know it is true. They have told me so. I should—I should—but even if you live on this soil for twenty, thirty years —”

Hand could not credit Ian's worries. Was the man really of mixed blood? If so, who would care? He should admit it and be done with the worry. Yes, of course, one heard talk, when the hour was late and men were in the mood. Not everyone was generous

towards to the other peoples of the planet, the cultures who the uneven rate of mankind's advancement had poorly treated. Even Boswell, old poxy Boswell, who had in his youth been something of a radical—or who, at least, had allowed Dr. Johnson to pull him into a kind of liberal philosophy—now was fond of issuing gross, disturbing opinions about “the other races” and their “function” in Britain's empire. But those were just words. If a man paid his own way, spoke like a good Scotsman, and wore a decent wig, then he would welcome in Edinburgh, Hand believed: just as welcome as any native-born McDonald or Murray. No one would care what his natural hair looked like.

William Cavenar's bed was narrow, set in the room's corner. A single man's resting place. The headboard was a solid block of American chestnut. Hand ran a fingertip down the tiny gap between the front panel and the side, spotting a tiny recessed lock in the top corner. It was not quite a hidden lock.

“What's in here?”

Ian took a moment to respond. “Mr. William's papers.”

“Open it, please.”

Ian did not reply.

“Hurry,” said Hand, already knowing he would get his way. “You need my protection.” Ian was weak, afraid, and it felt good to be stronger than him, more secure.

Inside Hand found a small stack of books, their spines poking in all directions, as though the collection had been in regular use. The top book turned out to be a Roman Catholic bible: Hand could not read the Latin, but he knew what he was looking at.

William was a secret Catholic? The man had never displayed much inclination. The next

book complicated the picture: *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, by Edwards, the American divine; the third was an unfamiliar tome, author unclear, with a short but intriguing title: *Spiritual Beliefs of the Hindu*.

“I had no idea William was religious,” Hand said, “in any way. He always seemed to me to worship, if he worshipped anything, his own property.”

“That was the man he was, yes,” Ian said, speaking in a soft voice, as though afraid to be overheard. “Lately, however, he had begun to think of other matters. He was troubled. He thought of heaven, and whether he was destined for that place.”

Hand lifted a heavy book from the compartment: a handwritten diary. The writing was thick, and difficult to make out, but the spirit of the records was easy to discern: William had kept an account of his prayers. Page after page, William's handwriting described a failure to do right by his conscience, and the enormous fear that God had lost hope in him. Most days, his hours of prayer ended in despair. Hand put the book down, aware that he might be reading a man's last words.

“What was he doing with the trade unionists?” Until discovering this collection of books, Hand had assumed that William was hoping to infiltrate and betray the radicals. He might even have been working as a government agent. Now, however, it seemed possible that William's involvement was genuine. Could he have gone over to the Jacobins? Overcome by religious guilt, he might have believed anything his duty, even to extend revolution to these shores.

Hand bent down slowly, his knees sore, and looked under the bed, hoping to find more books or papers. Instead he found only a few dead leaves, single-pointed, browned

and dry. He stood, a pair of those leaves in his palm. He felt strangely reminded of the last days of Douglas's life, the terrible encounters with the horned man. The trees appearing where no forest had ever stood. Diarmid crying out in agony, and Tyler struck and falling, falling. Leaves flung about in the wind.

“The room was full of them, those things, when we went in at last,” said Ian. “I told one of the girls to sweep them away.”

“How did they get in? There can't be a good-sized tree within a mile of this house.”

“Oh, you'd be surprised, sir. You'd never guess what blows in from the sea.”

These words drew the notice of Hand's clock sense, his extra ability to perceive the world and its rhythms. Usually defunct during the regular week, his power seemed to twitch an ear, the way a sleeping cat grew alert at a bird's approach.

“You said the windows were locked.”

They went to the grand double windows. Hand turned the key in the frame, finding it loose, moving without obstruction.

“The lock is broken.” Hand pulled, applying his strength to the unlocked window, tugging it inward, but neither frame moved. Something was holding it shut, jamming it from the outside.

Ian pushed with him, and with a snap, the left frame swung in, forcing Hand to jump back. From the outside, the damage to the wood was clear, as though it had received a sharp blow. A thin strip of leather lay on the carpet, the wedge that had kept the windows shut despite their broken lock.

There was no balcony; the wall was sheer. It was a significant drop to the ground below. No obvious handholds permitted a climb. Yet Hand's clock sense whispered that this was the answer. This was how William had left that night: he had been removed through this window. Someone had climbed the wall, broken the window's lock with brute force, climbed into the room, incapacitated or bludgeoned old William Cavenar, and had carried him back through the window, wedging it shut to avoid discovery. And then, somehow, this modern-day Hercules had climbed down the wall with the unconscious William slung over his shoulder. A feat of nearly impossible strength.

"No," said Ian, guessing the direction of Hand's thoughts. "Mr. William could not have climbed down."

Hand did not know anyone capable of such a deed.

"I want to get some men together, for dawn tomorrow, to search the surrounding area," said Hand. "And I want you to show me all of William's papers regarding the trade unionists. I want to know what he hoped to achieve."

"Should we call the sheriff? What will we say?"

Hand remembered Conley's anxious mood, his eyes giving too much away. "Not yet." He knew more than Conley: he did not want to throw the opportunity away.

Chapter Six

The following day, the search began at first light. There had to be some trace remaining, Hand reasoned, if the old man really had been lugged through the window and carried off. It might be the sign of a boat recently docked, or a scrap of the scarlet nightclothes that William Cavenar wore to bed, but something, he hoped, would remain. Hand told his employees little, merely describing the kinds of things they should look for. He stood with his brother Calum as a three-man team headed south along the coast, departing over the uneven ground in the gloomy half-light, their voices soon lost under the sigh of the tide. Two hours later, they returned with news of a corpse.

A stone's throw from a nearby village, a ruined fisherman's cottage, its thatched roof mostly worn away, turned out to be the grisly resting place of William Cavenar. It was a humble place, with walls constructed from an indistinct mix of sod, broken brick, and plank. It possessed no real floor: William's beaten and broken body lay in one muddy corner, as though he had tried to crawl away from his attacker, struggling to delay his final end. Water dripped from the insufficient twigs and straw of the roof, falling on the dead man's bright red trousers and his bared chest, as though the rain sought to soothe his terrible wounds. Someone—or some group of men—had pummeled and swung at the old man until his neck had cracked. The air was dank, loamy, with a strong smell of shit.

Hand felt ill. He had not seen a dead body in a long time. Yet he also felt a livid, unfamiliar excitement. Something had happened, and Conley did not know about it. Someone had taken aim at a member of the Cavenar clan and had eliminated him, and

this meant that the family's power was not as strong as they imagined. Their power had limits.

Ian's shoulders were shaking, and he covered his eyes. "Ruined. I'm ruined. Me, this one you see here—" he gestured at his own chest, "this is a dead man walking."

"You killed him?" Calum had covered his mouth with a handkerchief.

"The sheriff will finger someone close to William for the crime. They will put it on my neck."

"You'll be all right," Hand said. "I'll vouch for you and the others."

"I'll send a lad to find the sheriff," Calum said, backing away to the door, leaning on his walking stick as he went.

Hand stared at the sprawled body. He had no idea who the murderer could be. Someone had dragged old Cavenar, alive, from the house, brought him here, and killed him. Perhaps it had been a government assassin, sent to finish off old William before he lost his head and announced his support of the trade unionists. But the crime seemed too garish, too grotesque, for a professional.

Hand's task was done: Conley had asked him to discover the uncle's fate, and he had done so. It had not quite taken ten minutes, but now the job was complete, Hand had earned his week off. The prospect sang to him. He could return to his comfortable study, let the complexities of trade winds and the Spanish navy fade from his mind. He could, in short, regain himself, become something more than his own shadow. He could likely complete his proposal for Bellevue. And if the council accepted his proposal, his name would grow in Britain. More opportunities would arise.

“No,” he told his brother. “Hold off on the sheriff for now.” He would not tell Conley, not just yet. The broken body that sprawled in the room's corner remained a puzzle. Something was amiss in the world, and the Cavenars, it appeared, had no idea what it was. Perhaps the murder would remain forever unexplained, one of the world's endless solitary enigmas. Or perhaps this was a crack in the fortress. Hand felt as though he stood in the infamous Ridotto, bearing in his palm only a single foreign coin, its value uncertain, its provenance unknown. He did not want to give away his coin, not before he understood it better.

“What?” Calum asked, annoyed. “You can't keep it a secret. It's too late for that. You should have brought me, just me, if you wanted to —”

“We can. Cover him with a sheet.”

“People round here have seen us coming and going. Everyone will know by tomorrow.”

“What?” someone called from outside. “What was that? Cover him with a sheet?” Hand flinched, afraid. He knew that voice.

Conley stood in the doorway. He looked down at the corpse. He stared at Hand. He seemed pleased.

“You were trying to keep secrets.”

“I am still investigating.”

Conley looked back at him, seemed like he might be convinced. He one a step into the house, peering at the corpse, shaking his head, turning pale.

Hand said, “It's a mystery—”

Conley turned to him, his gaze fearful. He spat on the dirt floor. “No. You don't understand. McLeish. You don't understand. You work for me. I control great forces, remember? I own you. I can reach out to Philadelphia and have someone hurt your sister.” Calum started to threaten Conley against harming Abi, but Conley held up his open hand, demanding silence. “This is over. No more. Go back to your homes. Leave William's remains to me.”

Hand said, “I have done my part.” He hated the supplication in his voice. “I found William for you.”

Conley only laughed. “I caught you trying to betray me! My God. I suggest we forget our little agreement. You had better show up to work on time next week, bright and cheery, all right? Next week, you will impress. You will amaze, all right? Do a very good job with the clerks, or I'll be unhappy. Unpleasantly unhappy. Now go—out! Go home.”

The drizzle picked up as Calum and Hand walked back to William's house. The sea sluggishly beat upon the shore. Hand felt cold, his ankles and wrists too exposed to the breeze, but he stayed at a slow pace, one that Calum could maintain, his walking stick repeatedly getting stuck in the wet ground.

“Can't let him talk to you like that,” Calum said.

“I know,” said Hand. Lizzie had called him Conley's creature. Maybe she was right.

“We don't need him. We don't need their money.”

“But we do.” Hand was not sure why Calum's comment stung him with such bite.

“Of course we do.”

“John invited me for a beer the other day. He's trying to shift some commissions off Robert's book. Stop his brother working too hard.”

“I hope you didn't accept.”

“I should have.”

“Robert Adam is an artistic genius. We can't just produce the Adam style on demand.”

“I bet there's some posh lad in London we could hire. A half-starving dandy just back from Rome. He could figure it out.”

Hand could see William Cavenar's house ahead, the candles bright on the lower floor's windows. He badly wanted a cup of something warm, and a thicker coat. He longed to reach the house and escape the chill. Yet the darkened upper floor reminded him, too, of its owner, snatched from his own bed and murdered.

“Well,” Calum said, “let's finish the Bellevue proposal. Send to the Council. Let's get it in, and get it approved. Make some money. Then we strike out on our own. Thank the Cavenars for their help and wish them the best.”

Hand lacked his brother's confidence. He understood, better than Calum did, how many bills the family had to pay. Hand needed to maintain a certain look and dignity, in order to mix in society and get new work. Calum's four surviving children had to be raised into gentility, or as close to it as the family could afford. The firm's employees needed to be paid. Hand's estranged daughter in Glasgow required a hearty allowance. And beyond all these, Lizzie depended on him for her income.

She had said she no longer needed his help, but he did not know if this was true. If he gave up working with the Cavenars, she would be destitute.

A quiet voice in Hand's head whispered that he was just hiding from the truth: the Cavenars would never let him go.

Hand said, "I tried to quit them. It didn't work."

"This again! Why do you keep holding that over yourself? You can't let one failure sit on you forever. The whole country lost its savings over the Darien. Robert and John—those artistic geniuses of yours—they had to beg the government to save their arses because they mis-measured the height of the Thames. It's a riverbank. It doesn't move! How could they get it wrong? But they did. Still, they kept going, even prouder than before. Why should you be different? Why do you have to be better than them?"

Hand did not reply. His brother was right, he knew. He had to get himself and the firm free of Conley and the Cavenars. Either he had to earn his way to riches, or find a gap in the family's power, a weakness he could exploit.

The pub was quiet that afternoon. Hand carried his pint over to the seat by the fire, asked for the hearth to be stoked, the flames encouraged. He set on the wax-ridged table William Cavenar's diary and the pile of the dead man's most recent papers.

The sheriff had been sent for. In William's house, two of Hand's clerks were taking down statements from each of the servants, so that they would not incriminate themselves if called for a criminal trial. In an hour or so, the whole of Edinburgh would hear of the old man's murder.

So if Hand wanted to use what he knew—if he wanted to uncover the links between William Cavenar, the trade unionists, and whoever had killed him—before the relevant parties knew they were under scrutiny—he had to work fast.

William's diary was mostly a collection of self-exhortations to prayer. Hand flicked through the pages. Day followed night with no let up in William's overwhelming guilt. The book was written with the vagueness of someone recording his own thoughts, and William rarely paused to explain what specific acts had made him a 'sinner,' or whether the 'murder' he accused himself of was a real or imagined crime. Hand thought back to the Cavenar offices, and the pallid weak men who, by moving a piece of paper from desk to desk, caused the deaths of thousands. Were their crimes real, or imagined—or both?

Hand felt very tired, and the poor flickering light of the pub slowed down his reading. He had started with a heavy pile of papers, the ones that Ian had assured him were the most recent, but William Cavenar appeared to have no system for his correspondence. Hand looked away, stretched his neck, and tried to marshal his strength. After all, he owned a certain a genius, certain talents that he could deploy. However, when he sought out the help of his clocks, he found the planet Earth standing in his way. There it was, the massive globe glowing in his mind: the picture of the world he had built up over so many years of working for the Cavenars. Through the endless, remorseless stream of reports, newspapers, and private letters, he had absorbed more information than any normal mind should. He suspected he knew more of the world, its trade-ways, its conflicts, than perhaps any man ever had—or should. Largely, it was an illusion: most of his information came months, even years out of date, and he had no sure way of

removing lies and mistakes from his picture. Yet it shone there in his mind, a model kept alive by his uncanny talent for keeping track of things, as though his many clocks flitted about the immense mental globe he maintained, tending to its endless complexities and corners. Often, that distant world, removed in time and space from his regular life, seemed more real than the people he met in the street.

The effort to keep it intact was always with him: he had simply learned to ignore the strain.

Now, however, he needed his genius back. He needed it for his own use. The walk through the cold had drained him of strength, and words swam on the page. Conley had demanded that Hand put in a strong show the following Wednesday, that he deliver even better information than usual. But today, Hand needed his mind back, just a portion of it. No one in the Cavenar office cared about Japan, for instance, or the far reaches of Siberia. He had absorbed a supply of facts about those distant places, and yet he was never asked anything about them. He could let that part of the world fall away, fade from his mind. It would be a risk—to free up a little of his genius—but likely the Cavenars would never find out. No one would know. And as time went on, and more information arrived on his desk, he could rebuild that obscure corner, replenish his understanding.

He closed his eyes, and looked up at the great glowing planet. Shivering, suddenly anxious, he allowed a large portion of the Far East to slip away. He was no longer remembering so much of the flux and flow of life in that part of the world: there had been a particularly interesting trader in one of the Chinese properties—in the city of Ulan

Bator—yet Hand no longer remembered his name. The man's entire story was gone, merely its absence remaining, like a missing tooth.

Hand breathed more deeply: he felt a few of his clocks return to him, a few more frequencies now free for his use.

He gestured at the bar, and received a re-fill of his glass. He sipped his beer, re-reading, asking his clock-sense for help. It leapt to his aid. He had already passed over, he suddenly saw, a curious matter. He reached for the diary, flicking back its heavy, squat pages.

William's writings, both in the diaries and his letters, showed every indication of being an honest convert to the trade unionist cause. He had attended several of their meetings: one occurred every Friday night—tonight—in Crannock's old warehouse. And in particular, he seemed intrigued, even fixated, on a particular young woman, or a child—Hand found it hard to tell—who was somehow involved with the movement.

This young woman, Leda, played no clear role in the leadership, and yet she seemed prominent enough that William could assume that a great many people knew of her. There seemed something damaged or unsightly about this girl: William had written several letters in the past month hoping to arrange tuition and introductions, and while in his diary, he spoke of how marvelous she was, in his letters, he assumed that others understood how struck by misfortune she was, how deeply she was in need of help.

One of the people William had written to, Hand noted, was the heiress to the Bray Shambles, Arabella Carver. He had been asking her if she would discuss the girl's education. This was interesting: over the years, Hand had seen Miss Carver many times

since the nightmare days of the horned man, and he believed that she viewed him amicably.

Hand turned page after page, committing each detail to his memory. He still had no idea who might want William dead. He saw no indication that William was engaging in treason or unrest: there were references to a strike planned for the end of the month, but workers had carried out strikes many times.

He would have to investigate. However, as Hand's clock sense spun and wove with additional force, he felt only more troubled by the implausibility of how William had been abducted. Either a great team of skilled men had cooperated on removing William from the house, or the servants had lied, or the person who had committed the crime possessed strange powers, vitality far beyond that of normal men. And Hand had no idea who that person might be.

Chapter Seven

The radicals held their meetings in Crannock's, a half-derelict warehouse on the Edinburgh road. Hand had only visited the space once before, during its years of high industry. Back then, Crannock's had housed several traders of fineries. Each of these agents and buyers had been well-connected among the French aristocracy, and the warehouse constantly hungered for Scots ornaments, crafts, and fabrics. The highest classes of French society had long possessed a fondness for Scots weavings and leather-working: from over the country's coastal towns and highlands, crafts came to this warehouse to be consigned, packed, and shipped. Ten years ago, when Hand had last seen it, the enterprise had employed more than twenty men and women, and he still remembered his excitement.

This visit had occurred soon after Tyler's passing, a private funeral on the Mediterranean, which Hand had not been invited to attend. Hand had arrived at Crannock's in a melancholic state, sunk in a gloomy emptiness, missing both Tyler and Lizzie, but the scents of tanning and varnish, the Hebridean murmur of the traders come to make a sale, the bright hues of high-piled cloaks and linens, the strong, intense mug of coffee which a blue-eyed girl had given him: the vitality of the place had warmed his heart, made him feel that the world was still fresh, still welcoming.

Today, however, Crannock's was all but moribund. The French aristocracy no longer requested clothes from Scotland. Demand for fine goods had collapsed since the looting of the Bastille: for several months, highlanders had continued to bring their wares, either

unaware of the great upheavals far away, or simply unable to imagine that the news they received of foreign conflicts could ever affect their daily routine. But Crannock's buyers had no more appetite for supply, their credit ruined, lacking the funds even to arrange a discounted sale in English markets.

Now, from the road, one might think the building abandoned, unless one noted the guard at the door.

