


IF ONLY TIME, WERE ON HER SIDE.

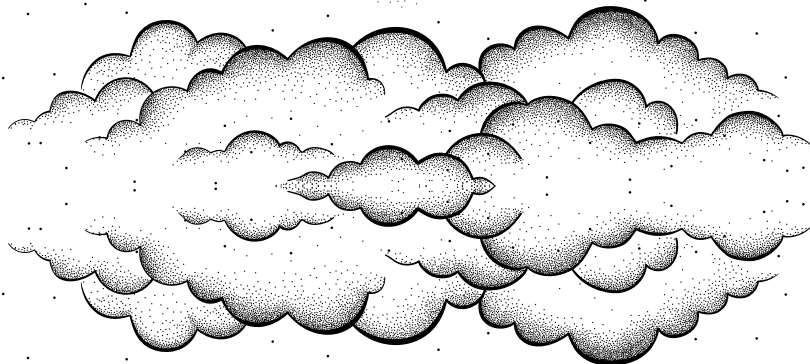
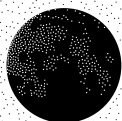
AGELESS



RENÉE SCHAEFFER

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R E N É E S C H A E F F E R



CamCat
Books

CamCat Publishing, LLC
Fort Collins, Colorado 80524
camcatpublishing.com

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Paperback ISBN 9780744310023
eBook ISBN 9780744310047

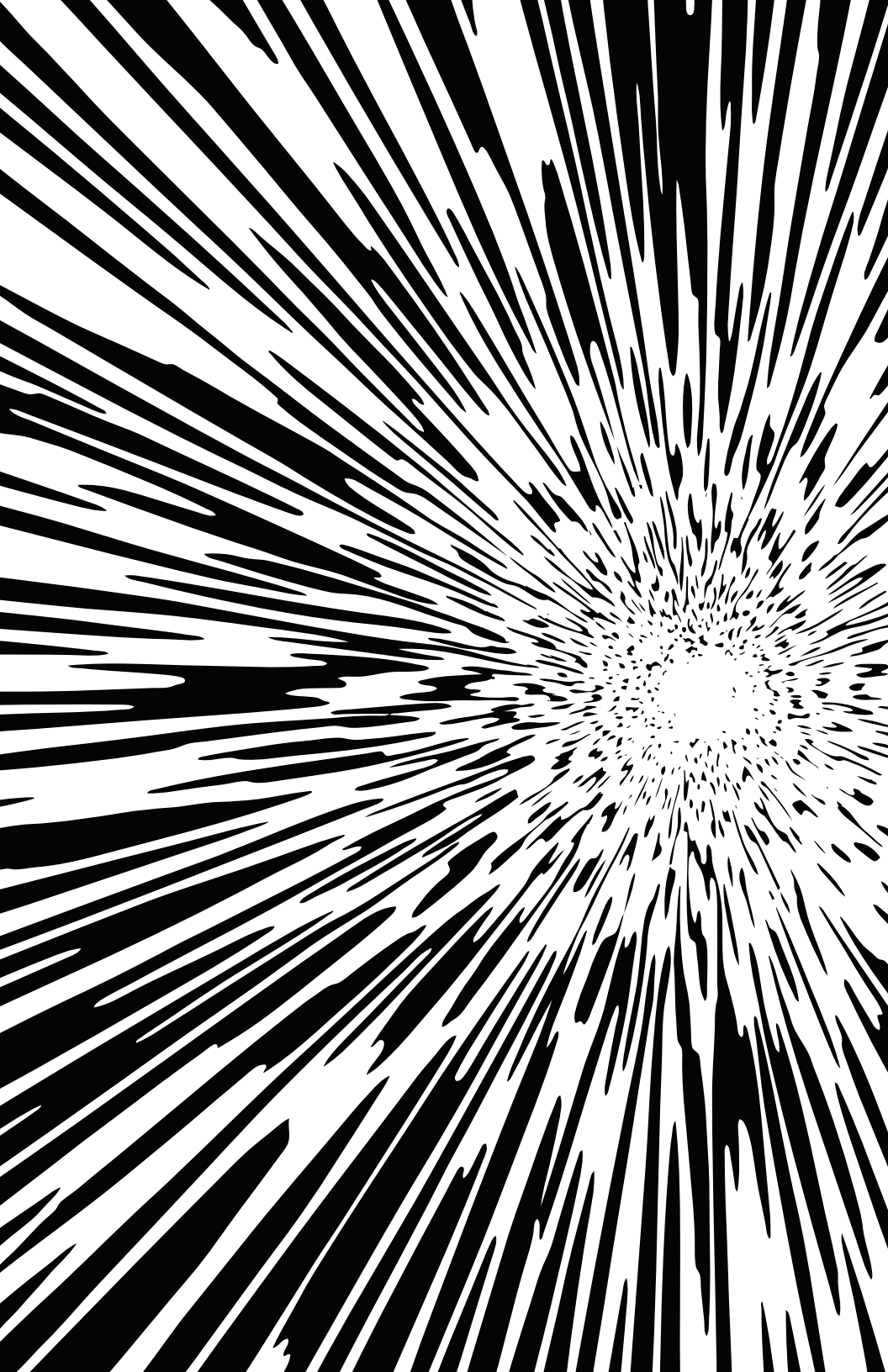
Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data available upon request

Book and cover design by Maryann Appel
Interior artwork by Dencake, Ganna Bozhko, George Peters, Lyubov Ovsyannikova

For my grandmother, Gertrude Jenny Gorman, who loved me best.

And for David Levine, my husband and best friend.





Our greatest glory is not in never falling,
but in rising every time we fall.
—Confucius

P R O L O G U E

TIME. FOR MOST of my life, others thought of it as the ticking of a clock carrying change relentlessly forward. There was never enough time. It could fly away. Time was for memories, and for dreams of the future. It was the precious, tenuous, present moment. Some had plenty on their hands, others wasted it.

Many years later, people would look at time differently. Time became as bountiful as the universe. It became the air. Time was irrelevant. It was ignored.

But for me, time is beyond those things. Time is—and has always been—my immortal enemy, the cause of my grief. Battling the monster gives me strength to fight life's brutal blows. It gives me the power to find equanimity when it all goes off the rails.



C H A P T E R O N E

1850–1866

N a i s s a



THE CRYSTAL PALACE at Hyde Park, London, was the site of the first world's fair, the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations of 1851. Produced by Sir Charles Cole and Prince Albert, Queen Victoria's husband, the Exhibition showcased cutting-edge industrial technologies from the Western world.

Among these were the world's first modern pay toilets, which cost one penny to lock. Charles Darwin, who attended the Great Exhibition, published *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* in 1859, generating international debate, acclaim, and calls of heresy.

In the United States, railroads began to replace canals, and rumblings of secession by Southern states burgeoned. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* vilified slavery and was all but banned in the South. John Brown attempted a slave revolt in Harpers Ferry in the Shenandoah Valley and failed, becoming a martyr for the abolitionist cause.

By 1861, Confederate secessionists defeated Federal forces at Fort Sumter, initiating four years of the bloodiest war on American soil, leaving up to a million dead.



In 1850, the year I was born, most American babies enjoyed names derived from British royalty or the Bible. My first name, Naissa, which means re-birth, was a little out of the ordinary. Perhaps my parents were giving homage to the Renaissance or displaying some sort of inexplicable presentiment. Sadly, I never thought to ask why they chose Naissa.

My father, John Nolan, was descended from a long line of Irish silver- and goldsmiths who had settled in Philadelphia early in the eighteenth century. My father's contribution to the family jewelry business was exquisite design. Finely wrought Nolan jewelry and tableware were in demand by the *haut monde* across the country.

Father often invited me to his workshop to watch him turn metals into his jewelry designs. My job was buffing finished jewelry with a soft cloth. I loved the workshop's smells of oil and solder and the sound of his hammer tapping against the small anvil. In the summer, however, I did not like to visit on days when the hot forge was running.

