Introduction to the Publishing Industry

Krista Beucler

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ENGL 491: Intro to the Publication Industry
College of Arts and Sciences, English Department, Creative Writing
Honors Capstone

Krista Beucler

Spring 2020
Advisor: Dr. Warren Rochelle
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Final Reflection

The Honors Capstone is designed to be a culmination of a student’s academic work at UMW. My project built on what I have learned throughout my time at UMW and particularly my major classes. But more than that, my Capstone has been the beginning of the rest of my career. While doing the project, it felt like something I was doing this semester, with a definitive end date. I see now that it is in fact just the beginning of the future. My Capstone project involved revising the novella I wrote for fiction seminar ENGL 470B, finding literary magazines that might publish my work, writing cover letters, and sending out submissions to the selected magazines. Though we structured the project in small steps with clear objectives, it is now going to become an ongoing part of my professional development. I selected four magazines to submit to during this project, but I plan to continue to send out submissions until the novella is accepted somewhere. Of course, this process won’t be a one time thing either; I will have to repeat this process with every creative work I produce for publication.

The whole process from the very first idea I had for this story that became the novella *The Necromancer* to its completed revisions, ready for publication took about four years. A friend had suggested I write a story about a barista on Valentine’s Day set in a fantasy world. I wrote a few pages of the opening, toying with the characters of Silver and Varior and then I got stuck and put it away for a while. Then in fiction seminar, two and a half years later, I thought this story would be a prime candidate for turning into my novella. Because of the deadlines enforced by the class, and the help of my critique group, I was able to finish the story I had been stuck on for so long. I was pretty happy with how it turned out at the end of the semester and I again put it away for about a year. When this Capstone project was in its early stages of
development I knew I wanted to explore the publishing industry and try to revise and submit some of my work for publication. *The Necromancer* felt like the most complete and best piece I had but I didn’t know if anyone published novella length work. My Capstone advisor assured me that some literary magazines do publish novellas and sent me on my way with several copies of the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. With my completed novella and literary magazines in mind, I designed the project that became my Capstone this semester.

The first stage of the project was revising the novella. The revisions were particularly challenging for me. I tend to have a hard time wanting to change what I have written in the first draft. My Capstone advisor really pushed me to think about world building. In the first draft of the novella, the plot and characters came first and the world came later, and I just sort of made it up as I went along. But for a revised, polished, ready for publication piece, I needed to think more deeply about the history of the world and the people that lived there, and the rules for magic. I read a lot of articles about world building from publications like *Publisher’s Weekly* and *Writer’s Digest*. These included interviews with writers like Margaret Atwood, N. K. Jemisin, and Leigh Bardugo. All of them discussed making the created world believable so that there appears to be more under the surface of what the reader sees. I used my readings and journal entries to help me flesh out the fantasy world of my novella. I wrote a lot of notes and histories of the world that did not actually appear in the novella, but did a lot to inform the action and back stories. It helped me with continuity errors and believability.

One of the other difficult parts of revising is know what not to revise. I had to be able to identify what was working in the story and not mess with that. Just like overworking a painted canvas, it is possible to revise too much. Knowing when to stop revising was one of the
challenges for me; I always felt like I should read it over just one more time before I could send it out.

I had a hard time finding magazines to send my work. At the time I was researching magazines, there didn’t seem to be many that were publishing novella length work, publishing genre work, and currently accepting submissions. I had a long list of magazines I wanted to submit to but not all of them were accepting submissions at this time. I think just because of the timing of the project, many magazines were closing for submissions in early March and others weren’t opening for submissions again until April and May. I picked four magazines to submit to for the project, but I expect to send more submissions as more magazines and contests open for submissions.

I think the worst part of the process for me was writing the cover letters. Every article I read about writing cover letters had slightly different suggestions about what to include and what not to include. It’s really stressful to have that be the first impression you make on the editor. It’s also really difficult to distill a whole 24,000 word project down into just one page that is going to make the editor want to read your work. Even if the work itself is very good, the cover letter has to represent the writer and the work well and not be a barrier to the story.

As far as the submission process, it’s probably the most nerve-wracking part of being a writer. There’s also the formatting of the manuscript and trying to make sure you’re meeting all the requirements that each magazine has for formatting, and then making sure to upload the correctly formatted version of the manuscript to the right place. As well as making sure you’ve got the right cover letter going to the right magazine. I definitely didn’t want to send the Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction a cover letter addressed to the editor of Driftwood Press.
Even after triple checking each submission, there was still a moment of panic after I hit submit and thought, “Ah! I can’t take it back now.”