Inside, Hand was asked to wait in the old reception hall, a drafty long space, shivering cold. Through a closed door, Hand could overhear a stern, passionate meeting, and could see under that door the shifting of candle light. He was required to sit and wait for his audience, however, and the expressions around the table suggested he was lucky to be let in this far. He told them that he wanted to negotiate with the union, perhaps agree to some of their demands for his upcoming projects, and this explanation seemed to have convinced no one at all.

A dour woman with a heavy, square face had frown at him ever since he had been let in. She had not given her name, nor said a word. To his left, however, a fellow with impressively clean teeth chattered incessantly about religion. Hand had given the man a few vague responses, his attention elsewhere. A pair of criminal-looking types lounged by the back wall, thin cold men: they regarded him as though planning where they might dispose of his corpse. And, to Hand's surprise, a black girl of about twelve or thirteen, a dark-skinned African young woman, sat at the table to his right, working on her embroidery. He did not know how many black women he had seen throughout his life: not many. She was certainly the first he had shared a table with.

The thrill of defying Conley had already faded. This did not seem a promising group.

“St. Andrews, that is your preferred church, yes?” asked the well-toothed fellow.

“Aye,” said Hand. “I attend.”

“I like that kirk,” he said. “I have often written to the minister, asking if he would read a short sermon of mine. I believe the listeners would be quite moved.”

“Careful,” said the dour-faced woman. “He's a spy.”

This comment sharpened the air. The two men by the wall leaned forward, their eyes glinting. The black girl stopped her needles, looking up at Hand, then glancing away.

“I'm a business owner,” Hand said. “I'm seeing if I can work with the union.”

The dour woman continued to stare at Hand, her eyes cold. The others were not impressed, but the intensity soon passed from them, and they continued to wait. Hand smiled at the suspicious woman, pushing back his irritation. It was already evening. He could be working on his Bellevue proposal.

“Is there a young woman here—Leda?” he asked. The table again drew breath.

“Don't say a word,” said the dour-faced woman. “He works for that one. Mr. Cavenar-Dunley.”

Hand paused. “Why is Conley your enemy?”

“Don't answer, none of you.”

The door of the meeting room opened and perhaps fifteen people emerged, still talking with one another. These men and women appeared happy, flushed with self-belief. Hand, with the aid of his newly-quickenened clock sense, could discern among them

an inner group of four or five men. They seemed in charge. The people at Hand's table turned to them, expectant that these leaders would know what to do with the visitor.

One fellow, a white-haired man about Hand's age, came towards the table, smiling. Hand had not known the lawyer, Sebastian MacLode, had joined this faction, but he stood, glad to receive the man's handshake.

“What are you doing here, Hand? You are not popular in this crowd.”

Hand disliking lying to a friend, but he felt he had no choice. “I'm trying to do the right thing. I hope I can work out some kind of plan for the workers.”

“He looks like a spy to me,” the dour-face woman asserted.

MacLode nodded. “He might be.” Hand stepped back, jolted. He had assumed MacLode would support him—to his face, at the very least. They were friends. They had grown up in the same circles.

MacLode said, “Your employer wants us dead, so you can imagine why we feel suspicious.”

“He's after Leda,” said the dour-faced woman. “He wants to know who she is.”

MacLode nodded. “Leda is unusual, it's true.”

Another of the five men approached Hand. He was a slender fellow, and although his worn, dark features indicated that he was no gentleman, he carried himself with an appealing lightness, a conviviality.

“Well, he can't have her.” This man, Hand guessed, was the room's leader. William's letters had spoken of a key figure in the movement.

“Are you the man everyone calls 'Flood?’”

“How do you know so much about us?” Flood asked, his smile unkind.

Hand said, “My friend, William Cavenar, told me about his involvement. He convinced me that I was wrong about the trade union movement. He urged me to open my heart.”

This remark intrigued the group.

“That Mr. William,” said the dour-faced woman, “is also a spy.”

“Oh, Esmeralda,” MacLode replied, “Has he not done enough to persuade you?”

“He cannae persuade me. He's rich.”

Hand began to ask about something that had come up in William's diary a few times, a plan about the mills by the village of Dean, but he was interrupted. People were coming up to Flood, offering him their thanks, preparing themselves to depart. There were more of them than Hand had expected, and he thought he saw several familiar faces. He saw a husband and wife whom he knew from one of the larger bakeries in the city. He met eyes, uncomfortably, with an upright, muscular man who worked in Manbourg's Architectural Elements, probably Scotland's best supplier of stucco and stone. This man—Hand did not know his name—managed the process of mixing the ingredients for the firm's signature stucco, a vital task, a trade secret. Surely he was well-treated enough not to need a union's support?

“Hello Mr. McLeish,” he said. “Funny to see you here.”

Hand said, “It's my first visit.”

The young man held his glance. He had good reason to be cautious. Old Manbourg, who had opened his firm soon after arriving in Great Britain, had been a famous radical,

but his son, who had taken over the daily management of the business, was not. Hand smiled, hoping to indicate he meant no harm. He had no interest in reporting anyone.

Soon, most of the crowd was gone.

“How did you start talking to William,” Flood asked, “about the workers?” The question was asked without much care. To these men, Hand could tell, he meant little. His small firm would make no difference to their struggle. They might be intrigued by his visit, but he was barely worth trying to convert. If he continued to speak blandly, they would ignore him.

Hand paused. “I should tell you, first of all: William Cavenar is dead.”

Flood stared at him. “How?”

“Someone pulled him from his bed and beat him to death.”

Now they looked afraid. Flood glared at Hand. He urged the people at the table, who had heard Hand speak, to silence, and then he moved about the room, guiding the remaining union workers out.

MacLode stood by Hand. “Tell us what you know.”

Hand's account of the story pleased no one. Two of the leaders moved away, debating in another room. Hand guessed that William had spent enough time in their company to have picked up a considerable number of secrets. They could not be comfortable with the thought he had been targeted.

Flood down beside Hand. “Tell me —”

The dour-faced woman tutted, again warning them against him.

Hand looked at her. "Please, my lady. I have no bad intentions against you or your colleagues. I don't work for the government. I grew up in a humble corner of the old town, as some of you well know."

A heavy, bald man shook his head. "Escort him outside, someone."

Flood raised a finger. "He let us know about William's murder. That seems like a friendly act."

The clean, well-toothed man grabbed Hand's sleeve. "Tell us: are you sympathetic to a reformation of the Christian faith? Do you believe that much of what the Bible teaches is superstition, and that with the aid of reason, we can peer behind its stories to find the true code of the divine?" The fellow seemed quite mad.

Hand nodded, slowly.

"Good! He seems," the religious fanatic said, blinking, "like a trustworthy fellow. I would like to take a minute to preach to him about the Church of Divine Reason."

The thick-set man who disliked Hand shook his head. "Go, get out. No harm meant, friend. But you aren't welcome."

MacLode looked at the black girl at the table, who had returned to her knitting. "We should let Leda decide. What do you think, my dear?"

She looked around at the people in the room. "I don't know this man."

Flood nodded, "Aye. But should we trust him?"

Hand allowed Leda's eyes to examine him. He felt confused: this was the girl William in whom had been so interested? She seemed very young, and poorly equipped to make decisions on behalf of others. He did not have much experience of assessing the

looks of a black person, but Leda seemed, to his eyes, of quite typical appearance. She possessed little of the nobility and stature he had heard certain voyager's accounts ascribe to the aristocrats of the Abyssinians, nor the height of the warrior races of the south Pacific. She looked, in short, like a fairly typical child, raised without access to the heights of education and social training. He shifted in his seat, annoyed to be exposed to such a bizarre test.

"I am shocked—shocked to hear William was attacked," Leda said, her mouth tight. "He was a good friend to us. I hope the murderer is caught. I hope he is executed in some horrible fashion."

"Here, here," said MacLode. He noticed Hand's expression: "Leda has been through great suffering. She seems to give good advice—perhaps as a result." Hand felt deeply disappointed by this group: they seemed a well-intentioned set, but primarily made up of unemployed lawyers, former or current petty thieves, and eccentrics. If they were the best Britain's trade union movement could recruit, he understood why the government saw so little risk in them.

Leda was still watching Hand, and as he met her gaze, his face warmed. It was as though she had, without judging him for it, overheard his thoughts.

"I'm conflicted," she said. "William Cavenar meant a great deal to me, personally. Some of you know this, that he made promises to me."

"They all say that," said the dour-faced woman. "They say anything you like to hear."

The heavy bald man laughed. "This is a mistake, friends. Get our visitor out, right now. None of you recognise him, do you? This is Hand McLeish. He's a killer. He murdered his own boss, Douglas, and took the man's business. Am I the only one who remembers that?"

"I had to do it," Hand said. "Douglas was about to kill someone. He was mad."

"Oh, I'm sure," the man replied. "But that doesn't mean we should trust you."

Hand could not keep the irritation from his voice. "I am not your enemy. I am the owner of a small architectural firm. I do offer some advising to the Cavenar family, yes, but it's just advice. I struggle to turn a profit just like everyone else. To the high and mighty of this country, I am nobody at all." Hand glanced round the room, trying to meet each person's eye. He turned to a tall, long-haired girl who was standing by the wall, young woman with a powerful face and amused eyes. She smiled at him. He was looking right at Granny Wynd. Although she was not quite there, her form wavering like a mist or reflection, her eyes retained the brilliant blue he remembered. She smiled, and seemed to nod her head at Leda, as if to commend Hand for discovering the girl. She looked away from him, watching Leda.

Leda said, "I think we should be cautious with him. Be careful what we reveal."

Hand could only watch the apparition of Granny Wynd. She had not disappeared, but no one else appeared to see her in the room: she seemed to be listening to Leda's thoughts.

"He means us well, he says. And maybe he really believes that. But people don't always get to do the things they want. They can't do what they say. That's the whole trouble, isn't it?" Hand couldn't believe he was hearing this. He just wanted to find out who might have

killed William Cavenar. What was wrong with these people? And yet, from the wall where she stood, Granny Wynd nodded in thought, as though Leda spoke wisely.

“I told you,” said the white-haired MacLode, “this girl was special. See?” Hand stared at him. He held the entire world in his mind. He dealt with questions of a scale unimaginable to these people.

“Why,” asked MacLode, “can't Hand do what he says he wants?”

“Because,” said Leda, shrugging, “he has a great wound in him.”

The dour-faced woman nodded. “He is wounded, that's for sure. It's written all over him.”

“It's not his fault,” Leda said. “Don't make that mistake. He is hurt because he is an owner, an employer of other people. It makes him afraid. He thinks everything he is can be taken away. It stops him feeling things right.”

Hand stared at her, annoyed. “But that's true. Everything I have *can* be taken away. The same is true for everyone in this room.”

“Yes. We have a wound in ourselves, too. We are wounded because we own nothing. That's the nature of this place.”

“For God's sake! I am just trying to find out who killed William Cavenar. It's important.”

Flood said, “We don't trust you. I wish we could, but wishing, as Leda says so poetically, is not the nature of the world. If we find out anything, we will pass the news along.”

“What,” Hand asked, “about the plan for Dean village, the Incorporation of Baxters? Could William's death be involved in that?”

He had said the wrong thing.

“So,” said the dour-faced woman. “He really is a spy.”

“Conley sent you here, didn't he?” asked MacLode, all warmth gone from his face.

“He has no shame.” The table stood, and the thin men by the wall circled around, closing in on Hand. As they took up position behind his back, Granny Wynd offered them silent, wry applause.

Hand was led out by the heavy, large man, the one who had accused him of killing Douglas.

“Don't come back,” the man said.

“I didn't get your name,” Hand said.

“Don't come back.” The door was shut behind him.

Hand stood in the cold. He had wasted his evening. If he was going to get free of the Cavenars, it would have to be through some other method. No wonder the trade unionists had won little support throughout Britain. They were too suspicious for their own good.

He had left his driver in a nearby inn, in order that no one would see his coach at Crannock's. The walk would take him twenty minutes, and the wind was very cold. Hand pulled his hat tighter on his head, and buttoned his jacket, heading down the dark road. His sore tooth ached in the back of his mouth, and he wished for a thicker coat.

“Mr. McLeish!” The girl, Leda, had come after him. She was not dressed for the outdoors, and she leaned into the breeze, holding down her skirt.

He waited.

“Miss Arabella Carver. She said good things about you.”

Hand held back a curse. “Well, for God's sake, why didn't you say that in the bloody meeting? Instead of that nonsense about owning things?”

Leda nodded. “But what I said in the meeting was true. You don't really intend to hire the trade unionists, do you? For your firm?”

“I supposed I'm not a good man, then.”

Leda seemed to think the matter was more complex than that, but rather than reply, she asked, “Did Mr. Cavenar say anything about me? Had he prepared anything for me, before he died?”

“He was fond of you,” Hand said. “Please excuse me now, as I have a fair walk tonight.” If this girl wanted his help, she should have spoken more kindly to him indoors.

“I know, I know. But did he specifically provision anything? He often talked of it.”

“Are—are you his daughter?”

Leda blinked. “No. I only met him this year—he wanted to help me.”

“Help how?”

“Help me have a regular life. Do you understand? A regular life. Like everyone else has. Miss Carver even said that he should contact you, involve you. She said you were good at making plans.”

Hand took a step back. “His will should be released soon, and he may have provided for you there. But I have to go. I have real work to do.” He left the child there, and walked as quickly as he could down the Edinburgh road.

Chapter Eight

Hand arrived at dinner, two nights later, in a surprisingly buoyant mood. The ache in his mouth had receded, and he had made surprising progress on his plans for Bellevue. It was true, his attempted parley with the trade unionists had got him nowhere, and still he had no idea who killed William. Yet Conley had not troubled him any more, and nothing pressing had come up at the firm: as a result, Hand had enjoyed a long day of productive creation. He might send off his proposal sooner than he expected.

The lady of the house was waiting for him at the door. Her husband, Mr. Brook of Inverness, had inherited a decent income when the old Countess of Ayeshire died, and in light of Hand's close friendship with Marian, the couple had adopted Hand as a perpetual dinner guest. They seemed to believe Hand enjoyed their company just as much as he had Marian's, and while this was not exactly the case, it was not sufficiently far from the truth to be awkward, either. The new Count was generous, amiable, and his wife was, for the most part, polite and kind. Their regular invitations were no small gift: a continual presence in society was the only way for a contractor to get new projects. Many of the Scots who possessed fine houses and estates sought out only London-based architects—when Robert and John had released a collection of their greatest works, its pages had barely registered Scotland's existence. Hand needed his firm to be well-considered in Edinburgh, and spoken well of abroad, and the Brooks were admired all over Scotland for entertaining in great style.

Alice Brook greeted him with greater than usual warmth, taking his arm, and regarding him keenly. Hand paused, unsure what force had overruled her usually austere manner.

“You dressed well,” she said. “That was wise. We have a special guest for you.”

Hand exclaimed, “Raeburn? Are the Raeburns coming?”

Alice seemed to find this funny. “Henry and Anne, yes, they will be at the dinner table.” Henry Raeburn was a talented painter who, through the deftness of his brush, had won the heart of a prodigiously wealthy widow. Raeburn lived for his work: rather than retire on his acquired riches, he instead had moved his wife to Rome, where they had stayed for two years while he honed his technique. But he was interested in a great many fields, and now he was back in Edinburgh, he had the idea to do something with his wife's estates. Each time they had been able to talk about business, Raeburn had seemed willing to hear out Hand's suggestions. The village of Stockbridge seemed an ideal area for the new town to expand into: if Hand could take charge of that project, it would make his plan for Bellevue seem like a natural extension of the inevitable.

Hand walked with the lady of the house to the dining room. Henry and Alice Brook had tasked Robert Adam with an intriguing challenge: to take an overly large and long space, which Alice refused to be shortened or broken up, and make it familial, even cosy. Robert's ingenuity had summoned darkness to his cause: the walls and ceilings were the shade of mahogany. The long table, lit by a profusion of candles, loomed gorgeously in the room's warm shade. The china and polished silver shimmered under the flicker of the chandeliers.

Conley was there, unfortunately, but the hosts had placed Hand far from him. Conley looked bad: wealth and power did not agree with him. He shook his heavy chin in Hand's direction, offering the barest smirk.

“I have been told,” he said, gloating, his voice guttural and liquid, “that you will perform a remarkable job next week, in the Cavenar office. I have advised several friends of the family to attend. They will want to see the works. Yes? The whole works.”

Hand did not flatter him with a reply. Conley might employ him, but he was not their slave. He was no one's puppet.

Dinner was served with two guests still absent, but as the table comfortably sat sixteen, the room was already loud enough without them. Hand was seated opposite Henry Raeburn, and beside the man's wife, Anne, but between offering her portions of each dish, and learning about Raeburn's commissions from a generous Tory in Somerset, he had no chance to present his latest ideas for Stockbridge.

Once the last dishes were laid out, the hosts dismissed their servants, and with doors closed, the temper of conversation grew more heated, personal, and fierce. Conley promised a scandalous tale about a trick that the infamous Richard Rigby had played on the Earl of Bute, but was hushed by Raeburn, who ordered him to hold the story until the ladies had retired.

The hostess, Countess Alice, was briefly abandoned by the flow of talk.

“Who else is coming?” Hand asked, indicating the empty seats.

“Duncan Crieve-Cavenar is one,” she said, frowning. “He is usually prompt.” Hand kept his groan inside his head. Duncan Cavenar was a wretched dinner guest. He was

another of William Cavenar's generation, but unlike his brothers, he had spurned the family business, opting instead to make his name as a poet. Hand had deliberately avoided reading any of the man's verses, but he understood that they were weak beer, at best. As Duncan aged, he had grown only more bitter and prickly, resentful of any other poet's success, and was widely suspected to be the author of a number of bleak, caustic letters, circulated by hand, between gentlemen of a certain class. Hand had read two of these screeds: "On The Age of the Planet And The Falseness of The Female Sex" and "On The Impossibility Of Improving Even By The Minutest Degree The Dignity Of The Poor." Hand had found both pieces miserable, morally vile, yet surprisingly well-argued, with a daring supply of allegory and metaphor. Duncan clearly should have made his career in prose, but Hand had no intention of telling the unpleasant fellow so.

"Duncan," Hand said, nodding at the empty chair to his right, "is unmarried."

"Aye," Alice said, looking at the door. "That place is for a different Cavenar. And—look—here she is."

Hand turned, and found himself rising to his feet. The door was open. Lizzie was standing there, in the doorway. The butler was waiting for a drop in the room's talk to announce her. Lizzie blinked, met his eye, her mouth tight. She appeared in deep discomfort. Hand looked back at his hostess: she was quietly beaming. She must have thought he would be pleased to see Lizzie. And he was—he thought he was—he felt unsure.

The room continued to gossip and crow. Conley was leaning over his lamb medallions, and had not seen Lizzie. She wore, as before, the thinnest of black armbands:

her dress was a deep green, and in the dark flickering of the Brooks' dining room, that mourning band would have been invisible if Hand had not known to look for it.