My paternal grandfather, Patrick Nolan, my only grandparent still alive when I was born, had bucked family tradition and been an attorney of some renown before he retired and lived with us.

He tended the grape arbor adjacent to our large garden, as well as several beehives from which he harvested the most delicious honey. While I couldn't speak for Grandfather's wines, his grape juice was fit for a queen and the best part of autumn.

My mother, whom Father called Maggie but whose name was Margaret, adored numbers. Keeping the household and business books was a chore for most people, but not for Mother. She could find numbers in just about everything: a honeycomb, the shell of a chambered nautilus, or peppermints in a crystal candy bowl. No one was her match at the billiards table, much to the chagrin of any visiting gentleman foolish enough to accept an invitation to play. There was always a book by Mother's side or in her skirt pocket.

I remember one sunny afternoon when I was walking in the park with Mother and Father and a young woman in a lavender frock stopped us, thanking my mother for donating funds to send her to school. The woman said she was employed as a secretary and would never forget Mother's generosity. Throughout my childhood, such scenes were not uncommon.

When we camped outside at our country house, which we did often in the summer, the best times were at the campfire after dinner. We would sing songs and toast nuts and popcorn. I would watch Mother and Father exchanging little smiles that made them both glow. Sometimes Father would sneakily reach out to hold Mother's hand when he thought no one was looking. It was as if their love were a warm, invisible blanket wrapped around me, making me feel secure and happy.



My sixth birthday was a morning to remember. I awoke with the sun, and my little sister, Trudy, who was three years old, was still sleeping. I could not wait for my celebration day to begin. I quietly opened the shutters and marveled at the golds and pinks painted across the sky, the sun a fireball peeking from behind Jessup's Hill. The awakening world was new and fresh. I stretched out my arms and twirled until I fell down laughing. Trudy woke and rubbed her eyes with tiny fists and climbed down from our canopied bed to kiss me.

"Happy birthday, Naissa!"

Kissing Trudy back on her soft face, I said, "Thank you. I am sorry I awakened you."

Just then, Father and Mother came into our room.

"Happy birthday, Naissa!" they said together. I gave each of them a hug.

"Now that you are six, I would like you to have something of mine," Mother said, handing me a small parcel.

Lying in tissue paper was a sky-blue porcelain egg standing on three golden legs and decorated with ivory angels. Lifting the egg's lid, I found a

ring of lace spun from silver. It had a diamond in the center and a sapphire heart on either side. The ring fit perfectly.

Mother touched the ring tenderly. “My mother, who died before you were born, gave me this ring for my sixth birthday. I pray it brings you as much happiness as it did me and that someday you will pass it on to your own daughter.”

“Oh, thank you, Mother!” When Mother wrapped me in her arms, her love filled me with joy.

Trudy and I skipped and danced together around the room. At three and six years old, we had become inseparable. Everyone said that except for my brunette hair and Trudy’s red, we looked like twins.

On bad weather days, our bed became the Enchanted Bed taking Trudy and me on adventures in which we became anyone we chose and experienced whatever we wanted. The Enchanted Bed took us to ancient Greece and into the mysterious future.

At times, the bed was a cloud upon which we ascended to heaven. The angels played their harps for us and lent us their wings so we could fly down over our house and around the world.

After saying goodnight and sharing hugs and kisses with Grandfather, Mother, and Father, we nestled under the covers for our last adventure of the day. Trudy and I whispered to each other until our eyes could stay open no longer, and the Enchanted Bed transported us through the starry night and into our dreams.

When I was ten, Father and I worked together on a brooch for Mother’s birthday. The design was a silver framework shaped like a lilac spray, where each tiny blossom was a cut amethyst.

After I’d watched him create the framework and solder on its hammered leaves, Father said, with a smile, “Now, Naissa, are you ready to begin mounting the blossoms?”

With excitement, I watched as Father opened the safe and removed his sparkle box, a small chest of polished walnut inlaid with mother-of-pearl. Setting the box on the workbench, he unlatched and lifted the lid. Nestled

in lush, purple velvet were a rainbow of gems, all to be used in the jewelry he made. Father handed me a satin pouch from the box, and I poured its contents onto one of the black velvet-lined trays on the workbench. A hundred tiny gems glinted in shades from light to darkest purple.

“The crystal from which these stones were cut came from a one-meter-tall Russian geode.” Father handed me his brass loupe. “The color is brilliant. If you look closely, you can see there are virtually no imperfections in the crystal. They are the highest quality.”

I held the small device to my eye and bent forward until a few gems were in focus. The stones were like the finest glass, transparent and without a single striation.

“We will mount each one and then solder them to the framework,” Father said. “Are you ready to begin?”

“Yes!” I said eagerly. And we got to work.

My first efforts at mounting the gems were clumsy, but Father was a patient teacher. We worked two days, and by the afternoon of Mother’s birthday, we were finished. We put the brooch in a velvet Nolan Jewelers box, which I gave to Mother at dinner.

Mother opened the box and gasped. “Oh, this is exquisite! My favorite, lilacs. I thank you with all my heart. I shall wear this with pride.”

I beamed as Father pinned the brooch on Mother’s dress. She scooped me into a tight embrace.

“Darling Naissa, I shall treasure your gift always. I love you so much, my sweet one.”



Exactly one year later, I was eleven years old and in a foreign land when a black curtain dropped, ravaging my childhood. My entire family was torn from me.

Every one of them, gone: Mother. Father. Grandfather. Even Trudy, my best friend and playmate, only eight years old.

We had steamed to France for an autumn holiday to celebrate Mother's birthday away from the troubles between the states. The days were brisk and sunny as we explored the streets of Paris amid the sharp, earthy smell of fallen leaves mingled with the delicious aromas from patisseries and cafés. Our lodging was at Brodeur Inn on Rue de la Paix, near the heart of the city and overlooking the breathtaking Tuileries Garden. The innkeeper, Madame Brodeur, took a liking to Trudy and me. While Mother's and Father's attention was elsewhere, she snuck us hard butterscotch candies, which she retrieved from her skirt pockets as her silver and agate bracelets softly clinked.

For Mother's birthday, my family went to a luxurious restaurant known for its fresh seafood and views of the Seine and Notre-Dame Cathedral. Dinner was magnificent. Everyone agreed our favorites were the buttery escargots and mussels mariniere. Mother's birthday cake was almost too pretty to eat: a tree of pastry balls and wispy threads of spun caramel nestled in a wreath of silvered leaves and wheeled to our table on a shiny brass trolley.

After dinner we went across the river to tour the cathedral, and I was disappointed that scaffolding hid much of the facade's gargoyles and other carvings I had seen in books. Once inside the cathedral, the explosion of color was entrancing: the late afternoon sun shone through multihued windows and painted the floors in rainbow brilliance.

When Mother tucked me in that night, holding me close and giving me my goodnight kiss, she smelled odd. There was a strange, sour odor underneath Mother's usual lilac fragrance as she whispered, "Sweet dreams, my darling Naissa." I told Mother I loved her.

Awakened by a nightmare of sound rising out of my dreams, I became aware that Mother was screaming in the bed next to me as she held Trudy, who hung limp as a sock doll from her arms. Trudy's face was oddly blue in the lamplight, her lips dark. A thick string of spittle hung from the corner of her mouth. Mother just screamed and screamed. I jumped up to get Father, but when I saw the door to Grandfather's adjoining room ajar, I changed course. Entering the room, I froze when I saw Father weeping by Grand-

father's bed. The old man lay hanging half off the bed, bedclothes askew, his nightshirt immodestly high. Grandfather's open lips were the color of indigo ink in his ashen face, and his eyes stared at nothing.

