

The BOOK *of* LOST HOURS

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of
LOST
HOURS

A Novel

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*For Ernest,
whose memory I would visit every day if I could*

1

1938, Nuremberg, Germany

IN THE CITY OF Nuremberg in 1938, a man told his daughter a bedtime story. The man was a clockmaker, the son in a long line of clockmakers who lived in the city's Jewish neighborhood. Keeping time as his ancestors had for two centuries.

"Time for bed, Lisavet. You've had enough stories for tonight," the clockmaker said when his daughter asked him, for the third time that night, for another story.

Out the window, the streets had long since gone dark and chill with November winds. The clockmaker's mind was on the work he had to finish downstairs in the shop. And more specifically on the letter from America that sat on his desk, delivered earlier that morning.

"I'm not tired," Lisavet pouted. "I want to stay up until Klaus comes home."

"Your brother won't be home until late," the clockmaker scolded.

The smile on his face foiled his attempts at discipline. He ran a hand through her hair, already knowing that she would wear him down. His daughter was his late wife reborn, with golden hair and caramel brown eyes.

When she was alive, his wife had often teased that they had replicated

themselves into two miniature versions, him in their son and her in their daughter. It was true in the physical sense but beyond that, Ezekiel Levy and his son, Klaus, could not be more different. Klaus was like his mother with his high society taste and dreams of attending school in the capital. It was Lisavet who was most like Ezekiel. She could often be found perched on the stool beside him in his workshop, watching him coax the gears and springs of old broken watches until they shuddered back into life. She was the one who wound the clocks in the front of the shop each morning, watching with quiet reverence as the wood and metal masterpieces sang to the tune of time. And she was the one who would one day inherit his shop and the family secrets that came with it.

"Tell me about the magic watch again," Lisavet said, clutching his wrist tightly as he tried to stand.

At eleven years old, Lisavet was almost too old for bedtime stories at all, and the clockmaker knew it wouldn't be long before she stopped asking. He settled himself on the edge of the bed.

"Once upon a time in Germany, a clockmaker named Ezekiel lived with his two children in their happy little home above the shop that his family had owned for generations," he began in a deep voice that crackled like flames in a hearth. "The family were world-renowned for the magnificent clocks that they sold in their store, made from the finest materials. Gold and gems and carved wood that gleamed in the candlelight by which they did their work. Large grandfather clocks, small table clocks, and everything in between. But among all these wondrous masterpieces was the most precious timepiece of all. A simple brass pocket watch, passed from father to son for over a hundred years. That watch was not special because it was laden with silver or gold, but because—" He broke off, bushy eyebrows raised, waiting for his daughter to finish the line. It was a game they played with all his stories, but especially this one.

"Because it let them talk to Time itself," Lisavet said in a hushed voice.

"That's right." Ezekiel smiled and tapped her on the nose. "Time is

the axis on which the world spins. Humans count their lives in months and weeks, as if calculating the cumulative measure of their existence will somehow earn them more of it. Accidents occur in three clicks of the second hand. Hearts stop in a moment of time. But there are things that happen in the space between seconds. Worlds are built. Planets burn. Souls fade into the space between one instant and the next and memories fall to depths, lost to the silence and flames.”

He dropped his voice lower, hissing like the shadows. Lisavet’s eyes went wide.

“It was not always this way. Centuries ago, the things that fell from our world and into the silence were hidden. Closed off to humanity. Unwitnessed. Unknown. The most devoted sensed something more, seeking it in meditations, brushing against it in dreams, never fully grasping what it was they were reaching for. As Time became more tangible, more precious, so did the shadows. With the invention of sundials came the ability to count the hours, and with clocks, the seconds. What can be counted can be mastered, and soon the veil between our world and what falls beyond it became thinner. Those who learned the language of Time called themselves timekeepers.”

The clockmaker whispered the word *timekeeper* with a devotee’s reverence. Outside the window, the winds began to blow.

“Like Ezekiel,” Lisavet said, right on cue. “He was a timekeeper.”

“That’s right. It was a secret that the family had carried for decades. Until one day, things started to change . . .”

“A storm was coming,” Lisavet prompted.

Ezekiel furrowed his brow, his tone deepening. “A storm was coming. The world began to grow darker and in crept a cold fierce enough to blow out every hearth. People stopped coming to buy clocks from their shop. Ezekiel could feel the darkness lurking out on the streets, advancing. The men who brought the storm were ruthless, full of hate and fire. Some came to Ezekiel’s shop one evening in the summer and

asked him about his secret. They wanted the power for themselves. They demanded that he give them the watch that let him speak to Time."

"But Ezekiel tricked them," Lisavet said, full of pride.

"Yes, he did. It was his job to protect the secret, so he gave them a fake. They left his shop alone then, but Ezekiel knew that they would be back as soon as they discovered his deception. Time was in danger, and so was the clockmaker's family. So he wrote a letter to an old friend. Another timekeeper who might be able to help him."

"Why didn't they just leave?" Lisavet asked, frowning slightly.

He bit his lip, thinking. "Because the men who had brought the storm might catch them. So Ezekiel asked his friends to help his family escape by other means. You see, the timekeepers knew of a place hidden in the folds of Time where they could disappear. A place where his family could hide, and with the help of another timekeeper, where they could escape into other lands far away from the storm."

"And did it work? Did they help him?" Lisavet asked with a sleepy yawn.

Every other time he'd told this story, Ezekiel had ended it with a promise to tell the rest of the story another night. But tonight, there was a letter on his desk from his friend in America. Tonight, he kissed Lisavet on the forehead and smiled.

"Yes, they did. His friends wrote back and promised him help. Ezekiel and his family waited for the right moment. They talked to their closest friends and neighbors about the dangers of the coming darkness and brought as many of them with them as they could. It took some convincing. Not everyone believed in this tunnel through Time, and many were afraid of it. Still others didn't want to leave home no matter how strong the winds got. Those who would come settled on a day: the first night of Hanukkah when they would all be together with their families." Here the clockmaker paused. Lisavet had begun to close her eyes. The last part of his story came in a whisper. "So by the light of

the full moon in December, they escaped through the shadows and into freedom.”

As soon as he said it, two dozen grandfather clocks in the shop below all chimed eleven o'clock. Ezekiel fell silent, listening. As the chimes faded, echoing deep into the night, another sound met his ears. Shouting out on the streets, followed by the crash of breaking glass.