I have submitted to the Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, the Clay Reynolds Novella Prize from Texas Review Press, and Driftwood Press. I tried to submit to Deep Magic literary magazine, but I had some trouble with their website; they don’t use Submittable (an online tool many magazines use for submissions) and for some reason I couldn’t get the form to submit. I tried to send them a message, but they only have one of those Contact Us forms on their website, and when I tried to submit a message there I got a “There was an error trying to send your message, try again later” message. I didn’t know what to do since there was no email or even physical address listed.

I have received an email from F&SF; I have already been rejected. That response was much quicker than I expected. I thought I’d have 8 weeks to feel quietly hopeful that my story was still in consideration. I did not really expect to be published by F&SF since they are a very prestigious and well respected literary magazine. Not many writers who have never been published get their first publication there. However, the note from the editor was nice and he said he hoped that I’d keep them in mind for the future. From the Rappahannock Review, this would be what we call a warm rejection, which is meant to be encouraging so that the writer wants to submit to the magazine again, as opposed to a cold rejection which does not encourage the writer to send more work. Every published writer has stories about how many times they were rejected before becoming bestselling authors (except for Diana Gabaldon and Andy Weir, but they’re not the norm), but knowing that doesn’t really make the process any easier.
I have some doubts about Clay Reynolds and Driftwood; neither magazine says what genre they’re looking for but I sort of expect them to pick something more in the vein of literary fiction. Hopefully I’ll be able to submit to Deep Magic eventually. I plan to keep an eye out for some of the other magazines that were on my list but not currently accepting submissions, so I can submit to them sometime in the future.

This semester I was the Editor in Chief of the Rappahannock Review, UMW’s literary magazine. From reading for the Rappahannock Review as an editor, I know that bad cover letters really bias me against the story. I almost don’t even want to open submissions with bad cover letters, and I’m guessing some journals or agents probably don’t open submissions with bad cover letters. Being able to read other writer’s cover letters was helpful in giving me insight into writing my own. Another thing that was pretty clear as an editor was whether submissions were polished stories or first drafts. Even if it was a pretty good story, if there were typos or grammatical mistakes it reflected really poorly on the professionalism of the writer. Perhaps the most frustrating thing was not having the time to give each writer personalized feedback about their work, or being able to tell them how close they were to publication. As a writer, you only get the rejection, you don’t get to see how long the editorial team spent discussing your piece and how close you were to an acceptance.

Before beginning this project, I knew very little about literary magazines and had only the vaguest understanding of the publishing process. I’m very glad I got to focus more on the revising aspect of writing since it’s so important and isn’t always something we had time for in my previous creative writing classes. I consider myself a much more knowledgeable and skilled writer after this project.
As a senior, it’s time for me to transition to life after UMW. I think this process has taught me a lot and I’m really glad I got to experience both sides of the publishing industry, as an editor and as a submitting writer. I hope my experiences with the Rappahannock Review can help me be a better editor of my own work, and maybe lead to a job in editing or publishing. I know my experience submitting my work has helped further my understanding of how professional writers get published. I plan to continue sending submissions of my novella until it is published. I hope to also write a novel set in the same world of my novella, maybe with a few of the characters from *The Necromancer* making cameos. The last part of my project was creating a Domain of One’s Own with the Digital Knowledge Center. I plan to use my website as a professional writer’s website which will help me grow my online presence.

If I’ve learned anything from the outbreak of COVID-19 it is that we will always need artists. My parents always wanted me to be an engineer or a doctor or a computer programmer, and I’ve heard the “Oh, you’re an English major, so what are you going to do with that?” line so many times. I think it’s pretty clear that the world needs medical professionals, grocery store workers, and delivery drivers, but the world also needs artists. Without music, TV, movies, theater, and books, we’re just surviving, not living.

COVID-19 has disrupted my post-graduation plans, but even if I am stuck inside at home all summer and into the fall, I will be able to do one of the things I planned: revising a novel I have written and writing query letters for agents for my novel.
Dear [editor],

It’s Valentine’s Day and Silver’s parents are coming to dinner, expecting to meet the suitor Silver has dutifully told them of in her letters home. Unfortunately, Silver doesn’t actually have a suitor. So she decides to raise one from the dead. What could go wrong?

THE NECROMANCER is a 23,500 word humorous fantasy novella set in the Kingdom of Meryn on the edge of the magical Wildwood. Waypoints connect this magical place to the mortal world where tourists, commercial holidays, and even goblins can travel freely between.