I ran back to Mother, only to find her whimpering and trying to speak. Trudy slowly sank out of her arms and back onto the bed. Mother, voicing unintelligible words and looking around wildly, did not seem to know I was there.

"Mother! Mother, I am here," I sobbed, grabbing her arm. Mother brought a trembling hand to my cheek, but quickly moved it to her eyes. She poked her eyeball and blinked hard, as if surprised she had done such a thing. Moaning and reaching out again to me, Mother groped, but looked over my head. A cold grip of panic tightened around me—Mother could not see. She kept trying to say something, but the words came out as if in another language. Then she vomited and began gasping for breath from bluing lips, her mouth moving as I had seen fish do when too long out of water.

"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!" Suddenly, Madame Brodeur was in front of me, pushing me aside and helping Mother sit on the bed. This was a futile effort because Mother kept sliding over and down, as if she had turned into one of the marionettes we had seen at the street theater. Tears dripped from Mother's bulging eyes.

Then Father was beside us, his face overcome with horror. "Maggie!" He knelt by the bed and held Mother's hand. There was nothing we could do but watch as Mother drifted away, her gasping breaths coming farther and farther apart until at last they were no more. "Oh, Maggie," Father murmured.

Mother! How will I survive without your kisses?

It was impossible to believe she would never hold me again, never whisper how she loved me more than rainbows and stars. And never again would I play with my sister, never hug her when she trembled in the dark. And Grandfather, how I would miss his smell of tobacco and peppermint and the rough prickle of his whiskers.

“Father, what is happening?” I wished with all my heart for Father to tell me this was only a bad dream.

Father staggered to his feet, wavering as if he had played too many games of ring-around-the-rosy. He tried to speak, but his words were nonsense. Father clutched Madame’s hand and looked at her beseechingly, and then looked at me.

She said, “Oui, yes, I shall take care of her; do not worry.”

He staggered to his room. Mme Brodeur told me to stay in her rooms while she summoned a doctor, but I wanted to be with Father. She put her hands on my face and said, “Pauvre enfant,” but I knew I was not a poor child; Father had always said we were Philly big bugs. I believed he would tell her so himself when he was better.

But Father did not get better. My once strong and indomitable father lay dying. “Father,” I begged, “please do not leave me. Father, please!”

Father’s mouth formed words with no sound. Grabbing Father, I held him tight, as though I could keep his life from flowing away. But my embrace was no match for death’s. In a stillness so deep I was lost in it, I watched with weeping, aching eyes as Father’s features softened into blankness. I put my ear to his lips, but there was no breath at all. Father had left his body and had left me with nothing but emptiness. I cried and cried and could not stop.

The next day after a brief chapel service, I found myself walking down the streets of Paris behind a pair of black, ornate carriages, their horses’ hooves clattering upon the cobblestones. At the cemetery, the clergyman’s nauseating cologne overpowered his words. I watched as a huge hole swallowed four ebony coffins, three large and one small.

Leaning over the maw, I whispered, “Trudy, dear sister, do not be afraid of the dark.” Now, Trudy had to sleep alone.

I was emptied bit by bit as three workers threw shovelful after shovelful of French dirt onto my beautiful family. Then, sweat-drenched and dripping, the men levered a massive, granite slab over the grave.

Madame lay a small bouquet on the stone. She said gently, her voice far away, “By God’s grace, enfant, you have been spared. Viens, Naissa, let

us go.” She tried to take my hand, but my fists were buried in the pockets of my cloak. An enormity of dirt and granite were piled upon my chest, so how could I move?

Somehow, I turned my back and walked away from my family.

On the way out of the cemetery, I paused in front of a stone woman sitting on a pedestal with her face in her hands, grieving. My own grief reached out to hers and joined in recognition.

That night, at Madame’s, I lay sleepless, envisioning my family in the blackness of their earth-covered coffins. When breathing became difficult, I moved my visions out of the dark: Mother, her smile showering me in endless love, and wearing the brooch I had given her and that she now wore in her grave; Father, whose whiskers smelled of orange blossom and bergamot and whose eyes twinkled more than gems, waltzing with me in the parlor; Grandfather, deep in his grape arbor, clipping lush bunches from the vines, smiling at me as the sun dappled his face.

I remembered Trudy at night in our big bed, our arms wrapped around each other as we whispered stories and secrets. I remembered how joyfully she had played at various roles, especially that of mother to her doll babies. But now, Trudy would never have the chance to grow up, to live her life.

Where were they? In heaven with the angels, as Trudy and I had imagined? Could they see me?

I wished with all my heart to be with them so we could go on adventures together once more. Trudy and I would run and play and watch people like tiny ants in the world below.

But no. They were all under the ground. Trudy was sleeping alone in her box, without me. In my mind, I climbed into Trudy’s dark and cold, lonely casket and lay with her. Although my heart still beat, I was dead, too.



My Uncle James Leighton and his wife, Aunt Josephine, came to fetch me back to Philadelphia. Because Aunt Josephine bore an unsettling

resemblance to her sister, my beautiful, red-haired mother, I could hardly look into her hazel eyes without my raw wounds bleeding anew. I was told that the gangling and humorless Uncle James had been appointed my guardian. This deepened my melancholy because he and Aunt Josephine had always been overly formal and cold toward my family.

One luncheon at the captain's table soon after we embarked, the steward offered potted mussels to Aunt Josephine. She recoiled. "Oh dear, no! Are you trying to poison me? Take those monstrosities away at once!" She turned to Uncle James and sniffed, "The nerve! Everyone knows what happened to my dear father and sister. One should think the chef would be more considerate." She glowered at me from under her feathered hat.

Unsure why, I felt as if I had done something wrong. Then, her words struck home. *The mussels*. My stomach roiled.

"Please excuse me, Uncle, I feel ill," I begged of Uncle James, and ran from the table the instant he nodded assent. In my cabin, I cried myself to sleep.

I returned to America across an ocean of sorrow. Every day, I stood at the ship's stern and gazed at the dark expanse. As the distance widened between me and those I loved and had left behind in a French cemetery, a numbing emptiness spread and I knew that a large part of me, the part I recognized, was vanishing into the past along with my family.

The Leighton house felt barren, despite being elegantly appointed and full of bustling servants. My aunt and uncle had a daughter my age, Claudia, whom I had met a few times before. Claudia attended a posh boarding school in Vienna but had stayed home that fall because of illness. Now recovered, Cousin Claudia disregarded me, and complained bitterly to her mother about any attention I was given. Claudia became visibly annoyed when people remarked that we looked like sisters. It bothered me, too. *Trudy* was my sister.

I pined for my real family as time ticked on. Food tasted like cardboard, and even my corset began to hang loose. Most days, I was left to fend for myself.

No one ever went into the Leightons' library, so I spent hours there reading from the collection of books whose crisp pages seemed untouched by human hands. It was difficult to focus on the words. Gazing out over the library garden where leaves rustled in the crackling aftermath of the season's growth, I found it painful to focus on my future.

One afternoon, the stern housekeeper discovered my library hideaway and admonished me to take good care of the valuable books. After that, the housemaid would sneak me tea and small cakes or warm biscuits with honey, saying she had been sent by the housekeeper. Otherwise, I was left alone and empty in the depths of my despair.

A few things from home had been brought to my room at the Leightons', including Father's sparkle box. With shaking hands, I unlocked the box with its silver key. It was empty, save for a gold, heart-shaped locket with intertwined hearts etched on front, Trudy's initials on the back, and two photographs on the inside. One was of Mother and Father, smiling, and the other of Trudy and me. Father must have made the locket for Trudy's next birthday. Donning the necklace and pressing the locket against my skin, I received some of the comfort I so badly needed. I would wear the locket most of my life.

At Christmas Eve dinner with the extended family, Aunt Josephine announced that after the holidays, I was to join Claudia at school in Vienna. The table murmured with approval. My Uncle William, Mother's elder brother, was the only one who spoke up.