“What was that?” Lisavet asked, eyes wide open once more.

He went to the window, pulling aside the curtains. On the cobblestones below, coming up the street like a gale, a mob of angry faces was blowing in with the wind. Shattering glass drew his attention to another shop down the street and he watched in horror as his neighbors rushed out of their apartments, the children barefoot in their nightgowns.

“Papa, what’s happening?” Lisavet said. She was climbing out of bed.

“Put on your shoes, Lisavet,” he said. “I’ll be right back.”

He ignored her cries for him to stay and bolted down the stairs to his shop. The crowd was drawing nearer. He could hear the pounding of their hands against the doors. The crunch of glass underfoot. He had seen such sights and heard such sounds carried in the memories of the dead. He knew what happened next. First came the shouting, the breaking, the anger. Then came the fire, the fighting, the killing.

The last clock in the shop let out a final chime, sounding like a name. *Klaus*. Ezekiel’s heart rose to his throat as he thought of his son down at the synagogue. He stood frozen on the last step, panicked.

“Papa?” Lisavet’s voice came from the top of the stairs.

“Stay up there!”

They were coming. The first of them was at his shop, beating on the door. They looked eyes through the window, steel gray and ice cold. Coming for the watch. Then the knocking became kicking, and the shouting became jeering. Ezekiel rushed for the letter on the desk. He stuffed it into his pocket and emptied the drawer below of other letters. Letters that spoke of the timekeepers and those complicit in his attempts to

escape. He threw them into the bucket of water he used to mop up, the soap and lye expediting their disintegration. Without bothering to shut the drawer, he reached for his coat. He had barely pulled it on when the first rock struck the window frame. Lisavet was halfway down the stairs when he returned to her, stumbling on the too-long hem of her nightgown.

“Papa!”

“Upstairs, Lisavet,” he said, reaching into his coat for the pocket watch. The old familiar brass was slick in his palm.

His fingers fumbled over the crown until it clicked into place, and he flung open the door. What had once been their cozy, two-room apartment was instead a silent cavern of shadows. Lisavet clutched his arm at the sight of what lay beyond. Ezekiel gripped his daughter’s shoulders tight, kneeling down to look her in the eye.

“Listen to me, Lisavet. I’m going to find your brother, okay? I want you to wait in there. Stay right there by this door. Do not move from that spot. I promise as soon as I get Klaus, we will come and find you. All right?”

“But, Papa, what is that?”

A second rock struck the shop. This one found its mark, shattering the glass on impact. “This is the tunnel through Time that I told you about,” he said frantically. “The one that will take us somewhere far away.”

“But that was just a story!” Lisavet exclaimed, shaking her head as he propelled her forward. On the other side of the door, she could see nothing but shadows and darkness.

“It wasn’t just a story, Lisavet. Go inside. I’ll be right back for you, I promise.”

She dug her heels in, and he picked her up as he had when she was younger, tossing her over one shoulder. He deposited her on the other side of the door and stopped for just a moment longer to kiss her head and drape his brown coat around her tiny shoulders. It pooled on the ground at her feet.

“Be brave,” he said, his words muffled against her hair.

“Papa?” she said, her voice echoing.

He pressed a finger to his lips and left her, slipping back over the threshold.

The door closed behind him and never opened again.

FOR HOURS, Lisavet waited. Everything was deathly quiet and impossibly still. She counted the seconds. At the top of every hour, she longed to hear the music of the clocks from the shop in which she’d grown up, but instead heard only silence. A silence so all-encompassing that it seemed alive, like a solid thing you could touch. Shadows obscured her vision and prevented her from seeing more than fifty feet ahead of her, but what she could see was strangely familiar.

Bookshelves. Towering on both sides and lined with leather-bound volumes of all sizes and shapes. Like a library. Lisavet took a single tentative step forward, her eyes slowly adjusting. *Library* wasn’t quite the right word. Indeed there were books, their leather spines packed in neat, even rows. Sweeping archways and Roman pillars stood at intervals between the endless rows of shelves, and Lisavet’s eyes followed the path of one of them all the way up. Where she expected to find a ceiling, she instead saw an inky sky filled with watery images, as though Michelangelo had painted the Sistine Chapel into the very stars themselves, each image swirling into the next like clouds drifting in the wind.

She wanted to walk among the shelves, but her father’s words echoed in her head. Stay right by the door. Do not move from this spot. When she turned around to face the door once more, it had changed. Now it appeared blurry, like a watery reflection of a door more than the door itself. It began fading away, familiar planks of wood consumed by darkness. Lisavet lunged for the doorknob, but it evaporated beneath her

touch, taking any chance of returning to her father away with it. Lisavet sank to the ground where she stayed huddled on the floor, sobs racking her body.

The whispering started from somewhere within the darkness. A gentle, curious jingle as the shadows sought the source of a sound they had never heard before. Lisavet dried her eyes on the back of her hand, heart thudding. She did not know it yet, but this was Time itself, that long cherished friend of her ancestors, learning to speak to her, and she, uncertain and afraid, spoke back to it.

"H-hello?" she called as loudly as she dared.

Hello, the whispers repeated, echoing her own voice back to her.

Lisavet stood up. "Who's there?" she asked.

The whispers sounded again, closer now.

Lisavet's breathing came fast and shallow. She took a few steps in the direction of the darkness, away from the place her father had left her.

"Stay right there," she said. "I'm coming to find you."

Stay, stay, stay, the whispers echoed.

Lisavet stepped farther into the shadows and darkness in search of Time.

NO ONE was coming.

Lisavet had been trapped for two weeks and in that time, she had learned three very important things.

The first was that the laws of nature didn't seem to apply here. She never got hungry. She never got thirsty or needed to use the bathroom. Sleep was unnecessary in the traditional sense. She could sleep, and sometimes did just to pass the time, but before long she began prolonging the time she spent awake, just to see how long she could go.

Second, there were no other doors hidden away in this place, confirmed by several days of searching. No way out.

And third, Time did not live here as her father's story had suggested. Or if it did, it would offer her no help.

No one was coming. Perhaps no one even knew she was here.

The sky inside the quiet place was the most beautiful thing Lisavet had ever seen. Filled with swirling colors that moved and shifted like aqueous stars. For what must have been days, she lay on the floor between two bookshelves, staring up at it. She relied on it, its immensity and its mystery, to remind herself that she was alive. As she lay on the floor, she sometimes thought she saw her father's face conjured in the swirling colors overhead but as soon as she focused her eyes on it, the picture vanished.