Krista Beucler is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in creative writing at the University of Mary Washington in Virginia. If published, this would be her first publication. She is an avid reader, cat-lover, and traveler, though she always loves coming home to her native Colorado.

Sincerely,
Krista Beucler
Dear [editor],

It’s Valentine’s Day and Silver Nightbrace’s parents are coming to dinner, expecting to meet the suitor Silver has dutifully told them of in her letters home. Unfortunately, Silver doesn’t actually have a suitor. On her break at the apothecary, where she works as a barista, she decides to raise a boyfriend from the dead. Necromancy can’t be that hard, right?

THE NECROMANCER is a 23,500 word humorous fantasy novella set in the Kingdom of Meryn on the edge of the magical Wildwood. Waypoints connect this magical place to the mortal world where tourists, commercial holidays, and even goblins can travel freely between. Join Silver and her corpse-boyfriend on their adventure across the Kingdom of Meryn, through the city of London, into the Winter Forest of the Wildwood, and deep underground in the goblin stronghold.

Originally from Colorado, Krista Beucler is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in creative writing at the University of Mary Washington in Virginia. If published, this would be her first publication. Her social distancing hobbies during this time of COVID-19 include scrapbooking, reading, washing her hands, and cuddling her cat.

Thank you for your consideration,
Krista Beucler
Final Cover Letters

The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction
P. O. Box 8420
Surprise, AZ 85374

Dear C.C. Finlay,

It’s Valentine’s Day and Silver Nightbrace’s parents are coming to dinner, expecting to meet the suitor Silver has dutifully told them of in her letters home. Unfortunately, Silver doesn’t actually have a suitor. On her break at the apothecary, where she works as a barista, she decides to raise a boyfriend from the dead. Necromancy can’t be that hard, right?

THE NECROMANCER is a 23,778 word humorous fantasy novella set in the Kingdom of Meryn on the edge of the magical Wildwood. Waypoints connect this magical place to the mortal world where tourists, commercial holidays, and even goblins can travel freely between. Fans of fantasy will enjoy this lighthearted adventure-turned-love story that spans across the Kingdom of Meryn, through the city of London, into the Winter Forest of the Wildwood, deep underground in the goblin stronghold, and past even the boundaries of Death.

Thank you for your commitment to publishing great work in the fantasy and science fiction genres. I very much enjoy reading your magazine and it would be an honor to have my work appear in your pages.

Originally from Colorado, Krista Beucler is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in creative writing at the University of Mary Washington in Virginia. She is currently the Editor-in-Chief of the Rappahannock Review, the literary journal published by the University of Mary Washington. If published, this would be her first publication.

Thank you for your consideration,

Krista Beucler
601 Fossil Creek Drive
Fort Collins, CO 80526
krbeucler@gmail.com
Dear Hannah Pittard,

It’s Valentine’s Day and Silver Nightbrace’s parents are coming to dinner, expecting to meet the suitor Silver has dutifully told them of in her letters home. Unfortunately, Silver doesn’t actually have a suitor. On her break at the apothecary, where she works as a barista, she decides to raise a boyfriend from the dead. Necromancy can’t be that hard, right?

THE NECROMANCER is an approximately 24,000 word humorous fantasy novella set in the Kingdom of Meryn on the edge of the magical Wildwood. Waypoints connect this magical place to the mortal world where tourists, commercial holidays, and even goblins can travel freely between. Fans of fantasy will enjoy this lighthearted adventure-turned-love story that spans across the Kingdom of Meryn, through the city of London, into the Winter Forest of the Wildwood, deep underground in the goblin stronghold, and past even the boundaries of Death.

Please note: no table of contents has been included in the manuscript because the novella is not separated into chapters or parts.

Originally from Colorado, Krista Beucler is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in creative writing at the University of Mary Washington in Virginia. She is currently the Editor-in-Chief of the Rappahannock Review, the literary journal published by the University of Mary Washington. If published, this would be her first publication.

Thank you for your consideration,

Krista Beucler
601 Fossil Creek Drive
Fort Collins, CO 80526
krbeucler@gmail.com
Beucler

Driftwood Press

Dear James McNulty,

It’s Valentine’s Day and Silver Nightbrace’s parents are coming to dinner, expecting to meet the suitor Silver has dutifully told them of in her letters home. Unfortunately, Silver doesn’t actually have a suitor. On her break at the apothecary, where she works as a barista, she decides to raise a boyfriend from the dead. Necromancy can’t be that hard, right?