"Surely," he said firmly, looking from my aunt to Uncle James, "the poor child ought to stay home with family until her grief abates. Look at her, she looks like a wisp of vapor. And with the War Between the States, traveling has risks."

I loved Uncle William from that moment on.

Aunt Josephine disregarded her brother and Uncle James booked Claudia's and my passage on a stately ocean liner. On our carriage ride to the ship's mooring, I contemplated an unfamiliar life outside the country. I did not know whether I was more heartened to be getting away from the

Leighton house or frightened of living alone in another strange place. What would it be like going to school in Vienna? Claudia, who hated me, was the only person I would know. I did not allow myself to cry.

Aunt and Uncle had invited their coterie to an ostentatious bon voyage party on board so all might see how well I was treated. Their guests murmured approvingly as they toured the ship and were impressed by our large stateroom and its fine furnishings.

A long, linen-covered table, adorned with golden candelabra and centered with a glistening dolphin sculpted from ice, was laden with oysters on the half shell, roasted beef, poached fish in aspic, sweetmeats, and sundry exotic morsels. Multitudes of yellow and white orchids graced the room. The wartime ostentation was startling.

An elegantly dressed woman—I think she was one of Uncle James's sisters, judging by her excessive height and thin frame—approached me carrying a small plate with a sampling of the delicacies.

“Naissa, dear child, why don't you have some of this lovely food?” Her eyes were kind as she proffered the plate.

“Thank you,” I murmured, accepting the offering even though I was far from hungry. The few bites I managed to eat became a lump in my stomach, and I fought both nausea and tears. Easing into a corner chair, I lost myself in happier times.

We were camping at our country summer house. Grandfather and I had foraged for wild leeks and fiddleheads while Trudy and Father fished.

Grandfather was stooped over, motionless, cradling something in his hand.

“Naissa, come here—slowly,” he said quietly.

I approached, and his treasure was revealed: a dragonfly perched on his first finger, ashine in iridescent blues and greens. Its wings flashed the rainbow as they flickered in sunlight. The matchstick-long creature ran a foreleg over its head from back to front, back to front, grooming itself.

“Class and order?” Grandfather whispered.

“Insecta,” I answered promptly, but paused to consider the order. Neither hymenoptera nor lepidoptera, but . . . “Odonata!” I exclaimed, triumphant. The

dragonfly, startled by my voice, darted away, settling in the middle of an amethyst cluster of wild bergamot.

"Dragonflies are marvelous creatures," Grandfather said as we walked on to a large oak at the edge of the field. "They are pure predator. They can snatch a mosquito out of the air quick as lightening. And fast! They say the darners, family Aeshnidae, are faster than a racehorse." He stopped by the oak. "Let's wait here, in the shade. They should be along any minute."

After we sat down in the cool beneath the tree's canopy and Grandfather dabbed his forehead with his kerchief, he asked, "Do you know what sort of oak this is?"

I looked up. The sun sparkled through the rustling leaves, and squirrels scampered and chattered among the thick branches. Each leathery leaf had six or so deep lobes.

"A white oak?" I ventured.

"Excellent guess. This is a tricky one, because white oaks are similar. This old beauty is a pin oak. You can tell because the lobes are sharply pointed, like pins."

Just then, we heard laughter from across the field by the stream. Father and Trudy were walking up the hill toward us. Trudy started running and I jumped up to meet her.

We collided like puppies and rolled laughing in the grass. My knee burned from where it grazed a rock. I stopped to pull up my trouser leg, which now had grass stains and a small tear. I was glad Mother allowed Trudy and me to dress in boys' trousers for these adventures so we would not muss our good dresses. I watched as the crimson scrapes quickly faded, and pulled the trouser leg back down as Father approached.

"Watch out, my rough-and-tumble sons!" Father feigned shock at our behavior and then laughed, tousling Trudy's thick, red mane. "Come on, girls, let us fetch Grandfather and head back to the campsite. We shall cook these fish for dinner." He held up a string of glistening trout.

After we returned to the campsite, Grandfather stoked the fire with wood Trudy and I had collected earlier. Father and Grandfather were cleaning fish

when Mother arrived carrying a hamper. She and Cook must have finished canning tomatoes. I ran up to her.

“Mother, Mother! Guess what? This morning Trudy and I pretended we were explorers and look what I found!” I dug into my pocket to produce my treasure: several flint arrowheads and a long, fluted spearpoint made from obsidian.

“Oh my, these are beautiful, Naissa! I would guess the spearpoint is Lenape, and very old. Very rare.”

“That is what Grandfather said. He said they used it to fish and hunt.”

“You are a good hunter yourself, my darling.” Mother bent down to hug me in a snug embrace. I breathed in her scent of fresh soap and lilacs, and my heart sang with joy.

The minute the guests departed, Aunt Josephine whispered something to Sylvia, Claudia’s maidservant and our chaperone.

Josephine’s voice jolted me from my memories. She faced us. “Claudia, Naissa, I expect you to attend your studies to the utmost of your abilities.”

Before either of us could do more than utter a feeble, “Yes, ma’am,” she turned on her heel and was gone, a waft of verbena and the swish of silk skirts lingering for a moment in the space she left behind.

I went out to the rail. People around me held onto streamers and tossed the other ends to the crowd on the pier. Everyone held their ends until the ship pulled away and the streamers broke. I, too, was breaking—from sorrow, loneliness, and apprehension.

The air itself trembled. I lingered on deck even while the sky began to writhe, and huge, bruised thunderheads grew ripe to disgorge their innards. The sea breezes became winds blowing straight through my clothing until my insides were gust-whipped and brined. Evaporating. The salt I tasted was more than sea mist.

I wiped my eyes and made my way back to the stateroom. While changing for supper, Claudia and I stood in front of the looking glass and silently arranged our hair. We did appear to be sisters, with our brunette hair and hazel eyes. But that was where the similarities ended. Claudia was two months younger than I but looked mature and statuesque for her age. Her

navy ensemble was well pressed and sophisticated. Shorter, less developed, and thin, I was a little girl next to her. I felt awkward and self-conscious in my smocked, yellow dress.

That night, I threw myself onto my bed and thought about a terrifying nightmare I had when I was five years old. No matter how I strained, I could only remember it was about being a grown-up with an unhappy life. My life was already unhappy. My tears wouldn't stop.



Among the throng meeting the ship in Trieste, Italy, was one of our school-teachers sent to accompany Claudia and me on the train to Vienna. She was middle-aged with a genial face, her graying hair pulled back in a thick bun.

"Herzlich willkommen, I am pleased to see you again, Miss Leighton," she exclaimed as she shook Claudia's hand before turning to me. "And this must be Miss Nolan. Willkommen. I am Frau Klein. I teach the German language at Miss Sinclair's English School for Girls. I wish you a fruitful and pleasant stay at our school. My, my, you and Claudia could be sisters."

"How do you do, Frau Klein? What a lovely thing for you to say." I curtsied while thinking that looking like Claudia was not lovely at all, especially with that sour look on her face.

Too agitated to sleep the previous night, I dozed for most of the long train ride. When we arrived in Vienna, Frau Klein ushered us to a waiting carriage. The driver, a freckle-faced boy, helped the three of us in and then loaded the trunks and travel bags.

The view on our bumpy ride to Miss Sinclair's School consisted of farms and vineyards occasionally interrupted by patches of old forest. After about an hour, the carriage slowed.

My breath caught at a Baroque building fifty feet ahead. It stood monster-like in the gloom, its many eyes glowering. As we drew closer, I saw the eyes were numerous small windows with faces pressed against them. I released my breath.

Most of the girls, having been at school since autumn, ran out to greet us. Claudia jumped out of the carriage to meet them, but I hung back, watching the reunions. Frau Klein introduced me to the group and ushered me inside.