She was given the chair beside his. Hand could not look at her.

Conley wiped his mouth. "Did France treat you well?"

"Always."

"I'm glad," said Conley, smiling, although not amused. "But Edinburgh is much safer."

Hand noticed Alice in discussion with Anne Raeburn. The ladies would soon withdraw.

He picked up the serving spoons. "Are you hungry?"

"No," Lizzie said. "But thank you." She examined the room. "I was sorry to hear about your wife. I should have written to you, but I didn't. So I'm sorry about that, too."

Hand felt some of the tension in his chest fade.

She looked at him. "I should have been more decent the other night, in St. Andrews. Only, you had annoyed me, you know, with those gifts. That was not the right tone."

"Gifts?"

"Yes, of course," she said, moving away, rising with the other women. "A flirtatious tone does not become you, my dear."

Twenty minutes later, clutching his glass of port, Hand was still chewing on Lizzie's rebuke. He felt confused by her answers, and stung, too. Her life might have mounted a mockery of common-place morality, but Hand had always defended her. And he worked for the Cavenars because she needed him to: he made her life possible. That had been the

arrangement they had reached with Coney: Hand's work in exchange for Lizzie's full pension. Yet she continually launched attacks. And what did she mean by gifts? He didn't even know where she lived.

Conley stood over the chamber pot, pissing in a troubled stream.

He wiped his hands and picked up his glass. "To poor William. Attacked in his bed." William had not been well loved; Hand, alone, knew of the man's secret conversion, his apparent longing for a reconciliation within his soul. Had the change in heart brought William any happiness, before he died? What would a few months' repentance mean to the victims of William's earlier actions, those hundreds of souls watching implacably from Heaven?

"Where," asked a broad-chested, handsome officer, one of the more prestigious guests of the evening, "is Mr. Duncan Crieve? I had hoped to praise him for his pithy opinions. Opinions I do not share," he added, smirking, "in any way."

A voice in Hand's head whispered that Duncan Crieve-Cavenar had not attended because he was dead. William's murderer had killed him, too. Hand blinked, frowning. He had applied his clock sense for so long to the Cavenar business empire that he felt unsure if this intuition came from his genius, or was a mere flicker of the mind, something to be ignored.

Conley walked over to Hand and refilled his glass. "Duncan is working and cannot take a break. He is busy creating a new missive, another grand philosophical treatise. So he decided not to attend." Hand frowned: his instincts said otherwise, but he pushed the

worry about. "The current title of his forthcoming masterpiece, I am told, is 'Money: The Inheritor of the Earth.'"

"Intriguing," said the officer. "I can't tell, from the title alone, what slant he intends to take."

The evening quickly grew drunk and rash. Hand had to sit out much of the conversation: it consisted largely of gossip about London society. He absently turned his attention, as the port sank into his blood, to the great model of the world he maintained in his mind. The world's lights flickered and smoked in endless space, and the vast complex planet presented itself to him, unguarded. Its territories, its unknown spaces, its journeys of people and material. The gap, however, in the parts of the map that Hand had just abandoned, loomed blankly, like the ache of a sore muscle. He had been foolish to give it up. What had he gained by losing so much of the world? The trade unionists were not willing to help him. They were not even decent people. The Brooks's house: this, in the end, was his place, this finely decorated dining room, this chamber of mahogany and polished copper. He just had to work harder to ascend into its ranks.

"Reggie," the officer was saying, "was the more likely candidate, but at the last minute, he seemed lose his nerve, and stopped pursuing the post. My superior stamina won out."

The room turned to Hand, observing him curiously, and he became aware he had spoken. The room swayed uncertainly, and he wondered what he had said.

"Spanish flu?" asked the officer. "What does Spanish flu have to do with it?"

Hand nodded. Yes, that made sense. The Spanish flu would have decided the matter.

“Your 'Reggie' is Reginald Davis Clements. His family are agents for the largest landowners in Carolina.”

Raeburn asked, “You know fat Reggie?”

“We've never met. But I—I have heard the news about him. This summer, the price of sugar rose dramatically, yes?”

“Because,” Lord Crust said, “of the damn slaves in Saint Domingue.”

Raeburn sipped his wine. “But why,” he asked, “would a higher sugar price hurt Reggie? Wouldn't it help him?”

“At first. Before the sickness in Marseilles, and in several other French ports.” Hand arranged wine glasses on the table, creating a simple map of Britain, France, Carolina, and Saint Domingue. A triangle between France, the West Indies, and the American continent, with Britain watching from above. At Hand's request, the butler passed him spoons to represent the flow of trade.

He narrated as he built up his miniature hemisphere, describing the arrangements that kept sugar flowing across the Atlantic. “When the news spread that the French navy was beset by sickness, that revealed that they could not reinforce Saint Domingue. Therefore, plantation owners in Charleston demanded a re-negotiation with Reginald's family. They felt powerful enough to ignore old contracts.”

The officer, who had been squatting over the chamber pot, with his loosened trousers in one hand, lunged for the table, grabbing the wine glass representing London. “Thus weakening Reggie at just the right time, and allowing me to triumph!”

Hand nodded. "While you were contesting for the office, he was swept up in matters half a world away."

The officer shook the glass, regarding with delight his own success, and then frowned. "How do you know all this?"

Conley took Hand's arm. "Mr. McLeish simply reads the newspapers. Let us bring the ladies back, yes?" He leaned close. "Your gifts are not for public consumption! You work for us, yes?"

Hand tugged to get his arm free, but Conley held him fast.

"Listen. Listen. You work for me."

"Conley. I am not interested in—let me go."

"You cannot escape. Even if you could, where would you go? Who would pay you? No one. No one who is free of the enterprise that you despise. Sell your talents to someone else, you will still be paid with the money earned off murder and enslavement. Oh, yes. You heard me." Conley seemed possessed by an unusually intense mood. "I am not like these others. My eyes are open. I know what horrors sustain our lives, here on this chilly isle. I know, and I intend to keep it going—forever. Strengthen it. That's right. I'm going to strengthen our power over this weeping, helpless world."

"What in God's name are you saying?"

Conley leaned close. "The stakes are higher than you know. It's not just getting money here and there, selling this and that. That's what the uncles are after. Let them squabble! There is a greater plan. A greater plan than you know. The empire is about to

expand. Expand, quite dramatically, across the whole world. A few men will achieve the kind of power that Caesar and Tamerlane only dreamed of.”

Hand asked, “Who killed William? You know, don't you?”

Conley drew back. “Follow me, and you'll see. Obey me, and all will become clear.”

The party ascended to the drawing room, and, through the slow, reserved dancing, Hand slowly sobered. He did not know what Conley was talking about, and he suspected the man was a maniac. And yet he felt sure that Conley did know the cause of William's death, and this suspicion unsettled Hand, because the manner of that murder was impossible. Conley's face gave away no clues.

Hand allowed the lady of the house to smile at him, allowing her to think he was happy to see Lizzie again. And in fact, he was. Each time he was paired with her, he felt himself run through with an electric charge, as though he were Benjamin Franklin, flying his kite in a storm. She took his hand willingly enough, but did not often meet his eye.

The party, at last, came to an end. Conley had collapsed, dozing, in a chair. Lizzie and Hand found themselves standing apart from the others.

“I didn't send you any gifts,” Hand said.

“I don't believe you. The note sounded just like you. But you are not 'The Lord of the Cavenars.' You are their servant. The same as I am.”

“Hold on—'The Lord of the Cavenars'? Who said that?”

“Everyone is talking,” Lizzie said, ignoring the question, “about your plan to develop Bellevue. Apparently, you have a very pretty street plan, all laid out.”

“You sound displeased.”

“Of course I am!”

Hand stopped. How dare she?

“I am carrying out Douglas's plan for the city,” he said, harsh and low. “I am developing the new town, helping it to expand. To thrive.”

“You are definitely not carrying out Douglas's plan. You are the opposite of everything he wanted.”

“I stayed,” Hand said. “I stayed in Edinburgh and fought for your father's vision of the future. I have been working for this city's future every day for the past ten years.”

She met his eye, unafraid. “I don't blame you. Really, it's my fault. I encouraged you to sell your soul. I will always bear that shame. I will never be clean from that. So this is my fault, much more than yours. Well. Excuse me. My driver is waiting.” She hurried down the stairs.

Alice Brook came over to Hand. “Go. Follow her.”

“But—”

“If she wants to leave—but until then—”

Hand found Lizzie waiting outside. Her driver was preparing the coach. Lizzie sighed, but did not move away.

“Look—what should I be doing? How should I be doing things differently? How could I ever win back your respect?”

Lizzie looked at him, her eyes wide, as though she were on the verge of shouting. “A long time ago, you stood in my house, the house I had then. You spoke of this city's future. A bright city, you called it. A bright city that we all had to work towards. Do you

remember that? The way you talked? The bright city of the centuries to come. Tell me: are we in that bright city now? Are we any closer to it?"

Hand felt the accusation land, knocking him back. He had not dreamed of the bright city in so many years. The vision he had been given as a child seemed something from another life. He saw, instead, for a moment, the girl Leda looking at him, saying he bore a terrible wound. As though he were the wreckage of the man he had been then, when he had spoken of his visions.

"I am doing my best," he said. He felt bowed down, the accumulation of time laying over him, the sodden weight of so many necessities weighing on his skin. He tasted the alcohol in his mouth.

The driver's horses were ready, and he led the coach over to the front door.

"Do you remember," Lizzie asked, "that night we saw Will Marshall play? It was in that ridiculous hall, or whatever it was. He played for the crowd. You and I danced that night, too."

Hand nodded.

"I look back at that moment quite often. It was like the world went away. There was just art. A complete vision. That's what the garden of Eden must have been like. What we want, and nothing else. It's just so hard to get it. Eventually, I just gave up. Do you understand? I gave up thinking that the world could be like a poem. Instead, I work for myself now. What I make, I make for me alone."

Hand opened the coach door so she could get in.

“That's why I've come back. I'm sorry if my presence hurts you. But I have a goal, and I'm going to stick to it.”

“What's your goal?”

She tapped twice on the carriage's ceiling, telling her driver to leave. “I'm going to finish Douglas's plan for Edinburgh. I have all his designs with me. I'm going to make the bright city a reality.”

Hand sat in his house, still in his formal attire. There had to be a way to get out of all this. To get himself free of Conley. To stop hating the life he had earned.

It was too late to send a message across the city, but he pulled out paper and ink, regardless, and prepared to write.

“Dear Leda. I was rude to you the last time we met. I'm sorry. May I have a second chance?”

Chapter Nine

Hand sat in his study, working on his proposal for Bellevue, while his house filled with hesitant music. He liked the distraction: it reminded him of the years when the house had been full. His wife on the floor below, calling their daughter to the table.

Leda, however, was not a natural talent at the piano. That was clear. The tutor kept having to stop her and adjust her finger placement. Hand felt sympathy for the girl: he, too, had no gift for music. However, the value of that gift was higher for Leda. If a young woman was looking to impress a husband, music was one of the best talents to have.

When the lesson finished, and Hand heard the tutor packing up his bag, he came downstairs, and thanked the man for making the trip to Leith.

Leda rubbed her sore fingers. "That was hard."

"Music is useful," Hand said vaguely. "Did William Cavenar think so?"

"He talked about a whole lot of things. He was more interested in having me go to church."

"You should go to church if you like. But if you are interested in building a name in society, artistic talents are more useful."

Leda was sitting, Hand noticed, as though to make herself very small.

"You don't need to be afraid of me," he said. "I may not be much help to you. But I probably won't cause you any harm."

"William warned me to be careful. He said that if a man said he wanted to help me, he only wanted me in bed."

“That was wise advice. I've asked someone you already know to visit us. Miss Carver will oversee whatever lessons and help you need. She is a trustworthy woman.”

Leda paused. “I like her. Even if she has never married.”

“Do you think we need to hire a marriage specialist?”

“You are making fun of me. But I don't need to 'arrive' in society. I just want what everyone else has. A good house. A good husband and a family.”

“One thing,” Hand said, “leads to another.”

As Leda had said, Arabella Carver had never married, but the proceeds from the Shambles had allowed her continue a respectable existence in Edinburgh, and Hand thought she would be an excellent tutor for Leda. Although a mature woman these days, she remained strikingly handsome, and Hand suspected that handsomeness was a skill in its own right, an aptitude that one woman could teach another. Arabella arrived some time later in the afternoon, and he quickly saw that she and Leda were already comfortable with each other.

All the rest of the day, Hand continued his work while, downstairs, the two women talked. He did not know if he really could help Leda, nor if helping her would bring any sunlight into his soul, but he felt glad to be trying.

Around the dinner hour, a knock on the door made Hand smile: he assumed it was his brother's family. However, when he hurried down and pulled the door back, it was only a messenger with a letter for him. The broad-chested officer from the the party at the Brooks' house had sent him a letter. The note itself was brief, merely a polite suggestion

that Hand might like to read the first page of Duncan Crieve-Conley's new essay. The officer had received the document that morning, and was passing it on.

Hand should share it, he was warned, only with men of high character.

Hand was unsure what to expect: he had been convinced, during the party, that Duncan had been killed. He should have gone to Duncan's house on the high street, and knocked on the poet's door. But perhaps he had been wrong. He walked back to the sitting room where Arabella and Leda were talking. The essay was titled, just as promised: "Money: The Inheritor of the Earth." As Hand began to read, however, his mood grew more troubled. This was not written in Duncan Crieve's style.

Mankind will soon be forgotten. Every trace of his existence will be washed away by the tides. His cities will fall away to dust. Does my claim seem absurd? How could the divinely appointed master of the world ever be supplanted? To the common eye, humanity seems more successful than ever, and man's dominion over nature grows with each decade. But to the most sensitive of souls, a quite different truth is visible. As we learn from the great Buffon, a species responds to its environment. The ape's arms grow long in the forest. The horse's legs gain their strength from the plain. And when we look at mankind's surroundings, at the environment he moves in today, we see that this environment is made entirely of money.

Hand stopped reading. Although the letter bore Crieve's name, the writing was not his. He felt certain, suddenly, that the man who had killed William Cavenar had nothing

to do with the trade unionists. He was simply hunting down members of the Cavenar family, and William had happened to be his first.

“Ladies,” Hand said. “I have to go out.”

Duncan Crieve lived on the fifth floor of Gladstone's land. As Hand approached the building's steps, the rain poured down, whipping against his back, and the high street emptied of the last few heads still under the open sky.

He ran up the steps to the building's entry door and knocked hard, knocking again and again. When the door cracked open, and an irritable old face demanded to know his name, Hand offered his thanks and slipped past, climbing the narrow winding stairs. He passed by the quiet talk of families at night, the murmur of those waiting their turn in bed, and what sounded like a late, loud supper on the fourth landing. No candles burned on this floor, and Hand moved slowly, careful where he placed his feet. He knocked hard on Duncan's door, and knocked again. There was no light under the doorframe. Hand told himself to turn around: after all, William's killer had displayed prodigious strength. When he reached for the door's handle, his fingers were shaking.

The handle turned freely: the door was unlocked, and as Hand opened it, calling Duncan's name, a heavy reek of perfume hit him, the scent of orange and cloves stinging his tongue.

He could see nothing other than a great many things strewn on the floor, shirts and scarves that he stepped over. The fire was dead, and the damp night air moaned against the room's one window. He could make out, he thought, the shape of a desk by the

window, and the fireplace to his left. No one moved in the room, and he got no reply when he called. Brushing his fingers along the mantel, he located Duncan's tinderbox and a neat pyramid of wax candles. He lifted the top candle from the pile and with some effort got it alight. He looked around the suddenly illuminated room: some great ruin had struck this house. A short bookcase had been overturned, and books lay scattered underneath it. On one white wall, beside a simple painting of a castle and its moat, blood was flicked redly, as though, during a brawl, someone had been hurled against it with great venom, and had spat out a red mouthful. But Hand did not fully register the signs of struggle, the evidence of violent crime, because everywhere on the floor, he found dead leaves scattered, small, single-pointed arrow-heads, brown and grey. They were like the leaves he had seen in William Cavenar's bedroom. Here in the city, however, there was no way they could have blown in by themselves. There was no way to pretend they were natural: something unearthly had brought them.

Hand felt queasy, faint. He stepped back, breathing hard. Was the horned man coming back? That monster, a product of a madman's dreams—it could not be returning, not after all these years. Since Granny Wynd's death, there had not been a whisper of other worlds. The city had returned to the normal, scientific run of existence. Hand had done it: he had killed both the horned man and Granny Wynd. And he had watched men bury Douglas's body.

He looked around, checking for any signs that the walls were about to fade, the forest appear. He waited for that awful grey light, the horned man's forest. But the room was still.

He forced himself to breathe. He held tight to the mantel, supporting himself as he scanned the room. By the exhausted fireplace, a long-handled pot lay, and when Hand lifted it, the underside of the heavy vessel shone in the faint candlelight. When he ran a finger across the metal, his fingertip came away red. There was no sign of Duncan Crieve's body. Hand moved to the small house's only other room, the bedroom. The door was ajar, and he pushed it open, holding up the taper to see in. He saw an unkempt, cluttered bedroom. A man was standing by the window. This stranger looked about Hand's height, but nothing else about him was clear, because he wore a hooded cloak that covered his face. His head was lowered, keeping his face obscured. Hand's clocks flew at this unknown figure, circling him, inspecting, and they discovered nothing at all. To Hand's extra senses, the stranger seemed a total blank.

He moved for Hand. Hand, stumbling back, managed to get through the door and swing it closed, putting a barrier between himself and the stranger. But when the man pushed back, the door flicked back into Hand's face at incredible speed, and he was dazed, knocked off his feet by the impact. His face stinging, Hand couldn't believe what he saw: the hooded man, rather than simply pushing the door back, slapped at it with his open hand, and the door was flung against the wall so hard that it broke from its hinges.

This stranger could snap his neck without straining.

Hand scrambled up, grabbing the blood-stained long-handled pot, holding it between himself and William's killer. The taper he had lit had landed on a pile of shirts, and in the light of the small flames, Hand could make out a man's pallid, grey eyes, and a furrowed, pale brow. In a terrible flicker of speed, the man closed the distance and grabbed the pot

Hand held as self-protection, ripping it away as easily as Hand might steal a jar from a child. He seemed amused to be holding it by the pot-end, and tossed it away. To Hand's surprise, rather than attacking again, the stranger moved to the burning heap of clothes on the floor, and began stamping out the flames.

Hand turned and ran for the door. He didn't know if the monster was toying with him, or had not expected his attempt to flee, but he managed to get to the landing, thumping the door closed behind him, and he half ran, half fell down the steps. The spiral stairs were too narrow for him to move quickly, but perhaps this would help slow his attacker. The house on the next level had its door closed, and Hand kept going, too afraid to waste time to see if they would let him in.