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Thank you for your consideration,

Krista Beucler
601 Fossil Creek Drive
Fort Collins, CO 80526
krbeucler@gmail.com
Dear Brendon Taylor,

It’s Valentine’s Day and Silver Nightbrace’s parents are coming to dinner, expecting to meet the suitor Silver has dutifully told them of in her letters home. Unfortunately, Silver doesn’t actually have a suitor. On her break at the apothecary, where she works as a barista, she decides to raise a boyfriend from the dead. Necromancy can’t be that hard, right?

THE NECROMANCER is a 23,772 word humorous fantasy novella set in the Kingdom of Meryn on the edge of the magical Wildwood. Waypoints connect this magical place to the mortal world where tourists, commercial holidays, and even goblins can travel freely between. Fans of fantasy will enjoy this lighthearted, family friendly adventure-turned-love story that spans across the Kingdom of Meryn, through the city of London, into the Winter Forest of the Wildwood, deep underground in the goblin stronghold, and past even the boundaries of Death.

Originally from Colorado, Krista Beucler is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in creative writing at the University of Mary Washington in Virginia. She is currently the Editor-in-Chief of the Rappahannock Review, the literary journal published by the University of Mary Washington. If published, this would be her first publication.

Thank you for your consideration,

Krista Beucler  
601 Fossil Creek Drive  
Fort Collins, CO 80526  
krbeucler@gmail.com
Selected Journal Entries

Journal 2: 2/3


Writer’s Digest: 20 Things to Consider When Building Fantasy Worlds 9/2/18

Guest columnist Sara Raasch provides a list of things to think about while building the world for a fantasy novel. She is the author of These Rebel Waves and Snow Like Ashes, both set in fantasy worlds. Her list includes things like the topography, origin, mythology, population, language, level of development, economy, division of power, and system of magic among others. I thought those were really interesting and useful things to think about, though they seem daunting. I felt like I could answer some of those same questions about my fantasy world in The Necromancer, but definitely not all of them. For this journal I’m going to try to answer her 20 questions.

1. Country/Place Name: The Kingdom of Meryn (named after the first king’s wife), Ening City (the capital city of Meryn), The Wildwood (where the Fae and most magical creatures live)

2. Population: there are many fewer Fae than there used to be. No more than 10,000. Meryn is a small kingdom, probably about a half million with most of the population concentrated in Ening City and other coastal cities.

3. Topography: Ening City is a coastal, shipping city with a climate similar to Paris. The Kingdom of Meryn, is mostly temperate forests and farmland, bordering the Wildwood. The Wildwood is divided into 4 forests (winter, summer, spring, autumn) each ruled over by a different Fae lord or lady. A mountain range divides the forest where the dwarves live.

4. Origin: The Kingdom of Meryn, populated mostly by humans, was settled 200 years ago by colonizers from our world. The Fae and many other magical creatures were subsequently confined to the Wildwood. It occurs to me now that if Meryn was settled by colonists 200 years ago, that would be about 1800, so it wouldn’t make much sense for the style of the kingdom to be like the Middle Ages. So either the kingdom had to have been colonized longer ago, or the styles of Meryn are from the 1800s, or they were like the 1800s but have now become similar to ours. I think I’ll have them colonize longer ago.

5. Mythologies: There are many stories about how the Fae are evil and dangerous and that those who go into the Wildwood don’t come back out.

6. Holidays: They definitely celebrate most of the commercial holidays we celebrate here, similar to how some other countries have adopted the commercial Halloween from the US. They also celebrate harvest festivals and some holidays and feast days from the middle ages.

7. Style/Inspirations: Good question. I mention Silver’s skirts, boots and the pouch at her belt, but I don’t give much description to how people are dressed. I guess I envision your stereotypical Pirates of the Caribbean meets Lord of the Rings outfits, or like the TV show
Merlin. Corsets, white shirts and heavy skirts for peasant women, cloaks, boots, and tunics for men. My original thought was kind of Middle Ages-like, but like mentioned in question 4, that doesn’t make a whole lot of sense. I guess Pirates of the Caribbean is set in the 1750s...

8. Terminology/Language differentiation: some spells use now defunct languages. The colonists were English so Meryners speak English. The Fae have their own language but can speak any language. Dwarves and goblins also speak their own language but most can speak English too.

9. How do they keep time: In the Wildwood time doesn’t much matter because the Fae are immortal and the seasons don’t change. In the Kingdom of Meryn time passes the same as here.