When she wasn't hiding away among the shelves, she wandered up and down the stacks, singing in hopes that the sound might reach back through the disappearing door to her father, or that Time might finally take heed and come for her. One day she took to screaming her way up and down the shelves. Louder and louder, hoping someone would hear. Eventually, someone did. Or rather, something did.

"Why in heaven are you screaming like that?" a voice said, sharp and irritated.

Lisavet spun around to see the ill-rendered figure of a man emerging from the bookshelves. His image dragged through the air before joining with the rest of him, like ink dragging through water, distorted and semitransparent. He wore a white powdered wig, a set of purple tails, and spoke in strangely accented German.

"I-I'm looking for my father," Lisavet stuttered, too shocked by his sudden appearance to be afraid.

"Can't you see he's not here, girl? Good thing too. You should consider yourself lucky."

"Lucky?"

"Most of the people here are dead. Only the dead live in this god-forsaken place."

"But I'm not dead. And I'm here."

The man looked her up and down, assessing her claims. "So you are. Are you a timekeeper?"

"A what?"

"A timekeeper," the man repeated impatiently.

"N-no," Lisavet said tentatively.

"If you aren't a timekeeper, who are you?"

"My name is Lisavet Levy," she told him.

The man didn't respond. He was listening intently to something in the distance.

"Shhh!" he pressed a finger to his lips. "Hear that?"

Lisavet listened. The soft sound of whispers met her ears. "Time!" she exclaimed. "It's back!"

"Time?" The gentleman raised an eyebrow at her foolishness. "Is that what you call that demon thing? Well, I suppose that's as good an explanation for it as any. Time is the beast that makes mortals of all one way or another. It takes everything, heedless of wealth or status." The man curled his lip bitterly as he said this, and Lisavet got the impression that he had once had both wealth and status before Time took them away. "If you're not careful, it will take you, too, before you're ready."

"Take me where?"

That was what she wanted after all. Perhaps it would take her out of this place. To America, like in the story.

But the man shook his head. "Nowhere you want to go. Believe me."

Lisavet's eyes grew wide as the gentleman's image ebbed away into nothing. The whispers became louder, calling out in formless echoes, hissing like water on hot coals. Lisavet ran from it, though she wasn't sure exactly what she was running from. She took refuge in a particularly dark corner where the books on the shelves were dustiest. No more singing. Only silence.



SOON LISAVET went off in search of the ghost again. This time, instead of screaming, she whispered, walking slowly down each row of books.

"Hello?" she said quietly, careful not to wake the sounds from before.

No answer. She remembered that the man had seemed to come from out of the books on the shelves. As her fingers brushed one of the dusty leather spines, another voice spoke.

"Be careful doing that," it said.

Lisavet drew her hand back in alarm. "Who said that?"

"This section is for medieval England," the voice said. "You're far too young for that."

On her left, a watery image shifted into focus. Fragments of light and color pulled together to take the form of a man. This one was younger than the last, wearing robes of coarse gray fabric. He had a hand pressed to his chin, contemplating.

"You'd be better off avoiding all of medieval Europe if I'm being honest. Though there are a few things that might be all right. Royals perhaps, or . . ." His eyes flicked in her direction. "Maybe you'd prefer the Romantic period instead. Do you like poetry?"

Lisavet mumbled something incoherent.

"You're a bit young for love poems, I suppose. Tell me, are you set on England or are you open to somewhere else? Italy perhaps? Oh, Italy in summer. The Renaissance period. You would love it."

"What are you talking about?"

"The memories."

"Memories?"

"Yes. Memories in the books. Normally I don't care what you timekeepers start with, but . . ." He turned to face her, his watery image shifting as he did so. "You're just so young. I would hate for you to encounter something dreadful on your first go at it."

"I'm not a timekeeper," Lisavet protested.

"You're not? Oh. How disappointing. And here I thought they were finally being progressive and appointing a girl. It really is a shame, you know . . . but I suppose it can't be helped." He seemed not to notice her growing alarm as he lamented her existence. "What are you doing here then?"

"I'm trapped. My father left me here and now I can't find my way back out."

"I see," the man said, looking concerned but offering no other help or solution.

"Well . . . is there?" Lisavet prompted.

"Is there what?"

"A way out? A door or a . . ."

"Oh. No. 'Fraid not."

Lisavet felt her whole body deflate. "Then can you at least tell me what this place is?"

"It isn't a place. It's more . . . a concept. You are in the space between the past and present. Everywhere and nowhere at all. This is the place where Time ends. The place where consciousness drifts when bodies die. It exists in the space between the fabric of tangible things, one moment to the next. Here, all things that happened on Earth linger in the form of memories."

"So you're a memory?" Lisavet asked, frowning.

"Unfortunately yes."

"Am I . . . dead?" She didn't know if she wanted the answer.

"People are always so worried about death. As if it is the end."

Lisavet could only stare at him.

He sighed. "No, you are not dead."

"Am I dreaming?"

"Not dreaming either. I assure you this is all very real."

"But you just said that you're a memory. You can't be real."

"Why not? Memories are the realest thing any of us have, Lisavet."

Lisavet took a step back. "You know my name?"

"Yes, of course," the man said with a slight smirk. "I found it in your memories. You know. Those things you insist aren't real."

Lisavet bit her lip sheepishly. "What's your name?"

"Me? Oh, I don't have one. Well. Not anymore anyway. It's been Forgotten." He gave a small shudder at the word.

"Forgotten?" Lisavet repeated.

He flinched again. "Yes, by a timekeeper who didn't want the world to remember me."

"I don't understand," Lisavet said.

The man turned toward the books again, a wistful expression on his inky face. "These books hold the memories of every person who has ever lived or died. Before the timekeepers they used to just hang around here in the time space, unattended. Not like it is now, all neat and tidy, filed away in books."

Lisavet thought of her father. His bedtime story. Noticing her confused expression, the memory of the man offered her a blurry hand, his features fixed in a kind smile.

"If you'd like, I can show you Italy now. It's really quite lovely, and I know the perfect memory to take you to."