He heard feet chasing him down. Just before he reached the next floor, he was grabbed by his shoulder. He tried to twist free, but he was lifted off his feet and the staircase swung and turned upside down as he was flung down the remaining stairs. He hit the stone and his outstretched arm was wrenched in his shoulder socket. His face was bleeding, he knew, and he had a terrible pain in his arms.

Above him where he lay, the door opened. "You smell that?"

The bearded man blinked to see Hand curled up on the floor outside his house. Hand sensed his attacker coming, and he covered his face. The stranger jumped over him without effort and continued down the stairs.

"Who was that bastard?" asked the homeowner.

Hand did not take in a breath until he heard the front door pushed open and the killer's feet heading down the steps. He was bleeding from somewhere on his face, but, to his relief, when two other men came out of the house, he was able to stand.

He was lucky to be alive. Climbing down a sheer drop would have been well within that man's powers. This person, whoever he was, was not trying to fight the trade unions. He was after the Cavenars themselves.

The close where Calum lived was locked at night, but after a long explanation, Hand was let through. Once he had climbed the stairs of their land, he woke his brother up and explained that they needed to hire some protection for Lizzie.

Mary reached for his face. "Oh my God." She woke their eldest daughter, ordering her to wash a towel.

"Find Robbie Waller first thing tomorrow," Hand told his brother. "Tell him we have a job for him." Robbie Waller was a quiet man with a sloppy, loose belly, but he was capable, Hand and Calum had discovered, of extraordinary acts of violence. He would be a good bodyguard for Lizzie.

"Funny you ask," said Calum. "She's already hired him. She's hired about fifteen men since she got here. Not just brawlers, too: men who know their way around a site. I'm getting worried we'll have trouble staffing our own projects."

"What's she after?"

"Robbie has no idea. He says she makes them walk all over the countryside, north and south of here, while she looks at maps."

Hand continued to sit while Mary applied a soaked rag to his face, cleaning his broken skin. "He must hate that. He's a worse city bird than I am."

"Aye. But she's paying."

"Pay him more. He gets a second salary from us: he needs to protect her. A fellow in a hooded cloak is chasing down the Cavenars. And he is much stronger than you would expect from looking at him."

Mary shrugged. "You'll get him. If he's a bad one, you'll catch him."

Hand was not sure. He had tried to track the killer's path through the night, to work out where he had gone, but again, he had sensed nothing. The man seemed able to elude his gifts.

Hand bade his brother's family goodnight. The younger children waved at him from their bed.

The Cavenar gardens were lit by torches in every direction. The mansion, Hand saw, kept guards at every door, and Hand's driver, who had been reluctant to make the trip so late, swore as men on horseback approached them and demanded to search inside.

It was as Hand had guessed. Conley had surrounded himself with guards. He knew what the family's attacker was capable of. He probably knew what the man looked liked, too.

Hand was allowed to dismount from the carriage and walk through the cold, flame-lit gardens. Conley was waiting for him in his study. Once Hand walked in, Conley closed and locked the door.

“My. You should have your face looked at,” said Conley.

“What have you done?” Hand asked. “Are you trying to dispatch your own family?”

“Not at all. I had a prisoner, an enemy, and he got loose. But I'm going to catch him.”

“Who is it?”

Conley nodded, as though Hand had just agreed to something. “It's a new age. We are poised for a new age. Those of who can seize it, yes?”

“Who is the killer?”

“He's not important. He exists only because the experiment has not—not successfully been completed. What is important, however, is what he can bring about. Think about it: the predicament these British Isles face. How is a small collection of nations going to rule the entire world? That's the question that's been bothering me. I already feel like the Empire is too thinly spread. We tolerate revolutionaries at home and we struggle against hill tribes in India. I have been saying this, of course, in London, and while I am listened to, I am merely listened to. I am allowed to ask questions no one else wants asked. The rest are giddy with the thrill of conquest, expansion. They imagine that with the French struck down, Britain is poised for centuries of power. I know otherwise. The world struggles against us. The world is large and we are few.”

Hand's head had begun to ache, a disconcerting throb in the base of his skull. “What's all this about, Conley?”

Conley smiled. “Granny Wynd.”

Hand could not believe it. Granny had been dead for ten years. And while her name was sometimes mentioned by locals, Conley was not one of them.

“What?”

“You heard me. The witch. Your friend.”

“She is dead.”

“Oh,” said Conley, pleased, “I am not like these other captains of industry. I grew up poor. So I find it easy to talk to the poor. It is a talent of sorts. As time went on, I talked and I talked, and I heard the stories. Sometimes I heard for free, and sometimes I paid. I heard about how you grew up next door to the witch. I heard all about her powers. I heard how the Thomas brothers tried to threaten Elizabeth, and how Granny Wynd taught the young Miss Farweather to set the brothers against one another. I heard how she drove good Douglas insane, made him throw his life away over a few masks and a story. I even heard how the witch challenged you, and that you slew her. Remarkable! While you were enabling my rise, you were also opposing her. How busy you must have been.”

“Granny Wynd,” Hand said, “is just a story.”

“The door is closed, my friend. There is no one listening. It’s time to be honest.”

Hand had thought his past was behind him. Douglas was dead. Granny Wynd was dead. Whatever horrors he saw in his daily work for the Cavenars, at least the nightmares of the past were gone. This, he had told himself.

Hand closed his eyes. When he had fought Granny Wynd, he had locked her terrible abyss away. The black void that lay beneath things—he had pushed it away, blocked its access to the world. How could it be coming back?

“What if I told you,” said Conley, his eyes gleaming, “that her power is still with us?”

Granny Wynd is dead, but her power did not leave the world with her. You never knew! I

would not have guessed it myself had I not found my prisoner. I had to extrapolate from him, working backwards to the witch. Her power, when she died, fled to a new host. It embedded itself in a new body, a man who could not use that power as Granny could. It merely made him very strong, very hard to kill. Impressive, certainly, but not enough to change the world. But what if that power could truly be returned to life? Returned to life, but this time, under our control? Not random, not wild—aimed. Think about it. A new Granny Wynd, but a woman who could be instructed, who could be told where to deploy her magic. The British Isles would be forever safe from attack: she could summon a gale against any foreign navy and smash their hulls. She could reverse the winds once the threat was gone, and guide our merchant fleets across the ocean. No nation could stand against us. She could set every American city on fire, one after another, until the colonials recanted their independence. Bring the plentiful rains to the Indian deserts. Yes, think about it! We would never again worry about agitations and revolts. We would sail on Trinidad, and she would whip the island's defenders from their walls. Think about it!”

“It sounds impossible.”

“It is necessary. Our country's time in the sun is fading. Can't you spot the signs? Scotland's golden age is over. Where is the next generation's Hume, our new Smith? No, we will not see them. We have lost our best minds to London. Too many people have left for England, or for the Americas. But with the new Granny Wynd by my side, we will change our fate. I will become the right-hand-man of the king. I will be the power behind the throne.”

“How,” asked Hand, “do you plan to transfer her power to a new vessel?” He could not believe the monster that Conley had become. This was the man he worked for. Worse, he had enabled his rise to power.

“I have done experiments,” Conley said. “The power has lodged in a man. When I discovered him, I kept him prisoner, under the most secure lock and key, within walls too great even for his terrible rage. I carried out tests, as any modern man would. I prodded, cut, and examined. And while I worked, I collected stories from all over Edinburgh about Granny, about the horned man—about your former employer, whom you shot dead. And about you. I learned a great deal about you. That’s why I encouraged your sister and her husband to leave for Virginia. In case you ever turned against me. Someone watches them for me, you know? A very dangerous someone.”

“Dismiss your man tomorrow, or you, Conley, will be a dead man.”

“Well—”

“If I could kill Granny Wynd, think how easily I could end your life.”

“Yes, yes, I will dismiss him. If you help me. You will stop hunting this killer. No more investigations. I am going to catch him, because I know his limits. He is strong, but he can be brought down. He knows this, which is why he has not tried to attack me. He is not all-powerful. Instead, you have another task. Do this small thing for me, and I will release from your service. You’ll never need to work for us again. Not unless you want to.”

Hand wondered what job could be so terrible that Conley would undermine his family's business to carry it out. Without his help, the Cavenars would soon be overrun by the East India Company.

“Here is your role in our nation's renaissance. This is how you will lead Scotland into its true golden age. You understand Granny Wynd better than any man alive. You worked with her. You fought with her. To you, her magic is a known quantity. This gives you an advantage over me: I have been forced to work by experiment, by test and theory. You can simply proceed by intuition, I'm sure.”

“To do what?”

“Find me a child. Once I catch my escaped prisoner, you and I will work together to transfer his power to someone else. A child. That's what I'm thinking. We give it to a child, someone who will need guidance, who will accept us as her guardians.”

“She may be harder to control than you think.”

“I believe it! But you will handle her. Think about it! Your sister's life. Your own freedom. And in return, you will help me build an empire without equal. You will pick the right vessel. I've already tried this operation, several times, you see, before my prisoner escaped. The subject always died. Every time I tried to make the transfer, I had wounded my prisoner to the point of death, and when the power was ready to move across, the merest taste of his power killed the recipient. They died in madness, in fire. The young lasted longer than the old. And of the young, the more creative and original outlasted the staid, the comfortable. Many of the most troubled members of the poor also performed well. But it was all relative: they died, one after another.”

“How many people have you killed seeking this golden age?”

“There is an opening in London. The government is confused, torn, by the events in France. I can step in. So I can't just run experiments any more. The next attempt has to work. I'm seeking someone with remarkable creative power, a great will, someone who has passed through great misery and trial. And I suspect you can find such a child. You have the talent, don't you? Find me that girl! Find her. Use your remarkable talents, and find her.”

“This is madness.”

“No. This is the only sane path. Find me the girl. Leave the protection of my family to me. Avoid the killer's wrath. Ask no more questions about him. Just bring me a suitable child.”

Chapter Ten

“Reflections of the mind,” said the wealthy abolitionist, “are inherently weak. They pale, evaporate, before the impressions of the senses. That is why it is so hard to raise lasting support for our cause. Point out, if you care to do so, the sugar that a fine lady takes with her coffee or tea. You may tell her the horrid facts about how that sugar was made. You may appeal to her tender conscience with all the terrors of slavery and the society it produces. You may paint a vivid picture of the men dying in the fields, the woman assaulted in their master’s house. And your fine Scots lady? She will be moved. She will gasp, look away. But what moves her is not her intellectual understanding. It is the stern voice, the experience of hearing a sermon. My voice. My face. The evidence, in other words, of her senses.”

Hand was nodding along to this story, although he felt impatient, and was resisting the urge to interrupt. The killer was still in the city, and Lizzie might be in danger. But Hand also had the clear intuition that he needed to get Leda out of Edinburgh, and quickly. He remembered Granny Wynd regarding the girl, during the meeting at Crannock’s. Hand saw, in a moment’s vision, a scared and anxious Leda standing on the cliffs of Dover, waving her hand, and sending a fleet of ships to sink beneath the waves. By her side, Conley applauded as the whirlpool consumed the last of the timbers, submerged the last of the desperate swimming men.

The abolitionist continued. “Reflections of the mind can have little effect on the own. That’s the whole problem. The evidence of her senses: it was that, in the first place,

which persuaded her. I showed her my disapproval. Yet, as soon as I have gone away, she merely holds in her mind a reflection of that feeling, a misty mental trace of what I said the Indies were like. And on her table, the sugar is right there, ready to be placed on her tongue. It is no contest! Her conscience upsets her, now that she knows the cost of her habit—a small part of the cost—but that, too, is mere reflection. The taste of the sugar is so vivid. Soon, she finds a way to make the reflection bend, give way. Perhaps she blames me for her discomfort, and decides that I ask too much, or that I was rude to lecture her, or am too old to know anything. Perhaps, if she is unusually clever, she finds a way to remain a taker of sugar as well as a disdainer of slavery. Perhaps she tells herself that they—whoever “they” are—should simply find a better, kinder way to bring the sugar to her table. And, once settling on this happy possibility, she feels herself absolved. She will not write a single letter. She will not sign a petition. By merely wanting things to be better than they are, she declares herself on the side of the angels. The next time you meet her, she giggles, half embarrassed, and murmurs something about ‘But what can you do?’“

Hand offered his guest, George Adam Parker, a re-fill of his unsweetened coffee.

“How popular are your arguments in London?”

“Growing. Abolition has many supporters. But it is also fiercely opposed. The Caribbean lobby owns extraordinary wealth. You cannot—I have toured the regions, Mr. McLeish. I have seen with my own eyes the effects of that accursed trade. The sexual depravity! You would think yourself in some latter day Rome, or Carthage. A mingled race is being born there, bred in great numbers as the slave drivers indulge their worst

instincts. A new people, born of tyranny and want. This is why I hope your firm will donate to the cause. Please, sir. Give to Freedom. Donate what you can to Freedom. Help us build a decent society.”

Hand felt the conversation was losing its way, “I admire your goals, sir. But have you considered my request?”

“The child? She is welcome in Freedom. Very welcome. The land is fertile there. Lush. My captains say there is nowhere in Africa more suitable. It just needs your support. Picture the risk! This is not a philosophical exercise. If Freedom fails, imagine the same mixing of the races here, in Scotland.”

“I am hopeful for the success of your colony. But in this particular case, it is not the right choice. The girl in question does not wish to leave. She considers Edinburgh her home. She was born in this city. Her father, I understand, arrived here as an adult, a freed slave, but her mother's side of the family appear to have been living on Scottish soil for a surprising number of years. I can show you the church records. And she possesses an admirable clarity about her chances in life. Would that all Scots children were so alert to reality. So, she has a plan, but not the means to carry it out. Leda is left entirely without money. Her parents are deceased, and her closest relations are impoverished. But she wants to live a sociable, respectable life. That's why I'm looking for an unusual solution.”

“What are her talents?”

Hand was not sure what to answer. While Miss Carver was impressed by Leda's capacity to express herself, neither she nor the music teacher had declared to Hand the

discovery of a great new gift. Leda was determined to improve her station, it was true, but determination alone was not a talent.

George Henry Parker seemed, all of a sudden, to make a discovery. He shrank back in his chair. He looked at Hand in bewildered, troubled wonder.

“You—sir—when you said—when you wrote to me—that I should adopt this girl—you meant that literally, didn't you? Adopt her—as a parent. In my own family.”

“Yes,” said Hand, relieved to be understood. “Thank you. I know it's a large request. But she has no parents. She's still very much a child. So it would not be extraordinary. She hopes to live a decent, prosperous life in Scotland. This means marrying well. The simplest way for a woman to interest a good quality husband, everyone agrees, is to have an income. With your great success in industry, you could equip her with tiny fraction of the estates promised to your heirs. I don't mean that she would be treated as an equal. A single drop of your wealth—it would transform her prospects in society. Transform them utterly.”

“No, Mr. McLeish. No, this is something you cannot ask me. This is—it is upsetting. Very upsetting.” Hand was dismayed to see Mr. Parker glance around, and pat his jacket pockets, looking for his gloves.

“Wouldn't this case,” Hand asked, “further the cause of abolition?”

“She would live with us? In our house?”

“We could discuss that —”

“I have sons, do you understand? Two sons. Young men. No, Mr. McLeish, this is a very libertine idea. I cannot—cannot —”

Hand begged the philanthropist to sit, listen to other options, but with no success. At the door, as he put on his coat, Mr. Parker seemed to regret a little of his venom. He looked at Hand with compassionate irritation.

“I hope you can help this—this woman.”

Hand walked with Leda up the steep path of Arthur's Seat. The walk jolted his sore limbs, but the day was clear, and he enjoyed doing his best to answer Leda's many questions about the knowledge a woman of quality was supposed to have. Outdoors, climbing above the city, forced by the climb to concentrate on his footing, his steady breath, Hand felt calmer, his mind clearing. He had thought he had defeated the horned man and Granny Wynd. He might have earned Lizzie's contempt and hatred in the process, but at least her life had been saved, and the city had been preserved. Now, however, even that comfort had been shown to be false. Granny Wynd's magic had survived her death, and Conley was set on bringing her back to life. He would doom a child, even if this “transfer” worked, to the endless despair and fury that Granny Wynd had suffered under. Hand felt as though his clocks were ticking faster, as though the time was drawing short.

They found Lizzie and her entourage near the top of Arthur's Seat. The scene surprised him with its industry: Robbie Bruce and four other builders were measuring out a square plot of land with stakes and string, and under a canvas roof, two clerks, at fold-out tables, were busy sketching. The morning was cold but bright. The rain had abated, and while the sky was mostly cloud, little shots of sunlight broke through here and there.

Lizzie stood by herself, looking away, holding on to her hat as she regarded the mountain's descent, the towers of the high street and the houses of Leith reduced to miniature by distance. Her mourning band seemed larger and more prominent today.

“I thought,” she said, “you would visit. Your man has been diligent.”

“My man?”

“Come on. The skinny lad you have following us. In the hood. He spent most of last week watching our progress.”

Hand turned, looking around. The peak was free of people, and none of the walkers below seemed aware of Lizzie's party.

“He's gone now,” she said, unconcerned. “He must have seen you coming.”

Hand told her that this watcher might well be the murderer of both Duncan and William Cavenar. He was not surprised, however, to see Lizzie shrug. “I'm smallest of the Cavenars. There are so many others for a killer to get to, first.”

Hand resolved to speak to Robbie Bruce in private. And possibly find the man a few assistants.

Hand introduced Leda, saying how brilliant Elizabeth Cavenar was.

Lizzie shook the girl's hand. “I am sorry that you have been caught up in Hand's attempt to absolve his own guilt. I hope you will get something from the experience.” She looked at him. “If you were truly concerned with the fate of the slaves, perhaps you shouldn't have dispossessed my husband. He was working to break his family's hold on the trade. Tyler was doing good for thousands, not one mere girl. And you toppled him.”

“I was mistaken. Douglas had tricked me.”

“Yes,” said Lizzie. “I’m sure the people whose lives Tyler would have saved understand that it wasn’t your fault.”

Hand could not speak.

At his side, Leda said, simply, “I don’t have many choices, Mrs. Cavenar. I need help, and he’s the best available.”

Lizzie laughed. “Clever. I approve! Get what you can.”

Hand turned to Leda. “Mrs. Cavenar is trying to complete her father’s vision for Edinburgh. His vision of the city’s future.”

“No, he left us more than a vision. He had produced a number of drafts: a great city reaching in every direction. Even before I started working on it, so much had been accomplished. And it already looks remarkable on paper. Look, child, see this map? My father’s idea was to take the new town as a model, as seed of likeness, and extending it in mathematically proportionate forms.”

“Who,” Hand asked, keeping his tone gentle, “will pay for this plan? How will it be implemented?”

She did not rise to his implication. “Oh, no one. No one will pay for it and few will even see it. I imagine will the design never actually be carried out. People like you are already ruining it.”

“How,” asked Leda, still looking at Lizzie’s map, “has Hand ruined it?”

“I have had to alter my plans to take in whatever pretty little things he is planning for Bellevue. And possibly Stockbridge.”

“But I have no plans,” he said, “for Arthur’s Seat. Why are you here?”