A smothering, claustrophobic sensation pervaded the building. The tiny dark rooms contained too much heavy furniture and smelled of mustiness and decayed possibilities. At night, the window was a mirror in which I tried to fathom my future but saw only my own sad, glittering eyes. My room had one pleasing feature, discovered only when spring arrived: the window looked out on a shapely maple tree. Its leaves, like green butterfly wings, reflected the sun's rays as fluttery glints of my happier past.

As I readied for breakfast the next morning, there was a soft rapping on my door. When I swung it open, a girl about my age was standing there.

"Good morning! I am Anna Winchester, from across the hall." She gestured to her room's door. "You are Miss Nolan, are you not? You may call me Anna. Do you know where the dining hall is? I could show you. May I accompany you to breakfast?"

I did not know where the dining hall was but was not keen on company at the moment.

"I am not quite ready. Perhaps I could—"

"Oh wonderful!" She brushed past me and sat herself on my reading chair. "I will wait. Say, I heard you are from Philadelphia. I hail from New York City. Do you have Parisian fashions in Philadelphia as we do in my city? We have the most wonderful fashions. I must show you the most divine bonnet I acquired over the holiday. May I help you with your hair?"

I looked at the hairbrush in my hand. It was all too much for me.

"Anna, I am sorry. It seems the long journey has suddenly caught up with me. I feel an urgent need to rest. Perhaps we will meet at dinner."

In the early days of school, Anna and others tried to connect with me, but I felt like an outsider who had nothing in common with them or their happy lives. Discussions of hair ribbons or so-and-so's inheritance meant nothing in the face of my grief. If I were to be honest, I also feared losing

anyone I might come to care for. As a result of my standoffishness, the others began to ignore me.

For some reason, I made George, the boy who had been our carriage driver, an exception. Twelve days after my arrival, we met again on a Sunday afternoon when he saw me reading behind the stables, under a pair of ancient fir trees. Hearing the gravel crunch, I looked up and saw him walking toward me, his hair bleached almost white by the sun. His lack of a coat and cap made me shiver beneath my cloak.

George's smile lit his face and eyes, melting away my melancholy. His breath came in clouds as he said with a faint German accent, "I beg pardon, miss. Perhaps you remember me? I was your driver to the school. My name is George Johnson, eldest son of the Reverend George Johnson." He gave a slight bow. "I work for Miss Sinclair after school and on weekends, to help provide for my family. May I—may I speak with you?"

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Johnson. My name is Miss Nolan. It would be my pleasure to speak with you."

"Why do you sit here by yourself, miss?" Although surprised at his forwardness, I appreciated his earnest manner. Well, if he could be forward, then so could I.

"I am uncomfortable with the other girls." Yet I was not uncomfortable with him, and we appeared to be of similar age.

Surprise flashed across George's face before he gave me a quick, lopsided smile that begot a deep dimple in his left cheek.

He nodded toward my book. "When I am able to find solitude and time, I also enjoy reading. If I may ask, miss, what other pursuits do you fancy?"

"I like exploring the outdoors. And you?"

"It seems we have similar interests, miss. I have found some wonderful places not far from here. Would you care to see them? I could show you."

It was against the rules to be in the company of a young man without an escort. I looked around and saw no other students or teachers. The possibility of an outdoor adventure rekindled a spot in my heart that had been dark for long months.

“Yes, thank you, Mr. Johnson. I should like that very much. But only if you call me Naissa from here on.”

With that same half-smile, George answered, “Of course, Miss Naissa. And please call me George.”

“Very well, George. I must don my boots and gymnastics costume. I shall be right back.” Once in my room and breathless from running, I cursed the slowness of my fingers as I untied my crinolette. Trudy and I used to be so free in our trousers whenever we played outside. Feeling gratitude for Mother allowing us that freedom, I laced and buttoned my gymnastic pantaloons and shift, and, last, pulled on my new Aigle Wellingtons. Redone, I stepped out the door and tried not to run.

When I returned to the fir trees, George had a lantern. He led me to a secret cave he had discovered two miles from Miss Sinclair’s. As we crawled through the cave’s small opening, the light receded and darkness assailed me. It was not a shadowy or hazy darkness one’s eyes could adjust to, but a world of deep and utter black. A darkness that contained who-knows-what kind of horrible monsters that reached out to touch me with icy fingers, whispering of their hunger.

All at once, I heard fluttering from above, and something brushed my cheek. I screamed and grabbed for George, but then laughed at my foolishness when I realized it was only a bat.

George lit the lantern. Wondrous, otherworldly glory! All around us shone marble-like walls, ceilings, and floors with lustrous rock icicles—stalactites—growing from them. There were many limestone formations, some shaped like castles, flowers, and mythical creatures. It was a fairyland, and well worth the tongue-lashing I later received from Miss Sinclair for my unchaperoned adventure.

The following Sunday, not caring about the consequences, I went on another trek with George. He led us deeper into the cave to a lake. Its startling, cobalt-blue water put the sky to shame, even by lantern light. We waded in barefoot with clothes hiked up, but George and I became drenched anyway. It was fun but freezing.

When the lantern oil waned, we reluctantly backtracked to the cave's entrance, with George as guide. I was grateful for his knowledge of the cave because I would have been completely lost in the maze of passages.

Once out of the cave, George and I relaxed for a time in the sun while he whittled a small block of wood he carried in his pocket. On our way back down the hill, I pointed out edibles such as bilberries, meadow salsify, and lawyer's wig mushrooms. George and I hungrily ate some, and then gathered all we could carry to George's mother for supper.

Mrs. Johnson was free with her smiles, hugs, and delicious meals. She invited me to spend Sundays after church with George and the rest of the family while the reverend made Sunday visits to his congregation.

Miss Sinclair agreed because Mrs. Johnson was an acquaintance, so she knew the family was a wholesome and pious one. Nonetheless, she lambasted me regularly about proper behavior with George and his family. Her admonitions did not matter to me, because George was a comfort in my otherwise solitary life.



Over the next few years, while war raged between America's Northern and Southern states, I excelled academically. Toiling on schoolwork kept emptiness from the loss of my family at bay. Interested in foreign languages, I took all those available, even though just two were required: Latin, Greek, French, and German.

I was intrigued by unlocking secrets hidden within books written in diverse languages, and the way words in other tongues corresponded to English. Most of my other classes were trivial "gentlewomanly" pursuits, such as needlework, deportment, and elocution.

I enjoyed drawing class but was miserable at it. My father's words, however, kept encouraging me: "Nothing worthwhile is gained without hard work." Needing more instruction than was offered by the school's curriculum, I successfully petitioned Uncle James for private drawing lessons with

a local artist. At times, I nearly gave up because my progress was so slow, but I didn't want to let Father down.

George and I spent many Sunday afternoons on hikes together. The two of us combed every nook and cranny within a six-mile radius of the school during our Sunday roaming. Curious about what could be seen, we climbed the tallest trees upon the highest hills.

We walked through shallow streams to find out where they led and used some medieval ruins we found as the background for impromptu melodramas. George and I observed the ways of the animals, and after a time recognized and named individuals.

In the beginning, George was a playmate and protector. As the years progressed, our relationship matured.

One autumn day in my third year, George and I sat next to each other in a copse of birch trees overlooking the valley. The gray of the sky matched my melancholy, for I was reminded of autumn in Paris. Sensing my gloom, George reached over and put his arm around me.

I froze. Then I relaxed into the warmth of him. I leaned my head against his shoulder, and we sat like that for a long while. George leaned down, and I felt a soft kiss atop my head. My heart was soothed, as if kindness flowed from his lips to my very core.

After that, we would lie under the shelter of trees, holding each other and talking while sunlight sparkled through the leaves and danced over us with tremulous, golden fingers. Occasionally, we shared a brief kiss. The warm softness of his lips on mine became the best moments of my days.