SOUND ERUPTED the moment they settled into the memory. It came from all over. The earth, the buildings, the streets, the very sky. After so much silence, the sudden cacophony was more than just a flood, it was a hurricane, enveloping every inch of Lisavet's body. The warm sun shone on her face, a breeze lifted her hair. Warmth! Movement! They were standing on the edge of a parapet, watching a festival down below. People laughing and singing. Lisavet almost cried at the sight of it. It felt almost real . . . almost.

"How do you know how to do this?" Lisavet asked.

Beside her, the memory of the man was smiling, watching her reaction. "I was a timekeeper," he said.

"You were?"

"The very first. Before the Romans conquered my people, I had found the time space through sundials and meditations. I am the one they stole the secrets from."

He took her down from the parapet, pointing out the young girl whose memory they were walking in. She looked to be about Lisavet's age, sitting above the crowd in a dress of fine silk.

"One of the Medici daughters," the man told her. "Very wealthy and important."

Lisavet didn't know much about the Medicis and their supposed wealth. To her, the girl just looked bored, like she wanted to join the festival but couldn't. As they walked through the crowd, Lisavet started to understand how she felt. She, too, was there, but not really there. She wanted to taste the delicacies sold from carts. Wanted to play with the other children darting through the crowd. Everything she touched passed through her hands. Eyes passed over her, seeing only blank space where she stood.

Lisavet turned her attention to the one person she could talk to. "Can I ask a question?"

"If you'd like."

"If you've been . . . Forgotten . . ." Lisavet said this as delicately as she could, but he still flinched. ". . . why can I still see you?"

"Oh, they didn't erase me completely. If they did that, they'd be erasing their own knowledge of the time space. And so what little of my memory that remains stays as it is. In the time space."

"That's confusing."

"It is, isn't it?" He frowned, looking just as puzzled as she felt. "Even so I'm glad for it. It allows me to provide assistance to other timekeepers when they need it. I show them how things work if they're struggling."

"If you don't have a name, what should I call you?"

The memory shrugged. "Whatever you like, I suppose."

Lisavet considered him. She had never named anything before. Aside from her dolls, but that was different. He was a person. Or at least he had been once. She couldn't quite tell where he was from. His skin was neither particularly pale nor particularly dark but a warm olive color. Maybe he was Italian? That would explain his love of Italy. His head was shaven. The robes he wore offered no hints, either. They were plain and old, like something worn by a monk, but having never met a monk before, she couldn't be certain.

"Azrael," she said after a moment.

The man looked amused. "Azrael? The Judeo-Christian angel of death? Bit on the nose, isn't it?"

Lisavet blushed. "Or we can pick something else."

"No, no. Azrael is fine." He said the name aloud a few times as if trying it on. "I rather think it suits me."

They stayed a little longer, listening to the music, until the edges of the world started to fade, crinkling and rippling like water. Lisavet looked up at Azrael in alarm. He shook his head.

"Worry not. The memory is ending." He pointed back up at the parapet where the girl was being led away by her nurse. "Let's return to the time space for now." He held out a hand.

"I don't want to go back there."

Azrael frowned slightly. "You don't have to stay for long. Now that you know how to time walk, you can go wherever you'd like. But . . ." He tilted his head, squinting at her. "Do be careful. There is more evil in the world than you've been yet made aware of."

Lisavet promised she would, mind racing with possibility. She thought about all the things she'd learned about history in school. Ancient Egypt. Germany before it was Germany. The Great War her father had so often talked about. All of it at her fingertips. She slipped her

hand into Azrael's, and they left the memory. Silence hit her like a wall the moment they returned. Gone was the sun. Gone was the breeze and the music and the smells. They had returned to the unmoving darkness. Lisavet was surprised to feel a small sense of relief at the absence of so much stimulus.

"Do you think you could show me your book next?" she asked, pointing up at the shelves.

Azrael winced slightly. "I would if I could; however, I don't have a book myself. Any specter you see in the time space has not been 'collected,' so to speak, by a timekeeper. Meaning we have no book of memories to confine us."

"Oh. I didn't realize that—"

Azrael held up a hand, pressing a finger to his lips. His eyes were fixed on something down the row of shelves. Lisavet followed his gaze and saw the figure of a man passing between the rows. His shadow did not drag the way Azrael's did. This was a real person, not a memory.

"A timekeeper," Azrael murmured.

Lisavet's eyes widened. A timekeeper? Perhaps he could help her leave! But Azrael shook his head.

"I don't think this one would want to help you."

"Why not?"

Azrael shushed her again and beckoned her to follow him. They followed the timekeeper at a distance until they saw him slip between a row of shelves up ahead.

"That section is Germany," Azrael said quietly. "Rather close to modern day."

Lisavet sensed the change in his tone. Germany? Her Germany? Ignoring his warning, she stole past him and ran for the row of shelves that the man had gone down. She didn't stop until she'd reached the edge of the shelf. Breathing hard, she peered around the side. The man was standing in the center of the row. He had pulled one of the books

down from the shelves, hand tracing over the closed cover. His blond hair was cropped close in the military style and when he turned with the book in hand, Lisavet got a better look at his clothes. From the side, his black uniform was indistinguishable, but from the front she could clearly see the many silver pins and insignias. The bright red armband fixed around his bicep. A Nazi.

She watched in horror as the soldier opened the book and withdrew a pack of matches from his pocket. He held the flame to one of the pages until it caught fire. As the flames grew, he dropped the book to the ground, cover face up, spine bent.

"Timekeepers destroy the memories they don't want the world to remember."

Lisavet jumped. Azrael had caught up to her and was watching the scene over her shoulder, his expression grave.

"But why?" she asked.

Azrael shrugged. "To uphold their ideology. The past is a mirror of us. It tells us who we've been and what we have become. Some people don't like what they see in their reflection, so they change it by erasing memories from the face of the earth. By erasing people from existence."

"Erasing people?" Lisavet repeated, horror raising the pitch of her voice.

The soldier's head snapped up. "*Wer ist da?*" he demanded, reaching for his belt.

Lisavet ducked around the corner, heart thudding. Azrael stayed where he was. The soldier shouted a few angry words at him, cursing Azrael for startling him. The Nazi took something from his pocket and Lisavet squinted at it to get a better look. The glass crystal of a pocket watch caught the light of the flames, glinting at her with unmistakable familiarity. Its bronze case was worn with age, its patina a reflection of the many hands who held it before. From father to son, now soldier. Her whole body went cold with recognition.