“Because I can't finish the design. I'm stuck.”

“What's the problem?” Leda asked.

“I can't just—it's the hardest thing I've ever done.”

“Some would say,” Hand said, cautiously, “that there are limits to the benefits of mathematically-derived design. Take the events in France, people would say: doesn't the revolution there show the risks of applying reason too strictly?”

“You would think that,” Lizzie said. “I am unbowed. I don't need or expect to make money from this. I just want the bright city. Remember that? And I don't agree, at all, that none of this matters. What is seen by the eye in the external world is repeated inside the human mind. A precise and clear architecture leads to, well, moral minds. You know the argument. Even if you don't follow it anymore. That's what the philosophers wanted for this city, even if I am the last one alive who believes it. Even old Craig thinks I go too far.”

“I'm just being practical.”

She looked at the air, reciting: “Take no thought, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or, 'What shall we drink?' or, 'Wherewithal shall we be clothed?'”

The bible verse knocked him back. She judged him so unfairly. He wanted to ask how Lizzie herself was clothed. How did she eat? By his toil. His work allowed her to entertain her father's dreams.

He kept his voice nonchalant. “Would you like to see my proposal for Bellevue?”

“You brought it with you?”

“My brother has been telling me we should go down to London and hire an artistic genius to help me polish the design. It occurred to me that I don't need to go down to London to find one.”

Lizzie regarded him more closely, and he thought he saw her cheeks deepen in shade, just a touch. “That's very kind. Of course, I will look.”

As Lizzie examined his pack of papers, Hand moved about the pavilion, observing her clerks at work. One lad passed him the books of Lizzie's designs. He immediately liked what he saw. In his youth, during Mr. Farweather's house arrest, he had seen Douglas's many sketches of the city's future. Douglas always loved to use the fewest possible number of components and motifs, feeling that elegance came out of simplicity and clarity rather than elaboration. If he had to design a house, for instance, he would attempt to make each floor, to a large extent, thematically identical. He did this not to limit his options, or to serve some weak idea about superficial unity, but rather because he viewed as sacrosanct the architectural elements which rose unbidden into his mind.

If you asked him, Robert Adam would gladly tell you a little story about every room in a house he was planning, explaining how the dining room would satisfy the owner's nautical inclinations, how the corridor would be sound-proofed in order that ladies might talk there without being disturbed. Robert Adam adored ornamentation. But Douglas, in contrast, would have simply said, “This is a house of arches,” or “The numbers two and three govern this place.” His buildings never appeared uniform: he was always able to vary, by scale and direction, his set of working elements. So one sensed, without quite

knowing why, a great rational order to a Farweather set of rooms. One half-heard the presence of a diffuse but sensible work of music.

Lizzie's plans for Edinburgh showed, from the first few pages, that she had not only grasped this quality of her father's, but had developed it ingeniously. Like Douglas, she had taken Craig's original design for the new town as the artistic premise, the building blocks: two residential squares joined by three straight streets, with minor streets linking and cutting through those main roads.

She had taken that premise and it repeated it outwards, varying one or other dimension to create whatever type of development she felt the different areas of the future city would need. North of the current new town, for instance, she envisaged a series of squares, linked by little roads; the long road to Leith, in contrast, presented a massively elongated and widened version of Queen street, with two smaller, parallel roads on either side, allowing for shops and houses to grow up away from the noise and bustle of that new high street.

Hand found a seat under the pavilion and continued to read. He accepted another book of designs from Lizzie's lead clerk. He was dimly aware that she was watching him: he looked up.

"Do you mind," she asked, "if we continue working?" He nodded, absently, continuing to read. She took Leda with her, talking to her about the project.

Hand completed his reading of her first stack of notes, and open the next collection. At first Hand was confused, for the second book seemed to repeat the designs of the first, but soon he understood: Lizzie did not know how to finish her plans. She had produced

multiple versions of this future city, none of which had been finished. She seemed to have started afresh in this second book; in a third collection, she appeared to have begun introducing new architectural elements, expanding her palette of urban motifs, but had ended that book unsatisfied. Most of the interlopers were removed for the fourth book: Hand grew hungry, and was aware that the day was moving on, but he continued to read. The fifth book attempted to shrink most of the elements, creating a dense sequence of little roads and little squares.

Hand saw the problem. Lizzie kept striking against the sheer reality of the landscape. She was too much of an artist to ignore the weakness in each of these street plans, but she could not finish a satisfactory one. Nature, in its wildness and disproportion, was her enemy.

Craig, after all, had been lucky. He had been given a relatively uniform plot of land to work on. The only difference between the real world and his sketch, at least of any substance, was the mild rise in elevation between Princes street and George street. And Craig's only concession to nature, to the existence of a world outside of his imagined town, had been to leave Princes and George street one-sided, with no houses blocking the new town's view to the south or the north. But Lizzie had no such luxury. She had to contend with ridges and hollows, with the winding back and forth of the Water of Leith, and the extreme plunge between St. Andrews Square and the rise of Carlton hill. Worse still, she had to make judgements about which established properties would remain in the future, and which would be wiped away. Craig had been given a blank slate; would Lizzie require that the Rocheid house in Inverleith be demolished, or should she attempt

to work around it? Every choice was a compromise, and each choice suggested fresh compromises elsewhere.

Hand's clock-sense seemed intrigued by the problem, but without his full capacities, without access to his complete strength, his gifts were not sufficient to give Lizzie an answer. He looked up.

She and Leda were sitting in the tent with him. Everyone else had left, and outside, the men were packing up, sharing a simple meal.

“I've fixed your design,” she said. “It wasn't as bad as I worried. You should be proud of yourself.”

Leda nodded. “She said a lot nice things about it.”

Lizzie offered him his notes back. “You got yourself stuck with 'Douglas Square,' that's all. I've drawn you a new outline. And I've changed the square's name, too, to 'Drummond,' not Douglas. I'm just being practical. Douglas is revered only by you and I, my dear.”

Hand looked. “An octagon? Not a circle?”

“Aye. There are some excellent octagons through the cities of Europe. It is an underused urban element. And I think it solves your problem with all those small streets attempting to intersect with each other.”

Hand, in turn, told her how impressed he was with her work. “I think I could help you, too. It's like—you need more than just paper, to work on. There are too many moving parts. I think I can—with a little more time —”

Leda looked at her. “You two should work together.”

“We did. We were building a theatre. He stole the money intended for it.”

Leda fell silent.

“Not,” Lizzie said, “for his own pocket. I should make that clear. He just wanted the project to go ahead, on precise, exact schedule. So he seized our money to make it happen.”

“It sounds like a misunderstanding,” said Leda.

“It probably does. Only, now there is no theatre in Inverleith.”

Hand felt enormously tired. He felt tired of feeling so much for Lizzie and knowing, at the same time, that she was ignorant of, or chose to be ignorant of, so much about him. He picked up her notes again, leafing through to a curious part, her plans for the Leith road.

“Look.”

He needed more of his genius back. The glowing world he had made in his head took up too much of his mind. He could not keep it spinning while Conley plotted to bring Granny Wynd’s madness to the world. And he could waste any more time pretending to Lizzie. Hand was unsure, as the wind picked up and rushed through the tent, which parts of his imagined world he was giving up. He did not know. Scraps here and there, complexities, details. Like coastal detritus lifted off the shore, it washed away from him.

“You asked Craig for his advice about this part of the plan, yes?” Lizzie, hesitantly, nodded. “He misled you. Those things he said? They were deliberately deceptive. He was jealous, I imagine, of the scope of your plans. It's a small thing, but it sent you down the wrong track.”

“How did—how did you know I met Craig?”

“Who is Craig?” asked Leda.

Hand pointed at another book. “You wrote his name down. Here. That explained to me why you decide to change your third design. But if you go back—”

“No. No, that's not possible. You looked at my books for a couple of hours. You couldn't have read them, and made sense of everything. Not that quickly.”

“I did. I have a strange gift,” Hand said. He felt a great weight lifting, the process of telling her the truth. “You know that I do. You know exactly what I can do. I don't know what it's called, but I have it. So did Granny Wynd. Remember her? She showed you how to kill Arran Thomas's brother.”

Lizzie's mouth trembled. She glanced at Leda. “She shouldn't be hearing any of this.”

“I need your help,” Hand said. “Conley, the head of the Cavenars? He wants to bring Granny Wynd back. He wants to put her power in a child, and use that child to—do any number of terrible things. I have to stop him.”

“No,” Lizzie said. “Granny Wynd just told stories. She was an unhappy poor woman who lived alone. And you must have spoken to Craig, and he told you Lord knows what about me. You are lying. Again.”

“We fought Lane Waller, and the Thomas brothers, together,” he said. “That’s what I want. I need your help. Or Conley will do something monstrous.”

“It's sad, actually. Sad that you try to—I don't even know what you are trying to do. But I am very worn out of hearing of it. And I don't want to hear anymore. No. I don't want to hear anything else.”

Chapter Eleven

Hand did not speak as he and Leda descended Arthur's Seat.

"I feel like I understand you now," Leda said. "You're even worse off than I thought."

"That's probably true."

"You love her. I think she likes you. But you both married other people."

"She hates me. That's what generates the emotion you're detecting."

"Who was Granny Wynd?"

He took Leda into the close where he had lived as a child. The shoemaker's was still in business, all these years on, and Hand knew a couple of the families who now resided in Tallow Land's lower floors. When they were let into the building, he urged Leda to climb ahead of him, going all the way to the top. The fire that had ruined the heights of Tallow's Land had never been repaired. As Hand walked higher, the blackened doors became silent, and the cold grew.

He pushed open Granny Wynd's door. The ceiling was still scarred with fire-marks.

"The woman who lived here was powerful," he said. "She was unusual. She could do incredible things. She could see the future. When she wanted a thing to happen, it just did. She could cut down a man who was standing on the other side of the city."

"Where's she living now?"

“I killed her. A long time ago. I killed her, because she was trying to ruin the city, the people I cared about.” As he spoke, Hand felt unsure, suddenly, if he had ever understood Granny Wynd. In her own way—enigmatic, cruel—she too had tried to prevent the coming of the dark city. After all, what had his victory achieved? Conley's reign? It seemed, suddenly, that he might have talked to Granny, understood more. He did not know.

“The point is,” he said, “the world is full of terrible things. There are real monsters. Maybe I am one. And beyond this city, the world is made up of monstrous people—cruel, brutal people. They rule and are ruled, everywhere. They protect what they have and think they are doing good.”

“Aye,” Leda said. “I know.” She was inspecting the view from the single window.

Hand felt frustrated: “I'm telling you this—I don't know if I can help you. I want to. I would love to get you settled, in a decent home. But you might be safer—I have made bad choices, it seems. I am indebted —”

She turned. “You don't seem properly awake. It's like you're here, but not all the way.”

“Listen. You could be in real danger. You could be at risk just for spending time with me. It would be safer if you got away from me, from these people.”

She looked at him. “Are you hungry? I feel like we skipped a meal.”

“Are you listening to me at all?”

She brought him to one of the saddest streets off the Canongate. The houses were low here, outside the city walls, and the recent rain had left the road sludgy and sodden. Children stood about outdoors, but they seemed to lack the inclination to play. Yet life continued here, too. Clothes hung from washing lines, and two of the houses in the alley had space, out front, for vegetable plots. Human life thrived, despite its surroundings.

Leda brought him to a damp, low house, where a tired woman, her white-flecked blonde hair escaping from a low cap, opened the door. Leda called this woman auntie, but this aunt needed considerable persuasion before letting Hand inside. She peered at his face while complaining that his fine clothes would be ruined by their dirty house.

The house's main room was indeed dirty, the ceiling soot-stained, but nothing worse than Hand remembered from his childhood. At the table, a black boy and girl, both younger and fairer than Leda, collaborated on a simple, plain piece of weaving. These, Hand guessed, were Leda's cousins. At the sight of her, they stopped work, asking Leda questions about where she had found her posh outfit. They did not meet Hand's eye.

Leda's aunt smiled at Hand. "They do work. They earn something for their upkeep—that's how we raised them. The Moores are good workers. That's true for all of us. Never begged for a single meal. He and I are married, too, in case you were worried."

Hand inclined his head in a way that suggested, he hoped, he had not been thinking anything negative. "Your husband—he is a Scot?"

"He's lived here long enough," she said. "And he works at a trade, which is more than you can say for a whole lot of white Scotsmen."

“Do your children have trouble—because—people—although they are paler than some of the Africans I’ve —”

She looked at him. He knew the answer. If he had full access to his genius, he would surely be able to calculate precisely how much suffering these bairns would face through their lives.

She gestured at the table. “You look like you need a little food in you.”

Leda nodded. “He hasn’t eaten all day.”

The children were silent when Hand sat with them, the girl unhappily looking down, and the boy gazing at him as though he were a great surprise. Hand accepted a portion of watery potato soup, sipping the warm liquid, finding himself unexpected refreshed. He hated the way Lizzie made him feel.

He thanked his host for the food. “You look after Leda?”

“When she lets us. She prefers your level. Your class of person. Don’t know where she got it from—certainly wasn’t from her dad. He had more pride.”

Someone knocked on the door, and Leda’s aunt, concerned, eased the door back a fraction. It was the handsome officer from Conley’s party, the crude, loud fellow who had sent him Duncan Crieve’s letter.

He removed his hat and said he hoped to say hello to Mr. McLeish.

“How,” Hand asked, “Did you find me?”

The officer hung back in the doorway. “You two attract a lot of notice, walking down the high street.”

Leda's aunt, uncomfortable and annoyed, invited the huge man in, and gave him a seat at the table. He gladly accepted a bowl of soup.

"I wanted to talk to you," the man said, "about Conley. He is frightening me. And I sense that you don't like him either." Leda and her young cousins stared at the stranger, their tasks and meal forgotten. "I'm all for military discipline, you know. A little firmness keeps people in check. But the bills Conley and his people want to pass? It's like he wants to turn us into France, before they had their revolution. He is the minority, and yet he acts like sleeps next to the prime minister. He shouldn't be this confident! Do you understand? He acts like he holds the winning cards, and no one in London knows why. He is simply a fanatic? Is it a bluff?"

"No," said Hand.

The soldier waited for more of an answer. "Look. I can help you. With this girl's education. I have some connections with Mr. Equiano, you know? The author? Have any of you read him? Anyone, here, in this house?" The children regarded him in silence. "A remarkable writer. That's the thing, you know? Good prose reveals all. Can't keep saying a man lacks a mind when he writes as well as that." He raised his spoon to his mouth. "Excellent soup, my lady. Excellent soup."

Hand took Leda down the long walk back to Leith. "They are good people, your family."

"I know. And I don't think it's wrong to be poor. But every poor person, if he had the chance, would be rich. Everyone weak and scared person would choose to be secure."

That's all I want. And I've started this journey and it's been going well. William Cavenar tried to help me—”

“And now he's dead!”

“And now you are helping me. And Miss Carver is a good woman, and so is Mrs. Elizabeth, too. And that officer! He wants me to meet that writer, in London. So. This seems like good progress. I don't want to give it up.”

“But if I keep trying to help you, the eyes of the city will notice you. It's already happening. You won't be able to back out, even if you want to.”

“That's what I'm hoping for.”

“You don't understand. Something awful could happen to you if you continue to associate yourself with me. I am dealing with monsters every single day.”

As they walked down the country, a man coming the other way spotted Leda, and staring right at her, he spat on the dirt, and continued on. Hand watched him go.

Leda said, “There are risks. But—do you want to say goodbye, here? If you don't want to help me, you don't have to.”

Hand thought he heard Granny Wynd's laughter, but he pushed the feeling away. “No. No goodbyes. I will try to get you what you want.” He thought about it, resolving himself. “Let's see what we can do.”

The goal seemed simple: if he wanted to guarantee Leda's safety, and the safety of the world, Hand had to find the hooded stranger before Conley did. He could not let Conley sacrifice a child, and create a new Granny Wynd, especially if that child was

Leda. Similarly, he could not let Conley's former prisoner complete his campaign against the Cavenars, and hurt Lizzie.

Searching actively, however, meant disobeying Conley's orders, and Hand suspected he was being watched. But he sent his firm's employees, supervised by Calum, out in the new town and along the high street, keeping an eye out, speaking to the men and women who rented spare rooms.

Lizzie was still working on her plans, touring every district outside the city; Robert Walker continued to report back on her progress.

Hand's efforts to help Leda, he discovered, gave him ample excuse to meander around the city. He took time to meet one tutor after another, visiting poets and dancing masters in all areas of the city. And, as Leda spent day after day in practice, the tuition, as he had suspected it would, paid off. Sometimes he caught himself believing that she must have come from a grander family, that she had been cast out of a higher level of society and was now, quite reasonably, attempting to regain what she had lost.

This did not mean, however, that he felt at ease at her first dance. Hand had expected the event to be quiet, staid, and would be as a result the perfect opportunity to give Leda her first taste of society. The great hall, however, was not only packed with many young, loud people, but the event's usual authorities, the matrons of the Assembly, seemed little inclined to enforce their will. This was more of a trial by fire than he had planned, and he was glad that Arabella appeared fully capable of meeting the challenge, maintaining a constant flow of tips and insights into Leda's ear.

Hand looked around for Calum: his brother had sent him several notes, reporting vague progress of in the search for the Cavenars' killer. He saw neither Calum, nor any of his own employees and agents.

Hand asked Leda if she was all right.

“There a lot of people here.”

“There are. But don't worry about them. One day soon, this will just be a fun evening for you.”

“She's not worried,” said Arabella, firmly. “She is doing very well.” Hand was not so sure. He spotted a great many men and women staring at Leda; more deliberately looked away.

Hand's arm was grappled by the rowdy officer from the dinner at the Brooks', the fellow who had offered to help Leda. The man's cheeks were flushed an alarming red, and his face was covered in sweat.

“I met Conley today,” the officer said. “Scared the living shit out of me. What makes that man so blasted arrogant?”

“He—he believes he can win over the king to his side.”

“He does believe it, and I wish I understood why.” He turned to Leda. “You look, my dear – very neat. I have written to Olaudah Equiano on your behalf, you know?”

Hand left their side, going to fetch a glass of diluted wine for Leda. He was stopped by Alan MacLode, who, although dressed nicely in a dark coat, seemed on the edge of panic.

“Did you know they would do this?”

“Do what?”

“Flood. Graham Lott. They have been hanged. Conley was behind it: he persuaded the city’s authorities both men were Jacobins. They swung from a rope this morning.”

“Why them? Why now?” Graham Lott was the young man from the trade unionist meeting, the one who mixed stucco for Manbourg’s. Hand couldn’t believe he was dead.

MacLode took Hand aside. “We had planned a strike. Over the mills in Dean village. Now we are being rounded up like stray dogs. You will need to make a decision soon. Your man, Conley, is trying to destroy us.”

“Well,” Hand said. “I don’t agree with that.”

“Then work with us.” MacLode was watching Leda. The handsome officer had made her laugh. “What are you doing with that child?”