Throughout my time at school, anguish from the loss of my family lingered. I often anticipated a glimpse of someone, a shadow, a motion at the door—something of my family filling the void. This expectation of their presence caused me to take second looks when shadows teased the periphery of my vision.

One March afternoon warmer and more humid than it should have been, George and I took a walk in the woods before returning to loll behind the stables under the firs. George stirred a small pile of fallen needles into patterns with his fingers, while I braided a chain of buttercups collected on our walk. In that moment with George, I felt sufficiently at ease to confide my struggle with grief.

“Do you think the loss of loved ones triggers the loss of oneself?” I asked.

George’s gray eyes darted to mine before he looked back at the pile of dry needles, which he studied for a bit. Then he replied, “I think it is clear the people we love each occupy a part of our heart, and when they die, that part in us might be lost, too, no? I think also, perhaps we fill the holes a little bit with memories of them.”

I considered George’s answer. “But what if the memories fade and disappear? Then a person would be left with nothing but the holes.”

“It seems to me,” he said, “in such a situation it would be important to preserve the memories as best we can, while we still have them. Perhaps that could be done by transcribing the memories or finding or making other mementos.”

“Is that what you would do?”

My friend gazed out over the mountains. After a moment, he nodded. “I have my carving.”

He always carried a small piece of wood in his pocket for whittling. Sometimes he showed me the finished products: animals and figurines of happy families at play.

I pondered how I might best preserve memories of my family, which grew fainter every day. Trudy’s locket with its pictures was a piece of them I could always hold on to. I had a few more photographs of Trudy, Mother and Father, and one of Grandfather with his beehives. But these were paltry means to fill my emptiness.

During my drawing lesson the following week, I suddenly thought of a way to keep memories of my family from fading. The grave in Paris where

they lay was unadorned, with only the words *Famille de Nolan* carved upon its granite cover.

What if there were an ornamented monument honoring my family at Père Lachaise necropolis? Memories of them would become ageless in marble, gracing the world with beauty for eons to come.

I had neglected my drawing lessons for a few weeks, but began again, redoubling my efforts with the goal of sketching the monument design forming in my mind. Whenever I thought to give up—which happened many times—the memory of my father, his skill, and his words pushed me to keep trying.

Late April of 1865 held a shocking week of tidings from America. Its zenith: the South had surrendered; the war was over. The nadir: our president, Abraham Lincoln, was assassinated just days afterward. I wondered about the America I would return to the following year. Would the peace hold? What would be the situation of the former slaves? I wished I could have discussed these questions with my parents.

I was still puzzling such questions a few days later when I was invited to Sunday dinner with the Johnsons. My fifteenth birthday had been the day before, and Mrs. Johnson prepared a celebratory meal crowned with my favorite dessert, her apfelstrudel.

Mrs. Johnson gave me a delicate lace collar she had tatted, which I treasured and wore often. My gift from George was a tiny, kicking Lipizzaner horse he had carved from a piece of ash and polished until it shone like one of the stallions themselves.

Later that evening in the woods, with the sky still light and crickets chirping in a chaotic symphony, George and I fell asleep in a hemlock grove. We did not awaken until dawn.

Miss Sinclair was by nature an angry woman, but that morning she was angrier than I had ever seen her. It was clear from her flushed countenance that she was steaming in her dark silks. She paced back and forth in front of the leaded windows of her office, a silhouette of iron intensity in the morning light, her heels a staccato on the mosaic tile floor.

Every now and then, a muffled crack or shout came through the windows from the gymnastics class, where a game of ground billiards waged on the front lawn.

Once she began, Miss Sinclair spat words at me, her voice an octave higher than usual.

“Miss Nolan, I should not have allowed you to spend Sundays with that . . . that . . . boy. I consider your behavior last evening to be a failure of the utmost severity. You have shamed me, our school, your schoolmates, and your esteemed family.”

What family?

“Have you not learned a single lesson in deportment since you have been with us? Where is your propriety? This is utterly shameful. What you and that boy have done is an abomination. An abomination.”

Perhaps she has been rehearsing this speech for decades. I am so fortunate to be its witness. Joy unbounded.

“You have dragged the reputation of this fine school into the ditches. For all we know . . . How many times have you lain with that boy? What have you to say for yourself?”

Her fury of words and striding came to a sudden halt as she turned to fix me with raging eyes. Girls’ laughter drifted into the room from the game outside. A woodlark in the rhododendron below the window sang its cheery *toolooeat, toolooeat, toolooeat*.

Instinctively, I reached for Trudy’s locket, rubbing its golden warmth into my fingers. I knew humble pie would be the best offering, but one must defend oneself when no one else would. “Miss Sinclair, I adamantly disagree, as your conclusion is false. I did not surrender my virtue, not once. I have always done as you asked and been a model student. Your lessons have not gone unheeded.”

The headmistress’s ears flamed red, her rage rising even further. “We shall see, we shall see, Miss Nolan. You shall submit to an examination by our physician and the truth of the matter shall be exposed. You may go.” She turned her back to stare stonily out the window at the girls and their game.

I suffered through a humiliating examination by Herr von Graben, the school physician, who pronounced me still *intact*. Nevertheless, a cloud of hissing whispers followed me, and Claudia, instead of ignoring me as was customary, glared. Miss Sinclair never apologized for her false accusations or even mentioned the doctor's findings. Far worse, one of George's sisters told me their father had beaten him severely, and we were to be kept apart permanently.

I considered defying the injunction, but truth be told, I was afraid of Reverend Johnson. More than once, I had seen his eyes spark with anger and his children flinch.

Without George in my life, I was broken. Nevertheless, I determined to take George's advice about keeping the memory of my family alive, and wrote to Uncle William, asking him to persuade Uncle James to allow construction of a monument at the Paris gravesite.

After Uncle James agreed to the monument, my drawing tutor gave me the names of two Parisian sculptors who could be hired to do quality work. To meet the sculptors and commission one of them to create the monument, I obtained Miss Sinclair's permission to travel to Paris that summer with Frau Klein.

I speculated that Miss Sinclair's approval, given with dramatized reluctance, was to keep me from complaining to my aunt and uncle about her treatment of me.

The day of our departure for Paris dawned warm and humid, thus I was glad to be wearing my cage crinoline, which allowed me to forego layers of heavy petticoats. Frau Klein and I rode the Kaiserin Elisabeth-Bahn to Salzburg, where we overnighted at a small inn near the station. The next morning, we headed for Stuttgart and the Rhône valley.

During our journey west, Frau Klein was often engrossed in reading her book. She had tried to keep the title covered, but I knew it to be *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*. I had heard of this book, which was said to be a description of the horrors of slavery but was rather scandalous owing to some indelicate content.

I wanted to understand Frau Klein's interest. "Frau Klein, please forgive me for interrupting your reading. I should like to ask your thoughts on a topic related to the book you are reading."

Frau Klein closed her book, removed her spectacles, and mopped her brow. She looked at me expectantly.

"Frau Klein, what do you think shall happen to the former slaves in America, now that the war is over?"

"That is a good question. It may be some years before all Americans accept the end of slavery, and so the dangers to the former slaves may not be insignificant."

"I hope not. It couldn't be worse than slavery was. My parents used to attend antislavery meetings, and they made sure my sister and I treated all with respect. Perhaps they were more involved, I will never know. Once, I overheard a family friend tell Father about his visit to a Louisiana plantation. The plantation owner tried to have, um, relations with a nine-year-old slave girl. When her mother begged and tried to save her girl, both mother and daughter were tied up and their backs whipped until the skin shredded. Father was furious to hear of such a thing."

"How horrible, Naissa. Thank goodness slavery is at an end. I pray when you return to America, you will find your country's people coming back together." We talked more about current events before the conversation moved to what I would do upon returning to my guardians that summer.

"Frau Klein, living in my aunt and uncle's house is difficult for me, thus I hope to find a position that allows me to live on my own, or with another family."