The soldier fiddled with the watch until a door opened six feet away from him. He disappeared through it, casting one last glance at the burning heap of paper on the ground. The minute the door sealed behind him, Lisavet rushed forward. She collapsed onto her knees in front of the burning book and reached both hands into the flames to pull what remained of the leather-bound volume free. The cover was burnt at the edges. Most of the remaining pages were charred to ash that crumbled under her feet as she stamped the fire out. But a few of them, the ones closest to the beginning, remained intact. They whispered to her as she swept the soot from them with careful, flame-stung fingers. Telling her their story in a deep, crackling voice. Her father's story. Her father's voice.

Her breath came in ragged gasps and tears stung her eyes. She had forgotten Azrael was there until he spoke.

"The watch . . ." he said quietly.

Lisavet only cried harder. She didn't want to think about what it meant, even though she knew there was only one way her father would have given up his pocket watch to a Nazi soldier. Azrael said nothing but stayed by her side as she cradled what remained of her father's memories.

No one was coming.

2

1965, Boston, Massachusetts

THERE COULD BE NO mistaking the girl who stood at the edge of the grave. A forlorn, neglected thing in an oversize cardigan that puffed out from the sleeves of her coat. She was not yet sixteen, and her freckled face and limp red hair made her seem even younger. It was the hair, a luminous shade of copper, that gave her away, identifying her as the niece of the man in the casket.

Moira watched the girl through the haze of smoke from her cigarette. She stood under an umbrella as the casket was carried over the muddy ground. It was October, late enough in autumn that the leaves had begun to shake off their vibrancy. Moira tossed her spent cigarette onto the ground and withdrew another from her coat pocket. The silver lighter she carried gave a shuddering click as she lit it, carrying over the sound of the priest delivering his prayer for the fallen man in the casket. The girl looked up at the noise. Moira smiled at her, the kind of cold, thin smirk that came most naturally to her. The girl immediately looked away in discomfort. They didn't know each other, Moira and this girl, and it was clear that she wondered who Moira was. Why she was at her uncle's burial.

It had rained every day since Ernest Duquesne's death. The city

was waterlogged, sidewalks brimming with mud. On the day of his funeral, it had rained so much that there had been talks of postponing, but in the end it was decided that they would go forward, leaving the procession to stamp through the muddy grass out to the gravesite. The service had been sparsely attended. Moira hadn't gone, but instead had watched from her car as mourners entered the chapel downtown, keeping stock of who was present. Neighbors. Old schoolmates. The occasional distant cousin. The moment the prayer was over, and the priest closed his book, they all filed out with great rapidity, not wanting to be seen lingering for reasons of self-preservation. Except for the girl.

In their absence, the girl stood alone at the edge of the grave with her eyes closed, head tipped slightly forward as rain fell on her head. Her red hair clung to her temples, making her look even more pitiful than she already did. Moira, who took great pride in her own appearance, had to remind herself that the girl was young, alone, and grieving, and therefore could not be expected to care about such things. She moved around the edge of the grave silently and stood beside her, raising the umbrella so it covered the child as well. At the sound of the rain hitting against the vinyl, the girl looked up in alarm.

"Amelia Duquesne?" Moira asked in a smooth, easy tone.

"Y-yes?" Amelia stuttered.

"My name is Moira Donnelly. I used to work with your uncle."

"You did?"

Moira watched as her gaze dropped down to assess Moira's outfit. A knee-length pencil skirt, black turtleneck, cap-toe heels, and an unbuttoned leather trench coat, none of which seemed appropriate for an employee of the State Department where Ernest Duquesne had worked. Add in the red lipstick, blunt bob cut, and side-swept bangs and Moira looked more like someone apt to be accused of being a beatnik than any sort of government employee.

"You and I met once," Moira informed her. "When you were about nine. Do you remember?"

"Not really," Amelia said, hands bunching around the sleeves of her cardigan. Wondering what someone from that part of her uncle's life was doing here at his funeral after all he had been accused of. She was easy to read, this girl. They would have to fix that.

"Hold this for me, will you?" Moira asked, putting the umbrella in the girl's hand. She took it without question. Moira turned toward the grave, reaching into her pocket for a second cigarette. "Funny how time works," she lamented. "We always feel as though we're standing at the precipice of our lives, all our years still stretched before us. Not realizing that at any moment, something could come along and push us over the edge. We are all immortal in our own time. Until we aren't."

There was a pause as she lit her cigarette with the silver lighter. The girl stared.

"Ernest used to talk about you a lot," Moira said offhandedly. "He was always telling us all how bright you were. You must be grieving for him now that he's gone."

Amelia's eyes clouded over and she shook her head at once. "They're saying he was selling secrets to the Russians," she said hastily.

Moira smiled faintly. That wasn't all they were saying. They were calling him a communist. Ernest Duquesne. Devoted civil servant. Distinguished war veteran. Communist. Traitor. Spy. That's what all the newspapers were writing alongside harrowing details about his death. *Shot through the head with state secrets still poised on his lips*, they wrote. He would have been arrested. Charged with treason and lit up like the Rosenbergs in '53. If it weren't for the fact that he was already dead.

"And? Why should that change what he meant to you?" Moira asked.

Amelia bristled suspiciously. "Were you close? Is that why you came today?"

"I came because there's something I wanted to ask you," she said, getting to the point at last. "Your uncle had something very important in his possession when he died. I was hoping you might be able to help me locate it."

"People have already been to our house. They searched his office . . . seized everything they could find that was at all tied to his work."

Moira nodded impatiently. She already knew that. "The thing is, I work for a special department that isn't affiliated with the agents who searched your house. What I'm looking for isn't something that they would have taken notice of. They wouldn't have known to look for it."

"What is it?"

There was a pause. Rain hitting the umbrella over their heads.

"A watch."

"A watch?"

"White dial with a gold bezel. By the watchmaker called Glashütte."

Amelia's eyes slid to the coffin. "That was the one he always wore."

Moira glanced at the puffed sleeves of the girl's sweater, noting the way she'd started tugging at the left one anxiously. "I was hoping you would know of another place where he might keep it. A relative's house, perhaps. Or a lover's?"

Amelia gestured to the empty graveyard. "Clearly not," she said, with more snark than Moira had assumed her capable of. "Maybe he was wearing it when he died."