“Helping her.”

“Lord. How does dressing her in finery help her, or anyone else? You are just teaching her to get attention from the wealthy. To put herself ahead of everyone else in her station. How will that improve the world?”

“It may improve her life.”

MacLode shook his head. “Do you know who that blond bull is? He’s one of the worst. And now she talks to him as though he was a shepherd in a pastoral. It’s like you’ve stolen her from us. You’ve added her to our enemies. You hate them, I know, but you continue to do their work. Well, you will soon be alone. Conley is going to force everyone in this city to choose a side.” Hand, shaken, returned to his friends.

“Look,” Leda said.

Lizzie had entered the room, wearing a long cream dress, holding a bundle of long-stemmed winter roses, speckled purple and pale lime. The mourning band on her right arm was thin, but absolute black. She looked lost, uncertain, and so, despite their previous conversation, Hand took a few steps in her direction. To his surprise, she walked to him.

“I'm surprised to see you here.”

She touched a handkerchief to her brow. “This is not what I expected. What a crowd!”

“People are feeling sociable.”

“Awful. My face is going to crack. Where's Conley?”

“He's not here. Not coming, I think.” The only prominent Cavenar, at least of Conley's generation, was the lady Augusta, of Trinidad. She was nearby, chatting with Henry Raeburn.

“Really? Conley instructed me to attend. See?” The card attached to her flowers was signed, 'The Lord of the Cavenars.'

“If it wasn't Conley—it wasn't you, was it?” she asked.

“It wasn't,” Hand said, looking around. He saw no sign of the hooded stranger.

Lizzie spent some time in conversation with Leda and Arabella, and while Hand was relieved to see Leda happily talking, her nerves temporarily forgotten, he still winced to see the naturalness with which Lizzie spoke to people other than him. He had hurt her, it was true. He had hurt her badly.

Arabella noticed his gaze, and smiled. “It's good what you're doing, Mr. McLeish.”

“I think she will be a fair success, tonight.” Hand felt constricted by MacLode’s comments. He had chosen a side. He was against Conley.

“Yes,” Arabella replied. “With any luck, by the time she is of age, she will make someone a respectable tutor.”

“If I can speak openly—I’m hoping for something more for her. Tutors struggle to marry, after all.”

“She lacks means,” said Arabella, her voice empty, in the realm of pure fact. “I—I don’t want to upset your feelings.”

“But you think this is hopeless.”

“Here, in society—there is only one thing a woman can use to keep herself afloat. It is not something they teach you in school. And the worst of it is, it only delays the inevitable. Those women end up as penniless as if they never caught a man’s eye. I’m sorry if —”

One of the workers from the firm—Tim Bucknell—tapped Hand’s shoulder, his expression urgent: “Your brother wants you. Now.” Robbie Bruce was standing beside Tim. Robbie had a look that Hand knew well, like he was readying himself for a fight.

It was not widely known that Craig had been required, in his plans for the building, to design a private chapel on the floor above. Hand found his brother, with two other men, at the foot of the stairs leading up.

“What’s going on?”

Calum looked pleased. “We spotted him. Your hooded lad. Couldn't keep hold of him, but we guessed he was coming here. Tim, here, saw him marching down Princes Street.”

“He must be after Augusta. Or Lizzie.”

“Augusta just walked up these stairs. She's in the chapel, now. Alone.”

“You let her go up there?”

“Sure I did. Didn't want to scare off the killer.”

Hand moved quietly on the stairs. At the door to the chapel, he listened, but heard only a single person's footsteps, Mary's, walking back and forth. The roar from downstairs covered any other sound.

Hand turned back to Robbie Bruce. “This man, if it is the man I met, is much stronger than he appears.”

He opened the door and walked in.

“McLeish,” said Augusta, annoyed. “What are you doing here?”

“Who told you to come up here?”

“Conley sent me a note. He didn't invite you, too, did he? Are we going to discuss your wretched goings on with that slave girl? How dull.”

“You're in danger.” He looked around for hiding places. The room was mostly bare, with six simple chairs facing a lectern. A plain steel cross on the back wall was the only hint of the room's religiosity. The windows were sealed, the shutters closed tight. But there was also an alcove off to the left, a private space to which the father of the household might remove himself to pray.

Hand's clock sense whispered that there was someone standing there, away from view.

Augusta somehow increased her disdain. "Danger? Have you come to kill me? I knew it. You are the murderer. You have been murdering my family. Damn! I told Conley you should be behind bars." She took a step away from him, and another, bringing her closer to the alcove. She was too far away now for him to reach out and grab. She was closer to the stranger hiding in the wall. Hand could hear, too, Robbie Bruce and Calum on the stairs behind him, standing just out of sight of the door.

Hand took a slow step forward. A dry, brown leaf broke under his foot. He told Augusta to stop, let him talk to her, but the instruction made her cry out, her face turning pale. Now she was scared. She darted back, getting a chair between them, shouting for help, for her guard.

Hand swore. He had to figure out a way to make her trust him, to calm her fears. Her heard female voices behind his back, and he turned to see Lizzie in the doorway.

"What's happening?" she asked.

"He wants to kill me!" cried Augusta, too intent on Hand to notice the cloaked figure emerging from the alcove, a short slender figure, his face once again covered in a hood. The stranger's hands were open. He was unarmed, but he reached for Augusta like he planned to snap her neck.

Lizzie screamed. Hand lunged for Augusta, too slowly: the stranger grabbed the tall woman's wrist and spun her away, trying to get better hold of her. For a moment, Hand got a glimpse of the killer's face, and again, saw only an unwholesome pallour, and a pair

of sallow, yellowed eyes, more reptilian than human. And yet, despite their strangeness, something familiar shocked him with its urgency.

Hand expected Augusta to cower away, pull away. But instead she had produced from somewhere a long pin or spike, and she was stabbing at her assailant's chest. He swayed back, ducking out of range, while still keeping hold of her wrist.

Robbie Bruce slammed through the doorway, with Calum behind him. The killer let go of Augusta, and one-handed grabbed up a nearby chair, swinging it underarm at Robbie. Hand ducked as the chair flew through the room, its impact clubbing Robbie off his feet. Calum ducked low, trying to protect himself from a second missile. The killer turned to the window and shoved hard at the frame, hard, with his arm. Glass and wood broke—Hand felt horrified, again, at this stranger's uncanny strength—and before anyone could close the distance, the hooded man took a grip of the remaining window frame and leapt out into the night.

Chapter Twelve

Hand left Lizzie with the doctor who was tending to Augusta Cavenar—her wrist was hurt, possibly broken—and went down to the dance, looking for help with the search. Robbie Bruce, trembling with rage at being bested, had already set off down Queen's street, in chase of the man in the hood.

The event was breaking up. Some people continued to carouse, unaware of what had happened upstairs, but many men were calling for their pistols and swords. To Hand's surprise, these fine gentlemen were listening to Calum as he split them up into teams, giving each group a nearby road to check. Everyone wanted to hunt down Augusta's attacker.

Hand's pleasure shrank away when he saw Arabella Carver. She stood alone, without Leda. Her eyes were wet.

“That monster,” she said. “He took her. Conley.”

Lizzie joined them. “Hand. Hand! Did you see that his face? Under that hood? Did you get a good look at him?”

Hand asked what she had seen, but Lizzie just shook her head, refusing to speak.

Conley, Hand learned, was waiting downstairs, underground. He had taken Leda with him.

Hand went down alone, arriving at a small room, windowless and hot. The air stank of tallow and ash. Three men who looked like escaped convicts lounged by the door.

Leda was hunched in a corner, holding Lizzie's flowers, her new dress creased and dust-stained. She looked unharmed, but her face was washed with dismay, fear.

"I told you," Conley said, "not to chase after my prisoner. I specifically told you."

His heart still pounding from the stranger's appearance, Hand beckoned for Leda to come to him. She looked at Conley, too afraid to move.

"Leda Smith," Hand said, "is my ward. And I don't want to talk to you right now. So we are leaving."

"I feel your understanding is inadequate, lad," said Conley, sighing. "I am building something major down in London. Do you understand? I dine with regents and viceroys. My faction is close to complete control. We are composing some remarkable bills. New laws. Rules that will put these isles in tip-top form, at last. Clean up the rabble, the trouble-makers, the ones too lazy to work. Cut down on the fat! It's more than you can ever understand, I know. You just need to find me a child." Conley paused, his tone softening. "Oh. Were you bringing her to me? Was this your plan?"

"She is my ward."

"She will be perfect. Well done, my lad."

Hand felt a great fear rising in him. He thought he knew who the hooded stranger resembled. It was impossible—it should have been impossible.

"How long," he asked, "have you been doing experiments on your former prisoner? How long have you held him?"

Conley seemed pleased by the question. "Oh, some time, some time."

"Ten years? Was it ten years ago that you found him?"

“It doesn't matter. The key is that you have picked a child to replace him. You have been just as resourceful as I imagined. Girl—would you like to visit London?” Leda remained seated on the floor.

“No,” Hand said, his stomach sick. “She is not for you. She has nothing to do with this.”

“If not,” Conley said, “then what are you doing? Hanging around with sedition-ers and trade unionists? Declaring yourself for abolition? How does this help me?”

“You get one day a week of my help. That's all. I am not your prisoner.”

Men surrounded Hand and gripped him, seizing his arms. He reached for his clock-sense, looking for a way out, but the world stood in his path, blocking every clear passage. His genius searched, but too slowly to help. He struggled, tried to unbalance the pair of men who held him, but a sudden blow in the small of his back made him reel, cry out.

Conley looked at him for a good minute. He came close, and then slapped Hand, hit him across his mouth. The blow jarred Hand, made him gasp. Conley hit again, and again, and Hand stretched back, kicked, straining to get away from his attacker. Conley's eyes were bright, like he was watching an enjoyable game of golf, and Hand did not know if the man wanted him dead.

“You are nothing. You are just a servant with a job to do.”

Leda was crying out, begging them to stop.

Hand was shaking—he was held tight—and Conley backhanded him, hitting his face so hard that something cracked. Leda screamed.

“You work for me,” Conley said.

“All right,” Hand said, despairing. He was afraid, he could not escape his fear. He could not take more battery.

“You work for me. You always will. Say it, or I break something important in your head.”

“Yes.”

Conley nodded to himself, his breathing slowed down. “Good.” Rather than release him, one of the men behind struck Hand low and hard in his back, and he tried to cry out, but he had no breath to spare. They let him drop to the floor.

“You’re expected at work tomorrow,” said Conley. “I have invited an audience, so you had better make it a good show. The best you’ve ever done. Show us the entire world.”

To Hand’s horror, the Cavenar office, early the following morning, was well-attended. His face was still bruised and swollen, and he walked with Leda on one side, and Calum on the other, unsure how easily he would move without their support.

He had hoped to carry out his own humiliation quietly, with just the usual clerks. The room, however, was crowded. Lizzie was there, as was Conley, and Conley’s lawyer, Sir Ambrose. The young officer from the night before was leaning against a wall. Even MacLode, somehow, had been invited. It was as though the Cavenars were aiming to display strength to everyone in the city, to dispel any sense of weakness created by the attacks on the family’s elders: or that they wanted Hand to know there was no way out.

There was no space for Leda and Calum to sit, to Hand's relief. He did not them want to see him work.

He sipped a little wine, and read the documents he was given with his one good eye. Lizzie's expression was impossible to read: he could only glance at her. The shame was too great.

This would be his worst performance ever. He had lost too much of the wider world. He had given up a little to discover Leda, to make sense of William's papers. He had given up even more to master Lizzie's grand design for the city. Now, the world resisted him. Finesse was gone. All he saw, with his limited eyes, was murder and theft. The names and purposes were gone, and in his mind the oceans foamed red. As the world spun, blood flowed from every part of the trembling map.

Although, in his mental picture, Scotland was still near the top of the planet, that blood somehow flowed upwards, joining together in thick rivers, seeping in Hand's direction.

He tried to speak in his usual fashion, to comment on business and opportunity, but he could not. All he spoke about was the violence he saw, assault carried out by men and women with a thousand different names. He had no story: he could only list one terrible act after another. It should have been a failed divination, but the clerks loved it. They wrote furiously. Conley was rapt, delighted, and the military officer leaned forward, his mouth open. Hand paused, aware suddenly that his eyes were wet, and he had been weeping on the page. No one seemed to care. The officer seemed to approve, in fact, as though this bit of performance made his claims more believable. When Hand finished, at

last, the clerks stood as one and applauded. Even Conley, bitterly, watchful, straightened in his chair, joining in the cheer. Lizzie was silent—Hand flinched away from her gaze. If she had ever hated him before, this morning had forever confirmed that emotion.

The handsome officer took Hand aside, whispering that he had never seen anything like it. He saw now that Conley was more capable than he had thought. There were schemes he had in mind, rare, wealth-creating schemes—women they could together deceive. Hand, mumbling a non-reply, was able to get himself free, refused a towel from someone, staggering to the hallway, seeking a little refuge in the bare space. He had created a city of blood. This had been his gift to Edinburgh. He could not stop weeping, both for himself and the world.

He felt people approach, and he lurched away, backing down the corridor, his hand up to protect his face. But calm voices surrounded him, stopped his retreat. Leda, small and close by, took hold of his arm. MacLode was there, too.

Lizzie whispered, “Lord, lord.”

“I’m sorry,” Hand said. “So sorry.”

She murmured for him to stop talking. She pulled his head down to her shoulder, taking him in her arms. He clung to her.

In the office of Farweather and McLeish, in the sitting room, Hand was given a chair by the fire. His friends gathered around him, telling him to drink more sherry.

“Has a doctor seen him?” Lizzie asked, again.

MacLode crouched by Hand's side. "That work—you must stop doing it. It's killing you."

Hand felt relieved to hear this. That meant he still had something inside that could be killed.

Lizzie said, "That is the last time Hand does any work for those people. That is the end."

Hand shook his head. "Conley won't let me. He'll threaten you all, one by one, so I do what he says."

She stroked his face. "He will try. That's all."

Hand nodded, grateful for her comfort.

She asked, "What is Conley doing now?"

MacLode said, "Word is, he has men searching the city for the man in the hood. They are hunting him down. They are knocking on every door."

Hand said, "He was Conley's prisoner. For many years."

MacLode asked, "In Edinburgh?"

"No. I don't think Conley kept him in nearby."

MacLode seemed to find this comment interesting, and he and Calum moved to the other side of the room, discussing the sympathetic members of Conley's household.

Lizzie came to his side. "I saw him. The man in the hood. He looked right at me, before he ran away. But it—it can't be." She paused. "You suspect it, too. Don't you?"

"Yes."

"But Tyler died ten years ago. I buried him in Nice. He is dead."

Hand kept thinking back to the glimpse he had caught. Those eyes. They had seemed familiar, even if he did not know how. The stranger had sent Lizzie flowers. He had called himself the lord of the Cavenars. The lord of the Cavenars.

Hand called Elsie over. “That letter that arrived. The one with no sender? Did you throw it away, or did you maybe keep it?”

Elsie smiled. “I thought you might want it.”

She returned a moment later, and Hand cut the envelope open. The note, hand-written, barely covered two lines. Hand read it, and then passed it to Lizzie.

Dear Lizzie. My dearest wife. I am alive. I am coming for you. And the sinners that share my name.

They had been left alone. He and Lizzie had been talking for more than an hour. Hand had told her the story of Granny Wynd's spell. He tried to tell everything: Douglas's madness. The death of Lane Waller.

“No, I need proof,” she said at all, refusing him, even though they felt closer than he could remember in years. “Before I can even consider what you're claiming, I need real proof.”

“You saw him. Tyler.”

“A similar face? An anonymous letter? Remember, you're telling me that I caused Freddie Thomas's death. That I helped you and Granny cast her spell—at least, that I encouraged you to do it. So I made my own father mad. I am to blame, in your version of events, just as much as you. So no. I can't believe you, not yet. I need to see him.”

“We can't find Tyler. No one can.”

“Then I want to see this prison. Where they kept him.”

Chapter Thirteen

The prison, MacLode reported, had been located in the city of Nice, up until the fall of the Bastille. Conley had made the journey down the French coast every year or two to supervise his experiments, but when France was no longer safe, he had brought his prisoner up to Scotland, and had built a great fortress of a house in a tiny coastal village. The village's name was Lachlan.

Hand was afraid to take time away from the city, but Lizzie insisted that she had to see this house, and MacLode thought, if the prison could be found, Conley's enemies down in London might be able to do something useful with the information. London's richer inhabitants would be outraged to learn that Conley had locked up his family's rightful heir in a tower.

Hand and Lizzie would be guided by a courier: if proof of Tyler's prison could be found, the courier would ride straight for London and spread the word.

The first day of riding was nearly perfect pain. Hand's only responsibility was to not fall off. Lizzie rode beside him, never speaking, coaxing both horses to maintain the courier's pace. Hand's body began the morning aching, the wounds he had received from Conley's beating exacting their damage. And as the day wore on and the sun yellowed with the afternoon, the ache of riding so long, grew enormous, unrelenting.

He could not shake the picture in his mind of the world of blood. But while he had felt helpless despair at the time, as the sun began its descent, Hand instead felt increasingly furious. Conley had already helped the worst parts of the world to flourish,

and now he wanted to accelerate the process. Conley had tortured and experimented on Tyler for a decade, and he would, without a flicker of guilt, sacrifice Leda to bring back Granny Wynd. And, it seemed, Granny Wynd herself approved of this plan. Her apparition had pointed at Leda, as if claiming her.

No, Hand told himself. No—Conley would be defeated, killed. Granny Wynd was never coming back. Hand saw the awful endless void beneath the world, the lightness nothing for which Granny had been the conduit. He saw the great wall he had built, made of clocks and paving stones and sugar pots, and it seemed to steam, tremble, as tendrils of the abyss rose up, breaking through to the light. He tried not to see, tried to focus on the real world around him. The witch was never coming back.

They rode until the light completely failed. At the inn they stopped at, Hand paid for two separate rooms, one for Lizzie, and one for himself and the courier. He fell asleep before he could change his clothes.

The next day, on fresh horses, they left the Glasgow road. An hour later, the courier led them through an abandoned village. The houses were simple, but still intact, and the land that surrounded them was lush and well-fenced. But not a single person remained. They rode on. Hours later, they came to a second such village, also empty, and then a third, this one, more ragged and run down than the others. He knew where these Scots had gone. They had fled to Glasgow or Edinburgh, or once-small Paisley, or across to America, as their land owners had seized greater and greater control. The well-fenced lands he rode through had once half-belonged, in practice, to the villagers who worked on them, but the age of science required more forceful management. Hand wondered how

much of the whole country had emptied out, the highlanders losing their liberties, the borderlanders exhausted by centuries of war.

I have done this, he told himself. People like me did this: we reformed the countryside, brought in new ways to farm. We opened up the passage between these villages and far flung lands. He knew, at the same time, that mankind was making great and sudden progress: there were more choices, more goods, more luxuries. There was more of everything, and yet these ancient homes lay abandoned.