"I do not wish to pry, but what is the nature of this difficulty?"

I was unsure how much to say but felt comfortable with Frau Klein. "To be honest, the Leightons and Nolans have never been close. I suppose Aunt Josephine disliked my beautiful, outgoing mother. My Uncle James is of dour disposition and barely acknowledges me, and Claudia resents my presence."

Frau Klein's eyes glistened as she took my hands in hers.

“You deserve a loving homelife, my child. Every child should have unconditional love. I am sorry.”

I was warmed by my teacher’s empathy and concern. “Thank you, Frau Klein.”

“Naissa, dear, please call me Marta.” She paused and gave me a slight smile. “When we are not at school, of course.”

It was the first time since my parents had died that I conversed openly with an adult. As we talked, Marta confided that she had once been married and there was to have been a baby, but none of it had worked out. Marta told me the rest of her story, and I told her mine. Time passed quickly.



It was bittersweet to be back in Paris and see some of the places I had enjoyed with my family. When I asked our hotel’s concierge about the restaurant where my family shared our last meal together, he said it was shut down five years before because a number of diners had consumed tainted seafood, which had proved fatal.

The first sculptor Marta and I visited, Monsieur Auguste Clésinger, had been described by my drawing tutor as a sculptor of somewhat scandalous reputation but breathtaking skill. He had created the acclaimed tomb of Frédéric Chopin, in which the muse Euterpe wept over a broken lyre. When we met Clésinger in his studio, he was polite and, although his eyebrows quirked at my design sketch for the monument, he seemed pleased with my ideas. Clésinger, full-bearded and rather unkempt in a baggy suit grayed with stone dust, had the strong, aquiline nose common to many of the French. Wisps of white in his dark beard and hair softened his angles, but his eyes were so black and sharp, I would not have been surprised if he used their gaze to bore straight through marble.

As we discussed his fee, my attention was caught by a low figure in the corner of the studio. I excused myself and approached it. My limbs suddenly froze and I gasped at the sight of a nude, reclining woman of white

marble. Her nakedness was carved in such exquisite detail, my cheeks burned. She had the generous curves of a real woman, the stunning result of intricate chisel work. I could almost smell the morning glories, roses, and lilies upon which she lay, their rendering was so lifelike. Most striking, even beyond the exquisiteness of the work, was her pose. The woman's head arched back at an extreme angle, while her spine twisted and was locked in an eternal convulsion. Her torso was in the throes of death. She reminded me of my mother in her last, agonizing moments.

And yet, this woman held peace in her countenance. Her feet and hands were in languorous repose, as if the final relaxation was having its way with her. The dichotomy was unsettling and intriguing.

"Elle est *Femme Piquée par un Serpent*—*Woman Bitten by a Serpent*," said Monsieur Clésinger at the very moment I spied the tiny snake curled around her wrist like a bracelet. One could easily forget this was a piece of marble. I turned away from her and walked toward him.

"When would you start on the monument? And how long might it take?" I offered silent thanks to Mother, Father, and Grandfather for the funds with which I was able to pay Monsieur Clésinger's exorbitant commission. I told Frau Klein there was no need to visit the other sculptor.



After returning to Vienna, I suffered through my remaining months at school without George. My only consolation was a second trip to Paris with Frau Klein, this one at the close of my final exams, to oversee installation of my family's monument. Frau Klein and I found lodging on Rue de la Roquette, near the Père Lachaise main entrance, and took pleasure in daily jaunts to the necropolis.

The walk up to Section Ten where my family was interred was not long, yet it was a journey to a universe separate from the living chaos just outside the gates. As we strolled deeper into the stone garden, up its narrow cobblestone and flagstone alleys, the voices of wrens and nuthatches gradually

overtook the din of the city. The many residents of the narrow and ornate stone houses packed among spreading maples and chestnuts infused us with their quiet repose, coaxing worries to fall away.

Monsieur Clésinger and his apprentices had worked exclusively on my commission over the past year. The final installation took several weeks' effort, with Clésinger, his two apprentices, and a number of laborers working dawn to dusk.

I enjoyed the worksite with its marble dust, clanging and banging, and laborers stripped to their trousers, their iron muscles glistening as they wielded hammers and hefted hunks of marble. Clésinger, barking orders and working with singular focus, somehow never failed to pause and provide a colorful update on the progress, pointing out what was newly accomplished, what was yet to be done, and the infuriating details, which, if not rectified, would mar his artistic excellence.

One morning, Clésinger called on Frau Klein and me at the inn. As we sat in the parlor, he beamed.

"Madame et mademoiselle, I have excellent news for you this morning. The work is accomplished. *C'est fini.*"

Frau Klein and I both exclaimed in excitement.

"How wonderful!" Frau Klein said, "When may we see it?"

Clésinger turned his beret in his hands. "I would be honored if you would accompany me at present, maintenant."

I hesitated. "Thank you, monsieur, I am happy to hear your news. Please excuse me a moment, and I will get the balance of your fee."

I needed a minute to think. Going to my room, I retrieved the note I'd previously written with the balance of the agreed-upon price. While I was anxious to see the finished monument, I wanted to be alone for my first viewing of my family's tribute.

Back in the parlor, Clésinger accepted the note with thanks.

"Monsieur, in order to fully appreciate your work, I would like to view it in private, if you do not mind. I will go to the cemetery later in the day, by myself. Would that be acceptable to you?"

Clésinger seemed to deflate. “Mais oui, of course, mademoiselle. As you wish.”

“Perhaps Frau Klein would like to view the monument with you now? She is anxious to see it.”

After they left, I went to a nearby café and had a small dinner while watching colorful Paris flow by on the busy street. Afterward, I walked to the library to return a book I had borrowed earlier in our stay and then browsed a few of the shops. Finally, as the sun began slanting and shadows grew longer, I turned toward the necropolis.

The monument was exquisitely beautiful in the late afternoon light, its sparkling, colorful marble mimicking nature with perfect pitch. It was exactly what I had envisioned. Clésinger had brilliantly executed the ornamented, eight-foot-tall arch over the sepulcher, and a marble bench where one could sit and look upon, and through, the archway. Everything was hewn not from the austere marbles of muted white and gray so common in the necropolis, but from a rainbow of richly hued marbles: crimson Griotte from France, the palest pink Rosetta Vene from Egypt, yellow and orange Numidian from Tunisia, green Cipollino Versilia from Italy, Blue Sky from Brazil, purple-veined Pavonazzo from Italy, ebony Noir Belge from Belgium, ivory Proconnesian from Turkey, and Artesian White from Greece.

Carved in high relief on the arch were two smiling goddesses whose benevolent gaze, I was sure, comforted the spirits of my family as they passed through the archway. Gaea, Mother Earth, was on the left column of the arch and honored Mother and Father’s love and respect for the natural world. The shaft of the tall spear Gaea held was encircled with tea roses and represented Trudy, whose name meant *spear*. Rays hewn from Numidian marble radiated from the spear’s tip, up and across the span of the arch, where they met and intermingled with vines of ivy. The ivy grew from Physis, the goddess of nature, who was on the right-hand column. She honored my parents’ study of the world around them. The scales she carried represented Grandfather’s profession as a barrister. His beehives and honey, grapes and wine balanced the scales. The goddesses were adorned

with brightly colored tiaras, necklaces, bracelets, and rings, representing the Nolan jewelry business. Masses of carved dahlia and lilac, Mother's favorite, grew from the base of the arch, and flowers of all sorts rose up and around the arch in bas-relief, all reaching out toward the apex, the sun.

Too many of the figures in the cemetery were sorrowful. I wanted my family to instead spend their eternity in beauty. Each stroke of Clésinger's chisel sang of Mother, Father, Trudy, and Grandfather—forever beautiful, forever joyful.