Moira eyed Amelia for a moment, wondering how much to disclose but also wondering how much she might already know. "As you might have surmised, it's not just a normal timepiece. It has special functions that most manual watches don't, making it a very expensive asset. One we would like to recover now that he's gone."

"We?" Amelia asked.

"The department." Moira withdrew a card from a different coat pocket. It had her name embossed in red ink the same color as her lip-

stick, accompanied by a phone number. "If you happen to come across it, give this number a call."

Amelia pinched the card between two fingers. "Does this watch have something to do with the secrets my uncle was accused of selling to the Russians?"

Moira smiled at her grimly. "Let's just say that if it were to fall into Russian hands, we might all find ourselves living in a very different world."

"Does it have the secrets of the atom bomb engraved on the back or something?"

Moira pursed her lips. She knew there was a reason she usually steered clear of teenagers. "There is more than one way to end a war, Amelia. And there are secrets far more dangerous than weapons of mass destruction." She took a long drag on the cigarette, shielding it from the falling rain. "This is the way the world ends. Not with a bang but a whimper."

To her surprise, Amelia perked up. "T.S. Eliot," she said.

"You've read it?" Moira asked skeptically.

"My uncle gave me a book of his poems last Christmas."

Moira wasn't surprised. Ernest had always been a fanatic about poetry, able to quote the most obscure lines from memory. It stood to reason his niece would be the same.

"Then you'll recognize this line. 'Between the idea and the reality. Between the motion and the act' . . ."

"Falls the shadow," Amelia finished.

Moira studied Amelia for a long moment, cigarette dangling between two fingers. "Don't give the watch to any of the other agents. They won't know what it means. When you find it, make sure you bring it to me. And only to me. Understand?"

"If I find it, you mean," Amelia said.

"Oh, I'm sure it will turn up."

She dropped the spent cigarette into the wet grass. It fizzled out

immediately, the glowing red extinguished in the muck. She pulled back the sleeve of her coat to reveal a watch of her own, a smaller model on a white gold bracelet.

"You're going to be late for school, Miss Duquesne," she warned.

At the mention of school, a look of dread swept across Amelia's face. And for good reason. Moira had been watching the girl for over a week, had dug into her records, and therefore knew all about her current situation at Pembroke Academy. Though bright, her record came with a rather long list of demerits and absent notices. As it turned out, Amelia Duquesne was quite the rebel beneath that mousy exterior. Amelia handed back the umbrella and turned to go, casting one last glance at her uncle's grave.

"Oh, and Amelia," Moira said, waiting until the girl turned to look at her. "Whatever you do, when you find the watch . . ." She paused and looked pointedly at Amelia's sleeve. ". . . don't wind it."

Amelia drew her wrist ever so slightly toward her chest, catching herself in time to pass it off by folding her arms. She turned and walked away, hurrying through the rain. Moira watched her disappear through the gates and down the street.

AMELIA WAS late to her first class of the morning, but for once, her teacher didn't seem to mind. Normally Mr. Markham was very strict about such things. Most of her many demerits for tardiness came from him. His class took place promptly at eight in the morning and Amelia found it difficult to wake any time before nine. This morning he simply waved her into the room when she opened the door. She thought perhaps he was sparing her the lecture because of the burial that morning, but then he called out as she made her way over to her desk.

"By the way, Miss Duquesne. This is your third tardy this month. Please see me after class."

Amelia's heart sank. She took her seat miserably amid the sound of snickering. Mr. Markham continued, picking up his lecture on the Civil War where he'd left off. Amelia flipped through her textbook, conscious of the many eyes on her. Her uncle's death had been the gossip of the school this past week. Rumors of his treason had followed Amelia around campus like a storm cloud.

"I heard they buried him this morning," said the girl seated in front of her, turning around to taunt her in a low whisper as Mr. Markham wrote on the chalkboard.

The girl, Rebecca, was the daughter of a congressman. One of many who attended Pembroke. The school was a popular choice for politicians to send their daughters, given its proximity to most major cities on the East Coast, as well as its track record for churning out both university candidates and well-mannered debutantes. Amelia, for whom neither path held much appeal, had always been an outsider despite her uncle's position working for the State Department. His fall from grace only served to push her further from the center of Pembroke's social circle.

"So does this mean you'll be defecting back to the motherland now that your uncle is dead?" Rebecca asked a few minutes later.

"Yup," Amelia responded dryly, head bent over her textbook. "Just waiting for Stalin to send a plane." Another student to her left let out a gasp.

"You should be careful making jokes like that," Rebecca said threateningly. "My father said that if your uncle was still alive, he would have been given the chair. He says he would have deserved it for betraying his country like that."

"That's an awful lot of gumption coming from a man who forged results of a hearing test to avoid the draft," Amelia bit back.

Mr. Markham shushed them from the front of the room, calling out Amelia's name in warning. Rebecca waited until he turned back around before striking again.

"I heard he was killed right in the act of selling secrets to the Russians. Shot in the head, wasn't he?"

Amelia tilted her book up to create a blockade, refusing to look up.

"Didn't your mother get shot in the head too? I seem to recall that's how she died. Only I suppose with her it was different. She did it to herself."

Amelia's grip on the book tightened. Her eyes slid to Mr. Markham, weighing the consequences of a demerit against the possible satisfaction of firing off a few choice curse words.

Rebecca leaned closer, putting an intrusive hand over the passage Amelia was reading. "I get it, though. I'd want to die, too, if I had a baby with a married man. Can you imagine? What would it be like to be so unwanted? Only . . . I guess you don't have to imagine, do you?"

Amelia slammed the textbook closed on Rebecca's fingers. Rebecca let out a yelp, far louder than was warranted.

"Miss Duquesne!" Mr. Markham snapped. He pointed to the door. "Out."

Amelia collected her things amid the sound of snickering. In the hall she took her seat on the bench that seemed to have been placed there exclusively for her. She glanced at the clock on the wall. Five minutes was a new record for her.

Pembroke Academy was a private, all girls' boarding school of great prestige. They had no tolerance for rule bending and little patience for snark; two things that Amelia had always had an overabundance of. Showing up late, sneaking into dining halls after curfew, and talking back to her teachers with frequency were par for the course for her. It was a defense mechanism. She'd learned early in life to recognize the look of pity in someone's eyes and hated it.