As they rode on, Hand felt slip away a little more of his grip on the wider world, his picture of the Cavenar empire. As his clocks came back to him, as the effort of maintaining his grip on the entire planet faded, his own powers of observation grew.

The inn they stopped at was a dismal place. It seemed to lack all real life and warmth, reduced to a mere stopping point in the middle of great emptiness. Hand lay in the hard bed and let the remainder of the Cavenar planet disappear from his mind. He could not sleep, but as he listened to the courier snore, he felt himself lose track of the rest of the world. The planet fell from him, leaving him alone. He felt the flow of trade across the Atlantic fade to a mere idea in his mind. He was just a man, in an inn, listening to another man snore.

In the morning, he moved about the inn in mild terror: Lizzie asked him what was wrong. Hand could not explain: he was now no different to these provincial, miserable men. His mental connection to the broader world was gone, and he was far from the thrill of London, removed from the society that stretched across the globe.

Yet he also felt as though a huge weight had lifted. He winked at Lizzie as they ate breakfast, telling her he would be fine. As he walked out into the open air, he felt so powerfully well. So strongly alive.

They arrived at Lachlan in the afternoon, a fishing village by a rocky shore, with a fine old house standing some way off, on the crest of a hill. The women of the village regarded them with distrust. Hand marveled at the strength of feeling he experienced now that his clock-sense was unburdened. It seemed as though he was so much closer to these women than he could have imagined. He already knew that they were hiding a secret.

The house that Conley's men had built stood empty and cold on the height. A local man, paid for his time, led them up, and brought them around the back, where the door could be forced. Inside, they found a terrible, blood-stained prison cell.

The house, outwardly, appeared like a normal home for a family of means. Yet inside, it stank of cold rot. There was no decoration and barely any furniture. All the builder's effort had been expended on maintaining an inner chamber, a strengthened compartment of two small rooms, whose reinforced walls were ribbed with ship's beams. The door frame to that inner chamber was made of steel, as though intended to keep a mob out—or in.

Four broken corpses lay about the entrance to that interior chamber. The bodies were in a state of extreme decay, but the great wounds they had received were still visible.

“No,” said Lizzie, almost in a whisper. “No, my love.”

Inside the small compartment, dead leaves lay on every surface. One room contained a small thin bed. Lizzie stared at it, appalled. Hand hated to think how long Tyler had been held in this house, or houses like it.

The old villager crossed himself.

“The one you want is in Trieth.”

“Who?” Lizzie asked.

“We watched them. They were here for the last couple of years. We knew there was something terrible going on. We heard a man screaming. And then one day, the fire didn't get lit in the night. Something had gone wrong. Good, we said. We reckoned they were all dead, but the manager, the house keeper fellow, he showed up a week later, over in Trieth, living very nicely indeed. Mr. Allan Camp. He was the one who did their provisioning. He survived. He doesn't know he's been spotted. Fool.”

“Do you know a man called Conley? A rich-looking fellow?”

“These were the lads that lived here. The dead ones on the floor. Can't be sorry to see them on their way to hell.”

They rode out the rainy day. They were forced by a storm to stop before Trieth, sleeping in a farm house. The owners assumed that Hand and Lizzie were married, and when they were offered the guest room, Lizzie accepted.

Hand entered the small bedroom cautiously, unable to quite look at Lizzie, and unable to not look at her.

“We need to talk,” she said. “If you get too close, you may not like what you smell.”

“I will stay on my side of the bed,” Hand said.

Hand lay beside her, looking at the beams.

"I'm not a widow," Lizzie said. "I am an adulteress."

"No—"

"Yes. Every time I—Lord!"

"Why," Hand asked, "did you grow to hate me? Was it Douglas?"

"That you killed him? No, I don't think so. If you hadn't acted, Tyler would have been choked to death. Douglas was mad. It happened later. I came to believe that you opposed me, opposed my every hope. That you would murder my theatre simply to keep a project on course."

Hand tried to explain himself, but she kept going: "Additionally," she said, "It became uncomfortable to spend time with you. And it was even more painful because that you seemed to have no awareness of this. You always acted like I should be glad to see you."

"I thought I was helping you."

"You made your thoughts very clear. You told me in some detail how I should behave, what society expected of me. You spoke at some length about my private relationships and friendships."

"That's unfair. I just —"

"It's not. You were explicit. You gave me a lot of advice about—about Sir Danley, and whether I should 'shame myself' by remaining in proximity to him."

"I wasn't wrong, though. Where is Sir Danley now? Didn't he abandon you, just like I said he would?"

“Just because something doesn't last doesn't make it a sin. It just makes it bad art. That's what I decided, afterwards.”

“I don't know,” Hand said, “how I can ever make up working for Conley for so long. When I look back, I can't even see any decisions, really—the decision to do it. It always seemed to be something I had chosen at an earlier point.”

“I told myself,” Lizzie said, “that you had decided to work with the family, and so, as you had made that choice, I might as well accept the money you sent. I reckoned you owed me, too. I was always able to live with the rest of it.”

Hand said, “I have to stop Granny Wynd. She can't come back. The world—”

“I remember talking to her. She was helpful, encouraging, even. I can't help feeling that your struggle with her is some great misunderstanding.”

They arrived late the next morning. Trieth was a prosperous market town, with a decent and busy high street. At the town's largest inn, Hand was given a letter. It was from Calum: back in Edinburgh, the town guard had arrested MacLode and the remaining trade unionists. The Cavenars were rounding up their enemies. Calum said that gangs of men were on the streets every day, searching the city for the family's attacker, and parents were keeping their children indoors.

The courier hesitated to join the search for Allan Camp. “I should get on the road to London. I have more than enough for a scandal.”

Hand disagreed. “We're almost there. Camp's story will be the final nail in the coffin.”

As they walked about the town, Hand's genius had returned to him in full. He no longer possessed a grand picture of the world, and this absence made him unexpectedly melancholy, but, in return, he felt the old power of his youth coming back. He could tell a dizzying number of things about Trieth: his clocks crowded around him, delighted to be able to tell him all the information they knew. He understood the business of the town. He knew that the lady of the inn was unwell and heavily in debt.

That same intuition whispered that he had better get back to Edinburgh quickly. Leda, and many other people, were in danger.

A local boy guided them for a penny to Allan Camp's house. Camp was a short, heavy man, busy in his vegetable garden. He tried to run into the house when he saw them coming. Hand's courier caught him before he could reach the door, and strong-armed him inside.

Allan Camp needed no persuading to talk. He sat in his chair sobbing and begged for their protection. He was, Hand learned, Conley's local manager, and had been in charge of writing monthly updates on the prisoner's health. When Tyler had broken out of his cell, he had first threatened Camp with a painful death, and then offered to pay him triple what Conley had offered. Allan Camp had taken the money, sent Conley false letters, pretending the prison remained secure. Only, weeks later, when Conley had seen the mangled body of William Cavenar, must he have understood that his prisoner was free.

“Where,” Hand asked, “did Tyler get his money from? From the dead guards?”

“No,” said Camp, pleased with himself. “That was my doing. He had me write to an estate he owned. They sent him the money. It was a little house that Conley never heard of.” Tyler had sometimes talked, Hand remembered, about a place he owned in the village of Duddingston, on the far side of Arthur's Seat. It was a house he had bought in secret, something kept quiet from the rest of the family.

“Aye,” said Camp, nodding. “That's the place. He's probably staying there now.”

The door to the house opened. Two tall men in black, knives and pistols on their belts, walked in. Their eyes were bleak, assured.

“Fuck me,” one said.

“Allan fucking Camp,” said the other, “you're a dead man. The rest of you lads are dead, too. The lady—she gets to come back with us.”

Hand's courier backed away. He had a weapon, too, Hand knew, but he was no match for these professionals.

Hand said, “No, sorry. Allan Camp is under my protection.” The world stood in clear, sharp focus.

The assassin moved on Hand, covering the room with calculated speed. He grabbed Hand by his arms and swung him, forcing him down to the floor. He bared his teeth, enjoying the fight. Hand was flung on his back, and the assassin drew a long knife, but despite Lizzie's frantic voice, begging the man to stop, Hand was not concerned.

He examined his attacker, the man standing above him, who was preparing to kneel and cut his throat. He saw the flow of life running through the man, the rhythm and ebb of energy that was the killer's own personal pattern. Hand reached up and took that

pattern away, gesturing for his clocks to fly in. He cut off the pulse of life. The man gasped. He staggered away, his eyes rolling up in his. He collapsed, sprawling backwards.

Hand accepted Lizzie's support and stood up. The second assassin stared at him. Hand saw how easy it would be to choke off this second fellow's existence. His head throbbed from the effort, but his abilities were not exhausted.

"We can make a deal," said the remaining killer.

"I am sorry," Hand said. "But I can't let you go." He pushed, and the man's eyes went blank. His body collapsed against the fireplace.

"My God," Lizzie said. "My God. Could you always do that?"

Hand felt the world spin, and he had to lean against the table. His throat was squeezed tight, and he thought he would throw up.

"No," he said. "I think I've become stronger. Which is good. It's how I'm going to deal with Conley." And Granny Wynd, too, if she tried to prevent him.

"You can't just murder people," she said.

"I can't just murder people who don't deserve it."

Allan Camp was whimpering, his eyes wet with terror, huddling in the corner. The courier, too, was trembling, shaking like he could not stop.

"Perhaps you can omit this part of the story," Hand said, "when you get to London."

"Aye." The courier, with an act of will, regained himself. "Mr. Camp. You and I are going to ride to London as quickly as horse can carry us. You are about to have the worst week of your life."

Hand and Lizzie went back to Edinburgh alone. Hand felt desperately weak, and he thought he would cry with relief when they stopped at the first inn they had slept in. Dust-covered, mud stained, he and Lizzie ate a simple meal of potatoes, roasted in a pot, covered with thick dark gravy. Hand had lost his hat somewhere on the road, and his hair was matted, flecked with grit from the road.

The innkeeper promised them hot water, and Hand waited downstairs while Lizzie bathed. His mouth was dry, and the filth of the road caked his skin. He wondered what Lizzie would do once she met Tyler. It was a great irony: at last, she knew him, believed him, at the very moment when her husband returned to win her back. He wondered, too, what Conley would do when they returned. Conley would threaten his friends, his family. He had Leda imprisoned, too. Exhausted and sore, Hand understood the conflict in clear, simple terms: there was a world of life, and one of death. He had to keep them apart. There was a bright city and a dark city.

At last, he and Lizzie were both clean from the journey. In the bed, Lizzie rested her head on his arm, her eyes closed, breathing in the early stages of sleep, and Hand tried to stay awake, to relish the moment, the end of their long discontent, but he, too, drifted off away. A candle had been left burning on the room's chest of drawers, and at some point in the night, Hand woke, and in that candle's light, he saw Granny Wynd sitting on a chair, watching him and Lizzie. Granny looked older, the way he remembered her from his youth, and yet some of the anger on her face seemed to have gone, faded. She was watching Lizzie, deep in thought. Hand, in this state between consciousness and sleep,

seemed to have forgotten to hate the witch, and he watched her in silence, almost glad to see her.

He woke again. The day had begun, and he could hear talk from downstairs, and a lamb's sad bleating. Lizzie was sitting on the end of the bed, and she was sketching. She had been drawing for some time, he guessed, in a small book. Her eyes were absent, like she saw a completely different world. Granny Wynd stood behind in ghostly form, looking over her shoulder at what she drew.

Lizzie noticed he was watching her. Hand blinked. Granny Wynd was gone.

"Don't look at me," Lizzie said. "I need to do a great deal to my face."

"Can I see what you drew?" He received the notebook. Lizzie had begun her plan for Edinburgh again, but these sketches were unlike anything she had made before. The exact motifs and straight blocks of her earlier plans were gone, replaced on the page by tree-lined, curving streets. Roads curled, wandering down hills. Now she invoked to landscape to produce her city.

"I dreamed of the witch," Lizzie said, brightly. "It was strange. It was like I was a child again, and she and I were talking in her room. Instead of telling me about Freddie and Arran Thomas, though, she talked to me about Conley. And you."

"What did she tell you to do?"

Lizzie smiled, but wouldn't say.

Chapter Fourteen

On the far side of Arthur's Seat, they left their horses at the Sheep's Heid pub, and walked through Duddingston. A fierce gale pushed them back; he and Lizzie did their best to avoid the worst of the mud, but with little luck.

"This is Tyler's house," Lizzie said when they stopped outside a small, plain door. Hand knocked, got no reply, but the door was not locked. He asked her to wait outside

He found the creature that had once been Tyler sitting on a chair in the kitchen.

Tyler had become wrecked, slender, grey. His face was somehow both, ragged and smooth, his cheeks taut like tight leather, his eyes cracked and dry. He sat with an eerie stillness, as if he could by choice will his mind into silence. He did not look alive, and yet his face was rich with feeling, like a sculpture of furious sorrow. He seemed swathed in unimaginable bitterness, as though the air he breathed was contaminated. His hooded cloak clung to him, thick with mud and stained with grass.

"You tried to kill me," Hand said.

Tyler shrugged. "Not really. I only wanted you scared off." His voice, rasping and faint, was a terrible thing. He coughed, his chest shaking, and he wiped a dry, small leaf from his mouth. The room was scattered with them. Hand could feel the force of Granny Wynd's magic tremble in the room.

"Conley is searching for you."

"Aye. I thought I'd let them run themselves up and down Edinburgh, lose heart. Conley has obligations in London. He can't worry himself about me forever."

“What then? What would you do?”

“Kill the rest of the family. Steal their money. Take Lizzie away with me.”

Hand became conscious, as Tyler did, that Lizzie was standing in the doorway. She gazed on her husband. Tyler cried out, moaning, clutching at his ragged clothes.

“No,” he cried, staring at Hand in outrage. “No! You can't see me like this. I am not this, not this filth.”

“How,” she asked, “are you still alive?”

Tyler closed his eyes. “Your soul should burn, Hand, for bringing her here.”

“I—” she halted. “I watched them bury you. In Nice, you passed away, and we buried you.”

“Ah,” Tyler said. “But the horned man was with me. He didn't let me die. I climbed out of the ground. I was alive. And an hour later, I was captured, put in one prison after another.”

Lizzie's shoulders shook. “It's terrible, terrible.”

“Conley tortured you,” Hand said.

“Many times. Never letting me rest.”

“You escaped.”

“No. I couldn't. Years and years. I was mad. Knowing Lizzie believed me dead. Imagining that you were wooing her, convincing her to marry again. Walls I could not tear down. Men who knew my strength, and guarded against it. Every year, Conley would come back for another round of his experiments. Trying to bring me close to death.”

Lizzie cried out, but she did not move to him.

“But you did escape,” Hand said.

“Once the prison was brought home. In cold, grey Scotland, they grumbled and grew lax. And when they slipped, I killed each and every one of them. Slaughtered them with my bare hands.”

“You came home,” Lizzie said, “and began killing your own family.”

“I came for you, wife. I am—reduced—since you knew me. I —”

Hand's clocks flickered about the room. They whispered a warning.

“Wait,” he said. Tyler stood, pushing the chair away, glancing around. Hand's extra awareness told him that there were people gathering on all sides. Soldiers were surrounding the house.

A crash sounded, and Lizzie flinched as the front door was flung aside. A soldier ran into the room, grabbing her arm. Tyler was up, across the room, and on him before Hand could react, swinging at the man with a wild arm, knocking the heavy soldier to the ground. The man's back and head smacked against the floor, hideously. Despite the danger, Hand couldn't stop the shivers breaking out across his skin. Granny Wynd's power was alive, in Tyler. It had crossed over to Tyler.

Voices were calling for their surrender. Hand concentrated, asked his clock-sense for help—only three soldiers guarded the rear of the house, where a narrow walled garden offered limited access.

“Tyler. The back door!”

Tyler stared at Lizzie a moment, and pulled away, following Hand's advice. Hand ran to the back window, saw the soldiers raise their muskets, and he pushed back at them,

taking the breath from them. He felt his own neck tense up, spasm, as the men collapsed. His head throbbed. One man remained, but Tyler hurled him from the path. He raised the back gate, tore it from its frame, and was gone.

Hand's vision spun. He had pushed himself too hard. Soldiers seemed to seep redly into the room, their pistols aimed at him and Lizzie. Hand tried to hurt, delay them, but when he tried to use his abilities, the world went black.

"I am unhappy," said Conley, sitting in the chair that Tyler had vacated, "that you enabled his escape." Conley was dressed in a gentleman's black coat and tie, a high top hat, and spotless shoes.

"You kept my husband a prisoner," said Lizzie. "Ten years—you made him mad."

"Aye," said Conley. "But for a good cause."

"You tortured him."

"We are all going to my house," Conley said. "The girl, Leda, is waiting for us. Tyler will come to rescue you, Lizzie. We all know that's what he's going to try to do. And then I can complete the transfer. Leda Smith will be the city's new witch."

Hand was about to protest, but Lizzie shook her head. She seemed strangely confident, telling him to relax. She linked her arm in his as they were led out to Conley's coach.

"You don't seem worried," Hand said. He was gathering his strength. He had to be ready to end Conley's life, as soon he could make sure that Leda was safe.

"I'm not worried at all," Lizzie replied. "Granny Wynd has shown me what to do."

Hand stared at her, suddenly afraid. He waited for her to explain more, but she merely leaned against him in the coach, encouraging him to put his arm around her, seemingly completely at ease.

The Cavenar mansion shone in the rain. Hand and Lizzie were led into a fine drawing room, its floor bare. Leda was waiting for them, guarded by several heavily-armed men.

“You look better,” Leda told him. “Your face looks better.”

“I'm sorry,” Hand told her. “I don't think I helped you.”

“Well,” she said, “we are prisoners now. I understand.”

“No. It's worse than that.” Hand pictured the fury that had captivated Granny Wynd all her life. “I'm going to try to get you free, but if I can't, you're going to have to trust me. Something bad may happen to you, but you'll still be you, deep down. You and I can destroy Conley together, when it happens.”

“That doesn't sound good,” said Leda. “I like how I am now.”

Conley walked in, removing his coat. “How should I summon Tyler? Any ideas?”

Lizzie shrugged. “He's coming. He knows we are here.”

The rain beat on the windows, on the distant roof. Hand wondered if he should just attack Conley. Conley, however, noticed his gaze, and laughed.

“Hurt me,” he said, “and my men will take revenge on you, on the girl, and on Lizzie. You can't kill us all, not in time. And remember, I have men watching your sister. You can't reach across the Atlantic, not in time.”

Hand felt, stronger than ever, the dark city growing in force, its presence bearing down on him. Any minute now, it would be unstoppable. He summoned his clocks.

Perhaps if he gave everything he had —

“Don't do that,” Lizzie said, taking his arm. “Instead. You should watch. I am about to begin the play.”

“The what?”