10. Highest level of development: They have magic but not technology like electric lights, cars, or guns. So definitely more of a Middle Ages vibe than an 1800s vibe.

11. Politics: Meryn is ruled by a king who isn’t very effective. The goblins run a black market trade and have bought out most of the king’s advisors, so they effectively run the government. In the Wildwood, each Fae lord or lady rules his or her own forest (The Raven King rules the Winter Forest, the Erl King rules the Summer Forest, the Blossom Queen rules the Spring Forest, and the Bear Queen rules the Autumn Forest). But the Raven King is kind of in charge of all the Fae.

12. Ruling Family/Group: Maybe the goblins have family groups vying for power? Or warlords?

13. Division of Power: The King is mostly a figurehead and the goblins mostly control politics, but there’s also a lot of infighting among the goblins. The king had the ring that contains the Raven King’s name and so controls him and the other Fae but he didn’t know how powerful and important the ring was (the knowledge of it was lost through generations). The goblins don’t know how powerful the ring is either, they just want it back because it was made by goblins and is rumored to have magical properties.

14. Economy: Trading economy, Meryn ships trade with other countries across the sea, as well as getting goods from our world through Waypoints.


16. Most common prejudices: humans and Fae generally hate each other. Some humans think magic is evil. Goblins hate everyone and everyone hates them.

17. Greatest strengths: The Waypoints make travel between this world and Meryn and the Wildwood pretty easy. There are Waypoints all over the earth that lead to different places in Meryn and the Wildwood.

18. Recent wars: There was a war when the humans came to colonize the Wildwood (it was once all Wildwood and dwarves’ mountains) but the humans cut down some trees and pushed the Fae back (like we did to the Native Americans).

19. Surrounding countries/peoples and relationships: there is tension between the humans and the Fae because the humans trapped the Fae in the Wildwood.

20. Magic system: Some creatures have an affinity for certain kinds of magic, particularly Fae for natural magic, pixies for mischief magic, and dwarves for craft making and way finding. Humans are capable of learning magic from books or teachers but rarely
have natural talents. Witches and wizards both exist in this world, but won’t be particularly relevant. Unions between Fae and human result in a demi-fae who can pass as human and can usually do magic. All magic has a price and true names have power. The Waypoints were created by a spell gone wrong, which ripped little holes in the fabric between worlds.

Writer’s Digest: World-Building Tips from the Masters 5/21/19

WD talks to five speculative fiction and fantasy authors to get their take on world building. Brandon Sanderson invokes the metaphor of the iceberg; the top is what the reader can see and what the writer has to create, the bottom is what the reader has to assume is there under the surface but doesn’t necessarily need to be created by the author. The author just has to make the reader believe that it’s there. Margaret Atwood talks about learning simple things like what the characters would have for breakfast and where they would get the food and how they would cook it and what they would wear while eating it, etc. She takes a pretty simple concept and finds out everything she can about it. V. E. Schwab sees the world as a character, as the first character in the story and has to flesh out the world’s norms and cultural expectations before anything else. Chuck Wendig starts with the story and uses the world building to support the story. He doesn’t want the world to eclipse the story. Finally Leigh Bardugo (one of my favorites) talks about supporting how the reader can understand the story from the first chapter, what context they need to understand what’s going on. She says the hardest part for her is giving the right amount of information, and not too much.

I’m going to consider Margaret Atwood’s breakfast question. The morning the story starts Silver probably didn’t have a very good breakfast, that’s part of the reason she was in such a bad mood. The apothecary sells little pastries like croissants, banana bread, bagels, fairy cakes (little, airy, sugary things that can have different magical effects depending on the type of frosting on them; for example chocolate frosting does nothing, but a precise mix of lemon and lavender would cause you to grow larger, and bergamot helps you remember and anise helps you forget). Silver probably had a croissant that morning and cup of black coffee. A lot of the bread recipes come from our world. Some ingredients, like wheat, can be grown in Meryn but others, like bananas have to be imported from our world. Some ingredients also come from neighboring countries across the sea, like exotic fruits. Inherently magical ingredients come from the Wildwood or from across the sea, but mundane ingredients can be mixed in a way to create a magical result.