Amelia tried to swallow down the tears welling in her eyes in case anyone walked by. She wasn't sure if she was even allowed to grieve. The burial was one thing, hardly anyone had been there. But was it okay to

continue crying like this after what he had done? Was it acceptable to mourn a traitor, or would people start to assume she was one too? She couldn't get the image of his coffin out of her head. The casket had been closed for the ceremony, and Amelia was glad for that at least. That she didn't have to see him that way. The uncle who had raised her when her mother had died, drained of color and life.

Amelia had been seven years old when her mother died, and Uncle Ernest, the bachelor with a busy schedule and absolutely no experience with children, had been the least likely candidate to take her in. He was, however, the only one who volunteered. For the first several months of living with him, Amelia had been so shy that she'd barely spoken, delivering head motions instead of words. He had given her a room on the second floor that had once been a small library of sorts, filled with bookshelves that reached from floor to ceiling, and a big window overlooking the oak tree in the backyard. Thick, leather-bound volumes packed to the brim with names and dates and stories of faraway countries.

"This was the European history section," he had said sheepishly as they stood in the doorway for the first time, her tiny suitcase in his hand. "I promise I'll move them out once I can find another place to put them."

Where? Amelia had thought to herself, looking around.

Uncle Ernest's house seemed at times more like a library than an actual home, with shelves lining each wall and books stacked on every space that wasn't for either eating or sleeping. In an effort to clear her room, he had another set of shelves installed in the dining room. But then Amelia had begun asking him questions about Joan of Arc and Maximilien Robespierre and King Henry VIII over breakfast and he realized that she'd been reading them on nights when dreams of her mother jerked her from sleep. The first full conversation she ever had with him was to ask him the meaning of the word *guillotine*, breaking her self-enforced fast of words after two months of saying nothing at all. So the books stayed, though he did remove a few of the more gruesome ones, replacing them

with books of poetry, which she loved almost as much as the history. So much that she had memorized them so she could quote them the way he did.

As Amelia had settled in, her dreams of her mother were replaced with nightmares of waking up in this house alone, abandoned, Uncle Ernest having fled in the night and leaving her by herself.

"You're stuck with me, kiddo," he said to her on those nights, stroking her hair and holding her close. "I'm never going to abandon you."

But now here she was. Alone. He had abandoned her anyway.

As thoughts and memories tangled themselves in Amelia's head, her hand closed around the watch on her wrist. She had been lying to Moira Donnelly when she told her she didn't know where it was. It had shown up in her school mailbox three days ago, wrapped carefully in brown paper. No note. No return address. Nothing to indicate how it had come to be there, which should have alarmed her. She was far too relieved to see it to be concerned. The watch was the thing that most reminded her of Uncle Ernest. He had worn it every day for as long as she could remember. The idea of parting with it, of giving it to that woman, was unbearable.

Don't wind it, she'd said.

But why not? It was a watch. Watches were meant to be wound. Her uncle had several others he kept in a box in his bedroom, and though this one was the only one he ever wore, he still wound them daily to keep the gears from rusting. As a girl, Amelia had watched him while he did so, studying the way his hands worked to keep them moving forward. A stopped watch was a dreaded outcome. Time neglected.

"Time is an intentional thing," he told her as he worked. "You have to look after it and it will look after you."

Amelia pulled back her sleeve. Her fingers hovered over the watch's crown, wondering. Maybe Moira assumed she didn't know how to properly wind a watch. They could break if wound incorrectly. But Amelia

knew how to do it right. Curiosity won out. She raised the crown of the watch with careful fingers. She spun it around a few times, first forward, then backward, but nothing happened. Amelia frowned, feeling vaguely disappointed. She pushed the crown back in. The entire watch seemed to shudder as she did so and all of a sudden, the hands on the dial stopped moving. There was a pause, barely even a second, and then it began to move again. Only this time, it was moving backward.

She sat up a little straighter.

"Amelia?" Mr. Markham had opened the door to the classroom.

She looked up, annoyed at him for interrupting. "What?"

He knitted his eyebrows in equal annoyance. "Watch your tone, Miss Duquesne. You may come back inside. I'm about to assign tonight's homework."

Amelia tucked the sleeve of her cardigan back over the watch and stood up. The words to the poem that Moira had quoted at her were suddenly in her head, as clearly as if the woman were standing beside her.

Between the idea and the reality . . .

A strange, prickling sensation traveled from the top of Amelia's head clear down her spine.

. . . falls the shadow.

She passed through the door to reenter the classroom, and then the world upended itself. At first, she heard someone shouting. Then a thousand someones, all calling out at once. Voices echoing into an abyss that she couldn't see, yet she could feel it, her whole body teetering on the edge of an invisible precipice. And then she was falling, crashing down through darkness and shadows. There was a rush of hot air and suddenly she was no longer falling. There was no impact, no abrupt stop. Her feet were back on solid ground as though they had always been.

She opened her eyes, hearing the stretch of her own breath. In front of her was a silent cavern. Two walls on either side of her, stretching up. A murky pool of shadows danced in her periphery. As her eyes adjusted,

she saw that the walls were actually shelves, extending forward in a maze. She grasped desperately for the watch, spinning the crown again, palms sweating. She stepped backward and felt her foot catch on the edge of the doorframe. There was a jerking sensation along her spine, as though someone had attached a string to her waist, and then a lift until her feet hit the ground a second time.

She kept her eyes closed, afraid to open them and face whatever might be in front of her. The silence was gone, swept away as quickly as it came, and instead she heard wind brushing against fallen leaves like a whisper, a metallic click . . .

"Not so good at following instructions, I see."

Amelia's eyes flew open.

She was standing in the cemetery. The sky was overcast but bright with morning. Her uncle's grave was before her. To her left, Moira Donnelly blew a long column of smoke up into the air, eyes on her own watch.

"We'll have to work on that," she said, lowering her wrist and fixing her dark eyes on Amelia.

Amelia let out a loud, desperate breath she'd been holding since the instant she'd tipped over the edge. How long ago was that? Hours? Seconds? She wasn't sure. Everything was the same as it had been that morning. Her shoes soaked from the damp grass, the raindrops hitting her face, the open grave with the casket still visible.

"W-what's happening?" she asked, looking desperately at Moira.

A smile twinged the edges of Moira's red lips. "You tell me."

Amelia tried to breathe but every time she tried to draw a breath it stuck in her throat.

"I don't understand. Is this . . . are you . . . what *time* is it?"