“Like I said,” Lizzie told him. “I really think you and Granny misunderstood each other.” Hand felt the old force of Granny's spell grow. Even Conley noticed it, blinking, looking around. A soft, slow fiddle could be heard from no discernable direction. The spell waxed, drifted around the room. Lizzie seemed to be listening to something. She smiled.

A door to the side opened, and, looking troubled, confused, an elderly Arran Thomas entered on crutches.

“Where am I?” he asked.

“You are about to watch a play,” Lizzie said.

Behind him, Calum and MacLode came through the door.

“Wait,” said Conley. “They are in the Tolbooth. How are they here? Who let them out?”

And, after them, to Hand's bewilderment, a young woman, his sister, Abi walked in, accompanied by her husband.

Hand walked to her, taking her in his arms. “Aren't you in Virginia?”

“I thought I was,” she said. “But Lizzie said I should visit you.”

“How did you get here?”

“I'm not sure.”

Conley, his eyes twitching frantically, looked from Hand to the guards. “Separate them!” No one moved. The slow air of the fiddle grew stronger.

“Who,” Hand asked no one in particular, “are all these people? What are they doing here?”

“Actors,” Lizzie said. “I decided it was better that we take part in a play, rather than fight.”

“What,” Hand asked, “is the play about?”

“It's simple. Everyone gets their heart's desire. Would you like to be first?”

The wind picked up again, and the lamps fluttered, shook. Hand left his sister and walked to Lizzie. Everyone in the room had taken a seat, or was watching in silence. Even Conley, perturbed, afraid, was leaning against the fire place, reducing to watching, waiting to see what would happen.

Hand could not understand where Lizzie's new mood, her impenetrable calm, had come from.

She asked him, “What do you desire, most of all?”

He could not reply. He felt stripped of speech. He wanted a better city. He wanted Lizzie to love him.

From the other side of the room, Leda said, “Hand is very guilty. He is so full of the past. It sinks on him.”

This was true. "I wish I hadn't visited the witch," Hand said. "At the beginning. I wish I could have just brought my mother some money."

"That would have solved everything, wouldn't it? A few large coins to give your mother. Then you wouldn't have needed to show off your abilities to Tyler and me."

Hand felt dizzy, unsure. Was that true? Could all of his striving and struggling have been avoided, simply by the gift of a little gold?

"Look," Lizzie said. She held out her palm, as if giving him something. "Take this coin. Give it to your mother. You never need to want. Your family will never be hungry. You will be safe, and at ease." Her hand was empty.

Hand reached for her palm, hoping, despite the evidence of his eyes, that a real coin would be there for him to grasp. But he took only air. The disappointment struck him in his chest. What a terrible sentence Lizzie had given him: to forever be guilty, to forever be ashamed. There was no coin that could remove that.

Lizzie nodded, telling him to retreat. It was no longer his turn.

The main doors opened. Tyler, his head low, his shoulders pulled in as though he were very tired, walked into the glare of the flickering chandeliers.

"There you are!" Conley cried. "You are here!"

"Wait, sir," said Lizzie. "Allow me to finish my spell."

"Who," Tyler asked, coughing, "is the spell being cast on?"

"All of you." Lizzie went to Leda. She had a bundle of freshly picked thistles in her hand: she gave them to the girl.

"I wish," she said, "I had better flowers to offer."

She walked to MacLode. She passed him something small, a wrapped package. “To keep you well, until you can be set free.” MacLode accepted it, but did not smile.

Tyler said, “My turn. Now I want my heart's desire. And that's you, my darling.” Tyler seemed to have aged another ten years since Hand had last seen him. Hand felt endless sorrow for his friend. He won his freedom, and returned to his wife, but the journey had ruined him.

“Where,” Lizzie asked, “would we live? Everyone here thinks you are dead.”

“We'll go to the Caribbean,” Tyler said, having to shield his eyes against the room's pale light. “Strange sights are accepted everyday, there. You and I—we will use the Cavenar money—we'll be happy.”

Lizzie was unmoved by his plea. “You already have that. My love, I mean. You already have what you need to desire. Now you need to rest. You are so tired.”

Tyler shook his head, denying it. He coughed out a wad of dead leaves, his chest heaving. Lizzie went to him, however, and, while the entire room watched, she gently led him to the day bed beneath the window.

Tyler, blinking, allowed her to lay him down.

“Rest. Rest, my love,” she said.

Tyler laid his head back on the cushions. His eyes closed. His body relaxed. With a sigh, his breath left his mouth.

From the fireplace, Conley laughed. “Yes! You did it. He's dead! Dead. Now, look in his mouth.”

Lizzie beckoned Hand over.

“What,” he asked, “are you doing? We can't just Conley what he wants.”

Lizzie just directed him to proceed. Afraid, hoping he was not making a terrible mistake, Hand bent over Tyler's body, and opened his friend's cold mouth. A lush green leaf waited on his tongue.

“That's it!” cried Conley. “That's it! I could never—I could never make it look that good. So green! It will work this time. It will work! Give it to the girl. Make Leda swallow it.”

Lizzie did not look away from Hand. “Won't you taste this? Just a little.”

Conley swore. “No. He can't have it. It's mine! Mine. Or the girl—I'll have her killed.”

“Don't worry,” Lizzie said. “It will be yours. Come closer, Hand. Taste the smallest part. There's nothing to fear.”

Hand felt the great force of Granny Wynd's power press on him, and he could no longer tell if that force came the witch, or from Lizzie herself. His mouth was dry. Was Lizzie preparing to destroy him, he wondered, as he took the leaf from her. Gently, awkwardly, he took a bite, tasting the green on his tongue.

Lizzie's eyes seemed to contain such kindness that Hand had to look away. He saw Douglas crouching over Tyler, pushing leaves into sick man's mouth. He turned, and where Tyler's body lay on the day bed, where the rain threw itself at the windows, small-leaved dark vines had risen up through the floorboards, and they encircled, protectively, Tyler's corpse, like a shield, like a shroud.

The candles on the walls, the chandelier above, seemed to be growing brighter. He coughed, and the back of his hand was spattered with blood. He took a step away from Lizzie.

“Hand!” cried Calum.

“What,” Lizzie asked, “do you see?”

He tried to answer but he could not see her in the dark. The grand Cavenar room was gone. Hand stood alone. He was standing, he saw, on the landing of the top floor of Tallow’s Land. He was a child again, in the gloomy half-light. His family’s door was closed, and he heard no one indoors. He was alone.

Granny Wynd’s door swung open in silence. Hand flinched. He knew he had to get away. He fled, somehow, the landing disappearing, until he stood over the city, looking down from a great height.

Hand saw, beneath the high street, the great wall he had built against the abyss. Flowers and ivy, dark blossoms that the world had never seen, were rising up, breaking through that wall. The void grew to burst the thin film on which life rested. The curving arc of the high street was split by Granny Wynd’s forces, its solid ground broken. The city’s towers trembled. Moss raced across the stones.

Hand pushed back. He called up more things of the world. He summoned his clocks, demanding that they protect the city, shield it.

He saw Leda’s aunt and her family. He saw the man of the house come home, tired and irritable after a day in a butcher’s. He saw their children, still working at the table, full of learned quiet. They knew better to say anything until their father had taken his

chair. They wanted so much, that boy and girl. And despite everything they hoped for, those hopes were a fraction of what they might desire, if the world ever allowed them the chance. They wanted far more than they ever allowed themselves to feel. Even at that age, they had been taught to give up almost all they desired. He saw their small, last hopes rising like steam from a pot of soup, rising up through the ceiling. And yet, those same hopes were continually struck back, hitting a solid barrier. It seemed as though, whenever these children tried to dream of a fuller, safer, better life, they were confronted by a wall of things. Money—money they didn't have, and the fine shoes of the wealthy. Sugar pots and cobblestones. The world seemed so very real when compared to their hopes, impossible to change.

Hand ran to help. He tried to push the ceiling away, break up the wall of the world that made change seemed impossible. But he found the wall made up of his own clocks, supported by every piece of the city he had turned into a shield. The barrier of cobble stones, and shoes, and crockery. His own wall kept the people of the city in their routines, their limited hopes.

He saw Douglas Farweather, scribbling in his notebooks of a great forest, some new place where human nature could return to grander shapes. He saw a party in Lizzie's house—he was Douglas Farweather, looking out of Douglas's eyes—and he saw himself, Hand McLeish, across the room. He seemed in Douglas's eyes a loathsome, small-minded builder. As the world grew, the roads were improved, as every new luxury took its journey across the land and sea, the wall over human minds grew stronger, making every action the product of mere necessity.

Hand felt a wild guilt, and he redoubled his efforts. He cleared away the mere things that blocked Leda's cousins, the trivial objects that kept this boy and girl from living the existence their minds were capable of. He ripped stones from the street, smashed clocks. And yet, as he worked, the scene changed again, and he found himself in his parents' old house in Tallow's Land. He saw their fearful expressions, as though he were a monster. He was the debt collector: he and his men had come to take their possessions for sale and evict them. Every pot they possessed, even their bible, would be taken to be sold. Hand paused, put the lamp down that he had lifted to throw away. But his men continued, stripping the bed, stacking up the toys, the blankets. His mother wept as the pieces of her life were removed.

Hand regained himself with a start. He had fallen to the floor. His brother and sister were speaking to him. Conley was laughing, telling everyone that the leaf was too much for Hand's stomach. It was too powerful.

His eyes seemed to close, and a moment later, Hand was sitting in his own house, in Leith, trying to ignore his wife as she shouted at him.

"Where do you go," Maggie was asking, "When we're alone? Who are you thinking about?" She was frantic. They had this argument many times before. He vowed to be more aware of her, to be present for her. He had to cease thinking of the greater world, of the passage of trade and the waves of conflict far away. He had to cease dwelling on the people he had lost, the chances he had thrown away. He had to be here. He would engage with the life around him. Maggie would see. Their marriage would improve, and her weeping, and his silence, would cease.

He drifted on. He saw the inn where he and Lizzie had spent the night. He saw Lizzie sitting on the bed as he slept beside, the early morning bright through the window. She had been drafting fresh designs for the city. She had paused in her work, looking away—she gazed at nothing. She was not there. And then she returned to make beauty on the page.

He saw the city surrounded by fields and hills. He saw it grow and change, spreading in every direction, developing into the bright city of the centuries to come. And, at the same time, he saw the dark city, too. He knew no way to be sure which city he was helping to create. He saw fresh forms rising out of the abyss, new homes and paths, never imagined creations that reshaped the most fixed and heavy parts of the city. He saw these fresh arrivals making new that which had always seemed impossible to change.

Hand blinked. The fiddle player struck up again. He was groggy, weak, and he was stretched out on the floorboards of Conley's great room. He had sweated like a fever.

“What did you see?” Lizzie asked. “Did you meet Granny Wynd?”

“I don’t know,” Hand said. And yet he felt confident, strangely, after his vision. He felt ready to go back into the city, to do everything he could.

Conley leaned over Hand, grinning. “Too bad! You look sick to death! It’s a pity, but I don’t think you can stop me now.”

Conley turned back to Lizzie. “Give it to me. The leaf. It's time to give it to me. Or my men will do their worst on you. On all of you.”

Lizzie nodded. “You are last, Conley. But now it's your turn” The rain outside faded away, and a breeze picked up. The sounds of birds circling, calling to each other, rose in

intensity. Hand, where he lay, could only watch as the room filled with a grey, steely light. The walls faded, and were gone.

Where the room had been, Lizzie and Conley stood in an endless forest.

Lizzie offered the leaf to Conley, and the wind blew it from her open hand. Conley cried out, lunging for it as it whipped away.

“Run,” Lizzie said. “Try to catch it.”

Conley ordered his men into the forest, and, they glanced at each other in fear. Too familiar with obedience to refuse, they followed behind their master as he ran deeper and deeper into the woods.

Hand, holding himself up on the floor, watched the distant Conley chase after the leaf, his arms outstretched. The grey light faded. The trees disappeared. Lizzie alone stood in the middle of drawing room.

She took a deep breath. “Well. That was successful.” She looked at Abi. “You had better leave.” Abi, letting Hand go, went with her husband to the door.

Lizzie walked over to MacLode. “You must go back to prison now, I’m afraid. We’re going to do our best on your behalf. I hope it won’t take us too long.”

MacLode looked at Hand. “I don’t want your help. This is a dream, isn’t it? Well, I can still dislike you in a dream. I can hate, and I can plan, even in a dream. We will be enemies, after all of this.” MacLode left the room, pushing Arran Thomas ahead of him.

The rain picked up. The intensity in the room departed. Hand, Leda, and Lizzie were the only people remaining. Tyler’s body lay on the day bed, unmoving.

Hand got up. “Will Conley ever find that leaf?”

“I don't think so.”

Leda hugged Lizzie. “Are you Granny Wynd?”

“I'm myself, I think. Granny just wanted to help me a little bit.”

Hand could hear people outside the room. There seemed a great many men and women waiting just beyond the doors.

“Why?” he asked, “did MacLode say we were enemies?”

“I don't know,” said Lizzie. She looked at the day bed where Tyler lay. “Perhaps he has a different plan from you, for the city.”

The three of them descended the stairs. In the massive Cavenar hall, they found a crowd of servants, soldiers, and clerks waiting. Hand's good mood sank. He did not wish to use his strange abilities ever again. He simply wanted a life, a life he could enjoy. But it seemed there would be one more struggle, always, before he could rest.

The Cavenar's head clerk stepped out of the crowd.

“We heard,” he said, “some very strange things up there.”

Hand told them that Conley had left the family business, and would not be returning.

The lead clerk looked at his colleagues. “We have done—we have committed acts—bad, criminal acts, some might say—but we were just doing what we were told. What should we do now?”

Hand asked them to follow him upstairs. There was a man, recently deceased, who should now be buried.

EPILOGUE

It was the winter of 1814 and everyone was reading *Waverly*. The weather had cleared for the first time in a few days, and Jane McLeish demanded that her family get up, put on their boots, and join the crowds on Princes Street. There was protesting: the children didn't want to put their coats on, and people said that Doug's family, and Maura's family—Calum's son and daughter, each with substantial broods of their own—would not want to come out. But Jane could not be refused, either by Greg, her husband, or by Hand, her father, and soon they were helping her round up the house. As the family fell under her sway, and roused itself, Hand allowed his walking stick to be fetched, and his outdoor shoes found.

The evening air was fresh, clear, and very cold. The crowd filled Princes street, treating it like a promenade. What had once been a peculiar, distrusted outpost was now the city's social heart. People greeted one another by name, waved to their friends. The sea wind blowing in from the Forth seemed to whispered at the enormity of the world, the hills and fields and waterways stretching away into the distance.

The new town was bright with open shops and lamp-lit inns. Even the small lanes between the principle streets were busy with foot traffic, and the wintry air shone in the pink faces of the friends and colleagues Hand's family passed.

In recent years, Hand had tried to tell young people how the city had been in his youth, how everyone, rich or poor, had lived within a stone's throw of the “old city's”

high street. Frequently, he was not believed. Everyone knew that the old city, crowded, unsanitary, was for the poor alone. No gentleman would stay there by choice.

Expansion, too, was coming, and in ways that would have been almost unimaginable to all but a few of the architects of the previous century. Napoleon had been defeated, and at last, the country would have a break from war. Although Robert Adam's Charlotte Square was still hailed as a wonder, one of the most successful residential constructions in the British Isle, in general, Adam's legacy was often questioned—and Douglas's visions appeared misguided fancy. Self-regarding ornamentation was the critique leveled against Adam, and tired sterility the one against Farweather: for the architects of 19th century Edinburgh, city planning should be based on the surrounding environment, the interaction of man with nature.

“Our grandparents,” Hand had heard one child-architect proclaim, “had an inexplicable hatred of trees—and of curved lines.”

The thought of Lizzie brought Hand, once again, to sadness. Despite the questions his great nephew was asking him about the war of '45, and despite the hope he had of seeing Leda and her family out that night, he felt himself grow sad. He asked his family's leave, and although they battled him, still, he managed to secure his freedom. He left them, and walked alone across the North Bridge, pausing in the middle, looking down into the darkness. The wind ripped past him, and he aimed his sight at the graveyard where Lizzie was buried. He stood alone, letting the evening's activity move behind his back.

He often wondered what he would be, and what the world would be, had he put his strange, terrifying genius to work. He could have gone down to London, and taken Conley's role as his own. He could have changed so many things: perhaps Europe's wars would have been avoided; perhaps abolition would have already come. The uncertain guilt weighed on him again—but that had been their decision, his and Lizzie's, that he would instead simply live. The Cavenar house had split, its fortunes dwindling to nothing, and Hand doubted if anyone would remember the name in a few more years. The trade unionists had struggled ever since the France had risen as a threat, and Hand guessed they did not feel they had made any progress in twenty years. On the other hand, Conley's dread warnings of Scotland's decline had been, at best, half-way correct. Hand still felt that no writer of the nineteenth century had yet equaled Hume or Smith in learning, but in their place, a remarkable artistic and cultural awakening had occurred. Robert Burns, who had been writing when Hand had been a younger man, but whom Hand, at least, had only slowly learned about, had composed poems that questioned everything Hand had once believed about the Scots language. And now all of Britain was in love with *Waverly*, whose anonymous author, everyone knew in Edinburgh, was Walter Scott.

It was for the best, he told himself. His calm, contented years with Lizzie had only been made possible by his retiring of his powers. He believed that. He had not tried to prevent her passing: he wondered, if there was a heaven after this life, whether she was waiting for him there, or if she had already gone to Tyler's side. Perhaps Tyler deserved that happiness. He did not know.

Looking down into the darkness below the bridge, Hand felt surrounded by ghosts, memories of those who had departed this world. It seemed like an entire age was passing away. He could remember, from his own youth, the fear and dismay with which the older folk had spoken of the war of '45, and the occupation of the city. Today, everyone who was too young to remember the past century waxed poetically about the heroic highlanders, the gallant Prince Charlie, even as they walked the orderly, carefully laid streets that Hand's contemporaries had designed.

Hand recalled, like in a dream, the strange, impossible moment in the Cavenar mansion, when Lizzie had seemed able to bring every force of nature under her will, when Conley had gone running off into the forest. She had told him, then, that he should not look back. She had showed him her empty palm, the missing coin that could not repair a single heartache. She had tried to teach him, he saw now, to live without regret.

He did agree with her lesson, in principle. But tonight, he missed her too much, and he felt too scarred and wounded by all he had lost. He turned away from the darkness under the bridge, and he walked into the old city, wandering up the crowded high street. He held a shilling closed in his palm, and, as he had done many nights before, he walked along the high homes of the high street, turning into West Bow, going down to the Grassmarket. He was looking for the boy he had been as a child. He wanted to pass the money he now possessed to that child, to grant him freedom from anguish, from pain. He thought he if he could just meet himself on the road, met the lad he had been then, and help that boy, all the struggles of his life could be lifted.

He walked and walked that night, but no child that he met bore his own face. In the city, the close, conspiratorial city, he could not find himself, and so he continued to walk, the coin gripped hard in his hand.

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