Writer’s Digest: The WD Interview: Author N.K. Jemisin on Creating New Worlds and Playing with Imagination 3/29/19

I thought this article was going to be about world building but it wasn’t. Jemisin is a black fantasy writer that has recently switched to writing full-time with the support of readers on Patreon. So a lot of the article was about that. She did mention briefly that she sometimes writes shorter stories to sort of test out a fantasy world before trying to write a whole novel. That’s sort of what I’m doing with The Necromancer; I have an idea for a full novel set in the same world but I’ll need to hammer out some more details.
The history of Faerie

“They say the Raven King was sculpted from a snow drift. No one knows by whom. Some say the world made itself for him, but I don’t think so. I’m sure the Wildwood existed long before the Raven King or the Fae or the nymphs or the myriad magical beasts that live beneath the trees.

They say the Raven King came first of the four, but no one knows for sure. The Erl King was born of summer moss and the Blossom Queen grew from the foam of the rilling brooks and the Autumn Queen was made of falling leaves. They were children together, the four rulers of the forest, raised by wolves and bears and ravens and deer. And all the creatures of the forest felt their power and knew the time of the Fae was upon them.

The Fae ruled the Wildwood for centuries in harmony until a spell gone wrong opened up the first waypoint and magic began to leak out and other things, less friendly things began to leak in.” —bedtime story.

The goblins came first, tunneling in from their underground world (a volcanic planet) and soon they had built underground warrens under the Wildwood. They are constantly battling each other for territory. The can’t be above ground during the day, the sunlight burns them, even through clouds. They have very little interest in gaining territory above ground however, so the Fae tolerate having them underground. The goblins pay tribute to the Fae.

The dwarves came in from their mountain world and built workshops in the mountain caves. There are some magical hot springs and lava flows that the dwarves find useful and different from their home world. No Fae lived in the mountains above the treelike and the dwarves also pay tribute. In exchange they sometimes get help from the Fae with enchantments or are allowed to use magical wood. Dwarves can create magical items by working with magical materials and can do way finding magic, but can’t spell cast.

Goblins also have forges and metalworks which they use for weapons and jewelry. Dwarves make just about everything.

In England in the 1100s (around 1189 under King Richard I) Crusaders set out to ‘liberate’ the Middle East from the Muslims. By accident, a group of crusaders stumbled through a waypoint in Jerusalem and ended up in the Wildwood.

Their first meeting with the Fae was fairly peaceful. But the Fae wouldn’t convert to Christianity and the crusaders then assumed the Fae were pagan animists who worshipped nature spirits and trees. They started cutting down the trees. This greatly angered the Fae but also weakened them. The crusaders had iron armor which made them immune to spells. After cutting down trees along the edge of the Wildwood, they sowed iron into the soil so no magic trees could grow again and the Fae could not pass the boundary. The crusaders would have wiped out the Fae out completely but the Raven King negotiated with the leader of the group and gave up his true name so that his people would be safe in the Wildwood and the crusaders would stop cutting the trees. In return for a treaty with the humans and power over the Fae, the goblins made a magic ring to contain the name of the Raven King. This bound the Raven King to the crusade leader, so he was often called upon to do magic for him.
The leader of the crusade renamed himself Solomon (after King Solomon from the Bible; I changed this from Andronicus) and pronounced himself king of this new land (he told his men God had given him a vision in a dream of him ruling a new holy land, safe for Christians). Exploring, they found other waypoints to other parts of the world and they established guards to keep out people they didn’t want in their new country. All the men on the crusade (there were probably about 1000) were able to go home and bring wives and families along with livestock and seeds, secretly. King Richard I never knew what happened to this group and they were known as the Lost Crusaders.

Solomon kept the real power of the ring in which he had imprisoned the Raven King’s name a secret; he only claimed that the ring was a gift from God and proved that he was ordained to rule.

Solomon had four wives like Jacob and had 12 daughters, which was very frustrating to him. In exchange for a son, Solomon traded all his daughters to the Raven King, who cast a spell on one of the wives to ensure she’d have a boy. The lieutenant, who had been lined up to marry the eldest daughter and be king, was left both wifeless and out of the line of succession. This drove him to murder the king, all the king’s wives and the unborn baby. He blamed the Raven King publicly for the deaths, claiming the spell had been a trick, a sickness that killed the king and his wives and the future king. The lieutenant took over and his line has been uninterrupted until our story.

For about 100 years the Kingdom of Meryn guarded its waypoints jealously and tried to limit travel between this world and theirs. They didn’t want the English to claim sovereignty over them and they didn’t want undesirable people moving there. But technological advances stagnated and they couldn’t get a lot of the food they wanted from the old world.