Moira took a drag on her cigarette before answering, "About thirty seconds past eight in the morning."

Amelia's eyes nearly bugged out of her head. "But I . . . it was just . . ."

"I did warn you not to wind it."

"I know. But I was in the hallway, and then I went through the door and . . ." Amelia paused to draw breath. "And then . . ." She trailed off.

Moirra raised her eyebrows. "And then?"

Amelia shook her head, lost for words. "I don't know."

It was a blur. The falling, the shouts, the abyss.

Moirra tossed the cigarette to the ground and reached for Amelia's wrist. "Well, I suppose we'd better get you back."

"What are you talking about?"

"Back to the right time." She had begun fiddling with the crown of the watch. "When you leave here, wind the watch again and a door will appear for you that will take you back to your classroom. That should do the trick."

Amelia tried to pull away and Moirra slapped her wrist sharply. "But I thought . . . Aren't you going to take it?"

"I'm afraid it's a bit late for that. We'll talk again later." There was a small snap as Moirra pressed the crown into place. "Off you go then," she prompted.

"But I . . . how?"

"Any passageway will do. A door, or a gate, or—" Moirra broke off, glancing around at the deserted cemetery. "Here's another poem for you, if you can guess it. Walt Whitman. 'Entering thy sovereign, dim, illimitable grounds . . . As at thy portals . . .'"

In her upturned state, it took some time for the poem to gather itself in Amelia's head. Moirra had placed the lines out of order. But Walt Whitman was one of her favorites.

" . . . also death," she finished.

Moirra gave her a broad, catlike smile. "In many religions, graves are portals, too, my dear. Doors to a world that lies within our own, but beyond it."

Amelia made a small squeaking noise. "I don't understand."

“Watch your head,” Moira said.

With one hand, she shoved Amelia backward into the open grave.

WHEN AMELIA had vanished from sight, Moira let out a sigh. This might be more complicated than she’d thought. She took her time getting to her next destination. In the parking lot, she shook out her umbrella and dusted the rain from her coat. Her car, a bright red Cadillac with a black top, was one of the many things about which she was particular, and she didn’t want to track water into it. Having a car at all was a status symbol in a city like Boston. Having one so clean and cared for was another.

Above all, Moira wanted to be someone whose competence people didn’t question. She was entirely self-sufficient. Her own money, her own apartment. A career with the State Department rivaling that of many men. She had earned her place, but she knew many of her colleagues still viewed her as the smiling, demure, compliant secretary to Jack Dillinger that she’d been when she’d first started ten years ago. Now she had Jack’s old job and some of those same men were her subordinates. They respected her as their boss but that didn’t mean they weren’t still keeping an eye out. Waiting for her to slip up.

So Moira made sure never to falter. They wanted compliant so she gave them stubborn. They wanted demure so she gave them cunning. They expected smiling, so she gave them cold, impassive, blunt. Someone who did not need assistance opening her car door and who might sooner bite your hand off for getting fingerprints on the finish. Each day, she made sure her appearance was immaculate. She kept her dark hair trimmed just beneath her chin and avoided the bright dresses worn by the wives of the men she worked with. Instead, she wore trousers or pencil skirts cinched in at the waist, heels with pointed toes, and turtleneck sweaters in dark colors. And never, under any circumstances, did she go

to work without applying charcoal eyeliner and curling her lashes with careful precision.

That morning, she wouldn't be seeing any of her colleagues, but still looked the part as she sat outside Pembroke Academy's main administrative building. She smoked yet another cigarette while she waited, keeping one arm propped against the open window. It was still early. From her seat, she could just make out the office where Amelia Duquesne would be meeting with the dean in a few hours. As it turned out, the only person of any real importance in Amelia's life now that Ernest was gone was the dean himself. He would decide what to do with the sad little orphan.

Moira watched him pull into the parking spot a few rows down. He was a stodgy, balding man in his late fifties, clad in tweed and elbow patches. He got out of the car, holding a stack of portfolio folders, a leather bag slung over one arm. As he shut the door, the strap of his bag slipped down to the crook of his elbow and in his effort to fix it, he lost his grip on the files. They flew out in all directions, catching in the wind and tumbling across the parking lot. He cursed loudly, dropping his bag on the ground to chase after them.

This was her opening. Taking one last drag, Moira flicked her cigarette away and began fidgeting with the crown of her watch. Just a half-quarter turn and time shuddered back. The papers sprang up from the ground back into the dean's arms. His bag affixed itself properly on his shoulder. Moira clicked the crown into place and got out of the car just as he was doing the same.

"Dean Hodgkins?" she asked, heels striking pavement as she made her way over to him.

He looked up. The bag slipped. He reached for it. But this time, Moira took the folders from his hands before they could fall.

"Let me help you with that," she said.

Moira maintained eye contact, allowing a brief pause for him to assess her, watching his expression. It was strategic as much as it was

amusing for her. How he reacted now would tell her all she needed to know about how this conversation would go. After a beat she held out a hand, shifting the papers into one arm.

“So sorry to catch you like this. My name is Moira Donnelly.”

Dean Hodgkins startled like a frightened bird, scrambling so he could shake her hand properly. “How do you do? I’d introduce myself but . . . well, it seems you’ve got the upper hand here.”

Moira smiled to herself. The scene played out smoothly. Two characters in a movie meeting for the first time. She lied and said she’d tried to call his office, but no one had answered. He made a joke about his secretary’s incompetence, which Moira pretended was funny. She beat around the bush as long as possible, complimenting the school, praising its reputation. All the while she maintained perfect eye contact. By the time she got to the point, she’d gathered everything she needed to know about him. He liked her. He was fooled by her false amiability. And most importantly, he was attracted to her. She could tell by the way he tucked his left hand out of sight to conceal his wedding ring, and the way he leaned forward slightly as she spoke, hinging on every word that fell from her carefully painted mouth.

This conversation was going to go just fine.

AMELIA LANDED on her back, eyes shut, in the middle of the dark, silent place. She scrambled to her feet, gasping for air, and searched wildly for this alleged door Moira had talked about. The narrow passage was before her, the walls on either side reaching up high over her head. In her panicked state, she realized the walls were actually shelves laden with old leather books. She almost stopped to investigate until she heard the sound of footsteps somewhere beyond her line of sight. She frantically spun the crown of the watch and ran for the door that appeared before her, twisting the knob without a second thought.