I sat upon the marble bench in front of the archway and allowed the world to settle around me. The scent of freshly turned earth drifted by on puffs of air while wrens' clear voices warbled. A pair of lovers whispered and laughed softly as they ambled past with arms interlocked. I stayed until the light started to dim and the marbles burned with the lowering sun's fiery reds and golds. The lovely surroundings and the splendor of the monument brought memories of my family into sharper focus. As the songbirds quieted and the nighthawks began their raspy calls, I had the satisfaction of knowing I had honored my family in a manner they would have been proud of.

On the way down to the exit from Père Lachaise, I paused at the grieving woman sitting upon her pedestal, whom I now knew was *La Douleur*, or *Grief*, sculpted by François Dominique Milhomme in 1815. She was more beautiful than I remembered, more human. I empathized with her.

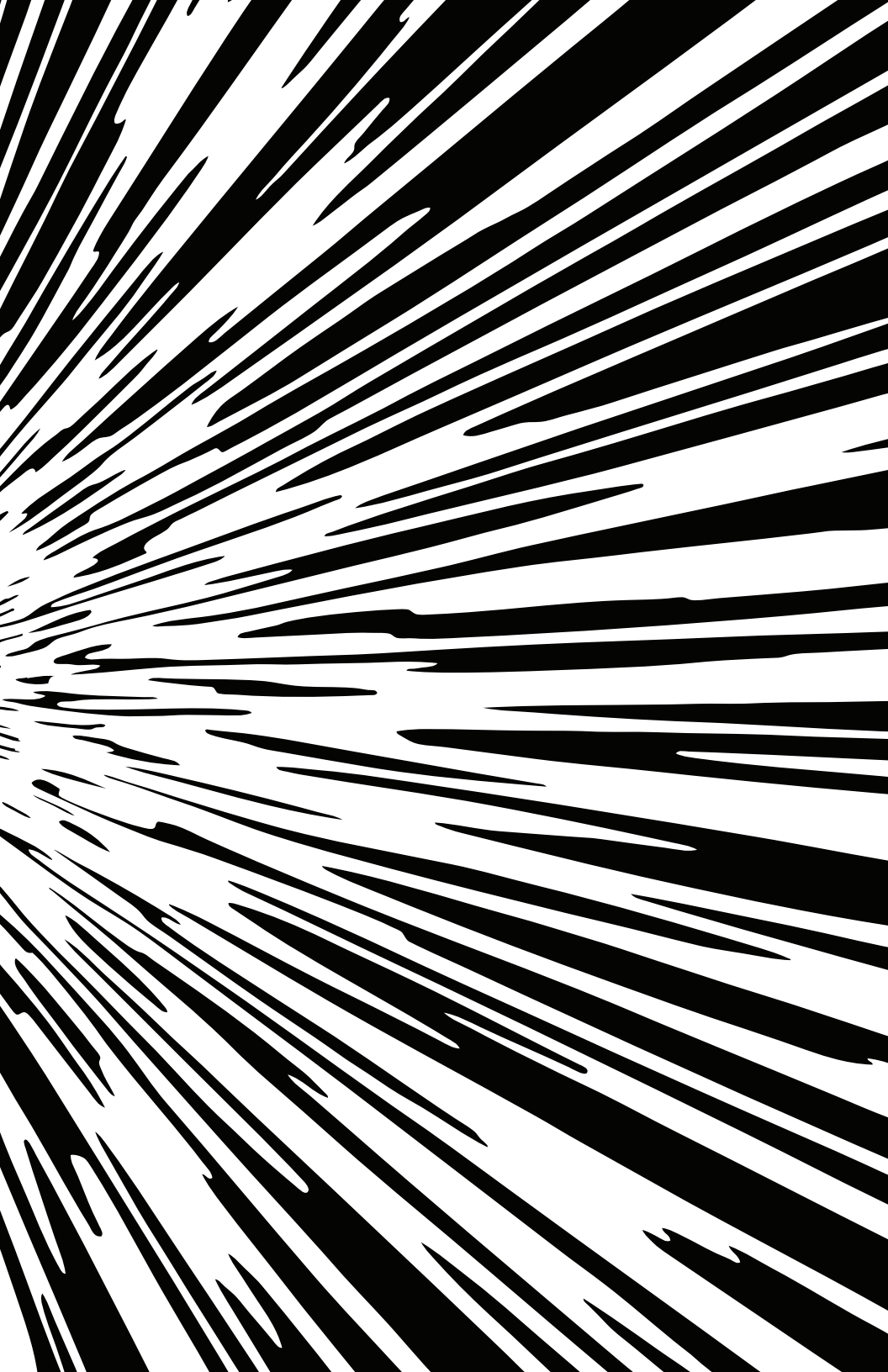


Before returning to Philadelphia, I sent Monsieur Clésinger a letter apologizing for excluding him from my first viewing of the completed monument, describing what it was like for me to experience the monument, and how perfectly he had carried out my intention. My thanks for bringing my family closer to my heart, exactly as I had wished, were sincere.

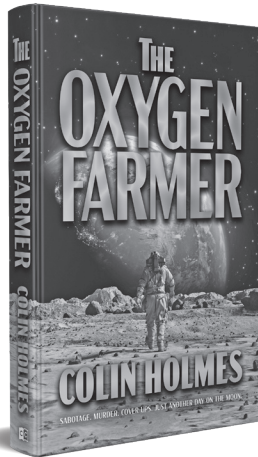
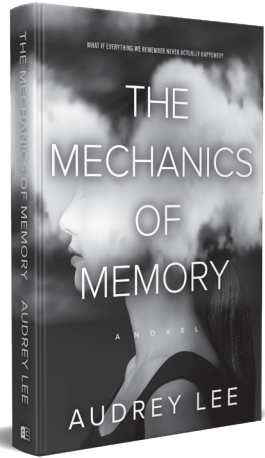
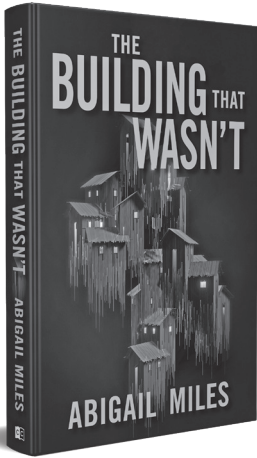
Because my sketch had accurately communicated my wishes for the monument to Clésinger, I was encouraged to keep drawing. I carried a small sketchbook with me and developed the habit of drawing whenever I could.

Regarding Frau Klein, I corresponded with her until her death over thirty years later. She became my Aunt Marta for whom I cared deeply, and who genuinely cared about me and my success. When I received a letter from Aunt Marta's sister informing me of her death, I felt the last remnant of family ripped from my grasp.

All I ever learned of George was that he left home a few months after my departure and joined the clergy. I hoped he found happiness—as I did upon my return to Philadelphia.

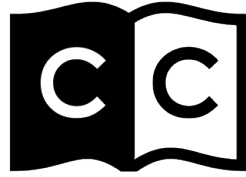


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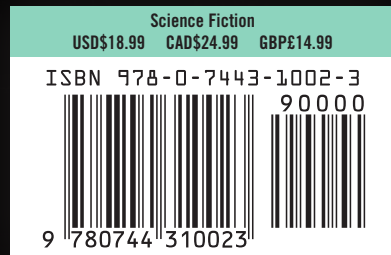
IS ETERNAL YOUTH A BLESSING OR A CURSE?

Naissa Nolan is a happy child in 1850s Philadelphia—until tragedy strikes while she and her family are on holiday. Alone and heart-broken, she is thrust into an immortal life she never bargained for or imagined. Naissa spends the next few centuries on Earth—and beyond—desperate to learn more about her condition. While working with the esteemed Oberlin Institute in Vienna, she makes an important discovery that could change everything.

But trusting the wrong people is a mistake, and Naissa's immortal life enters a new chapter she never anticipated.



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