So they opened up the waypoints and sent envoys through, claiming to be an independent country interested in trade. Some limited travel and trading occurred. Iron tools and technology could be used in Faerie but electronics with iron in them don’t work in Meryn because of the magic in the atmosphere. For this reason, there aren’t cars or cellphones. I think there is electricity (as far as I know it uses copper and not iron). They do have things like coffee makers, gas stoves, cameras, movies. They still celebrate mostly Christian holidays.

Tourists and immigrants: For a long time the only people who could move to Meryn were devout Catholics, until about the Enlightenment and then ideas about religious freedom proliferated into Meryn. The church is still important and the king is still head of the church, but they have become more tolerant. Tourist visas are hard to get and there aren’t many of them awarded each year. Tourists are required to travel with designated guides, after a rash of backpackers went missing in the Wildwood and were never seen again.

Waypoints: Waypoints are controlled by border security checkpoints (mostly, all the known ones are) and traveling between them is much like traveling between countries. (Think of waypoints like the windows from the Golden Compass books, like a slit that was cut between worlds. They can’t be closed though.) There are waypoints in the Wildwood but the Fae aren’t allowed to go through them. There is so much iron in the human world that they can’t even cross. The creatures of the Wildwood (nymphs, dryads, pixies, woodland animals, unicorns, centaurs, etc.) are also sensitive to iron and won’t cross waypoints. The Fae have put repellent spells on
their waypoints that pretty much keep people from coming through unless the Fae want them to. Animals from our world (horses, cows, goats, pigs, cats, etc.) have no problem with iron or crossing waypoints, though some wild species don’t manage to survive after crossing the waypoint because of the magic in the soil and atmosphere (this controls invasive animal species). Seeds were brought through the waypoints into Meryn for farming. Other invasive species of plants have blown through. Some strains are killed by the magic in the soil, others flourish. This is becoming a problem for the Wildwood, as the native trees and plants are being choked out, but this won’t be addressed in this story.

Some known waypoints (meaning someone controls them, a country a family, a gang):
- a pub in east London connects to Silver’s apothecary
- a phone booth in Trafalgar Square is the official tourist entrance and connects to a tourist information station in downtown Ening City
- a rug shop in Fez, Morocco
- a staircase in Valparaiso, Chile connects to the goblin tunnels
- an alley in La Boca, Buenos Aires, Argentina
- a mask shop in Venice, Italy

Some unknown waypoints (meaning they aren’t guarded or controlled):
- a tree in Hampstead Heath connects to the Winter Forest
- the Roman Baths in Bath connect to a spring in the Spring Forest
- a field in Kansas, USA

Fae and Demi-Fae: There are rarely marriages between Fae and humans. Fae are immortal and there are rarely full Fae children. The origin of the Fae is not known but it is conjectured that they came from nature spirits and nymphs and dryads. Occasionally humans wander into the Wildwood which sometimes results in unions between Fae and humans. These children live unnaturally long lives, but not forever, and have an affinity for magic and an immunity to iron. (There are some questions about iron in human blood and viability of pregnancies. Perhaps only people with iron deficiency can mate successfully with Fae.) The Spring Court likes to keep a few humans around, mostly as servants/slaves (paid in drugs). The Spring Court is known for its hedonism and psychedelic drugs. Fae from different courts have different magical affinities: Spring-plants, growing things; Autumn-healing; Summer-animals, shapeshifting; Winter-black magic, necromancy. The most powerful Fae can master any of the affinities, but will be strongest in one area, usually corresponding to what court they live in. Simple things like truth potions, compulsion, small remedies, etc. all Fae can do.

Demi-Fae born to Fae mothers are usually sent to the human world as changelings, outcast from Fae society. They are also not likely to survive because of the iron in the blood of the fetus. Demi-Fae born to humans are usually kept and are sometimes the family is treated with suspicion and outcast from human society. But these children have an affinity for magic so they often become witches or wizards.

Long enough ago that everyone has forgotten about it, a female ancestor of Silver’s disappeared into the Wildwood for a year and returned with a baby. So Silver has a Fae ancestor
somewhere in her line. Probably a fairly unimportant Winter Fae, maybe a guard in the Raven King’s castle. He’s still alive and the Raven King probably knows him. Because she has a Winter Fae’s blood, she has more of an affinity for black magic, including necromancy.

Readings: Publisher’s Weekly: Ask the Editor: Tips on Revising a Novel 7/28/17; Publisher’s Weekly: Ask the Editor: When to Stop Revising 10/25/19

Publisher’s Weekly: Ask the Editor: Tips on Revising a Novel 7/28/17

The fist suggestion is to put the manuscript away for 2 weeks, check, I put it away for like a year. Then you can come back to it with fresh eyes. The editor suggests: “making sure that the story is worth telling and you have told it well; the opening sentence is an attention grabber and helps the reader anticipate what’s to come; the characters are believable and well developed; the plot moves along swiftly without repetitions and the storyline always holds the reader’s attention; and the prose is clear, engaging, grammatically correct, and concise—try to lose the adverbs.” I do think my story is worth telling and I think I have told it pretty well, though I definitely see room for improvement in description, continuity, and perhaps pacing. I think the opening sentence is an attention grabber, or definitely the first 2 sentences since it sets up that we’re not in our world, but the worlds are connected. I think the characters are believable and well developed. The plot does move along swiftly, but perhaps too swiftly at times? The story takes place in just 3 days and sometimes I wonder if that’s too quick. Overall I think the prose is clear and engaging. I’m working on making it more concise in places and I feel like I’ve fixed most of the grammar errors. Also, I kinda like adverbs. I know you shouldn’t overuse them, but I think a few can’t hurt.

Publisher’s Weekly: Ask the Editor: When to Stop Revising 10/25/19

The editor talks about an author they worked with who spent a year and a half revising and the result wasn’t much different from the draft they had a year and half before, except that it had “lost some of its energy and freshness.” In art they always talk about not overworking a painting and I think that’s relevant for writing too. The editor points out, “There’s a point at which you’re not making the book better; you’re just making it different.” The hard part, of course is recognizing when that is. The suggestions for getting better at this include trusting your instincts and not changing things that don’t leap out at you as inaccurate, intrusive, or ridiculous, and asking several trusted readers to look at it for you. I have sent it to two trusted readers, one of whom has sent me back comments, the other is still working on it. I might send it to one more. The editor also suggests hiring a freelance editor, which is a good idea but not something I would do at this stage in my career.
Readings: Bartleby the Scavenger by Katie Boyer from Fantasy & Science Fiction 2014

This was a science fiction novella set in a post apocalyptic southern USA. I liked the way the author built the world and gave it to the reader bit by bit. The story starts at the end of the narrator’s life. You know it’s science fiction by the end of the first paragraph, because the narrator says that he is being ‘decommissioned’ in the morning for being old and injured. The story is structured as like a last confession that he writes in his cell before his execution. The author hints at the dystopian society and all-powerful Mayor that brought the narrator, Boss, to this point. I liked how she did this. She gave us enough information to be interested, but not so little that we were confused, and not so much that we were overwhelmed or were drawn out of the story.

After introducing Boss and the framing of the story as a last confession, the story circles back to the beginning where we learn how the world as we knew it ends. A civil war between Democrats and Republicans results in the bombing of the southern US and all of Boss’s family is killed. He manages to move to Brook, a town in the mountains that managed to escape destruction. Almost immediately a woman named Peighton has assumed control over the town and locked it down to keep the residents safe. Boss convinces Peighton that he has useful skills to offer so he is allowed to stay. Then we see how Peighton gradually gains more and more power and slowly starts to punish people who aren’t productive enough and eventually to ‘decommission’ them.

Another thing I thought was done well was the development of Boss from the beginning of his story to the end. At the beginning he sort of sets out to tell the real story of how terrible Peighton is in the hopes that someone can stop her, but by the end he realizes that his own actions have been essential to help Peighton get where she is. He thinks he is trying to save himself and his workers by helping her get what she wants, but really he’s just hurting the whole community by cementing her power.

Right at the end we get one last twist. Boss tells us that he had heard on his scavenging trips outside of Brook that it’s possible that the rest of the USA still exists and it was only the southeast that was destroyed in the civil war. He told Peighton this but she decided to keep it a secret from the rest of the town, so the last part of his confession is hoping that someone will find out that maybe Brook isn’t the last civilization left.

I can definitely see that it would be great press to be mentioned in Locus, either to have a story reviewed, or to be interviewed, or to be on one of their lists, either recommended reading or even just their list of what’s new.

I didn’t know novellas and novelettes could win Hugo and Nebula awards, that’s cool. The form must be somewhat more prominent than I thought it was. And I see that both the Hugo and Nebula nominations for 2007 and 2008 include novellas and novelettes published in F&SF.

I like the Locus Looks at Short Fiction columns. There’s almost always a recommended story or several from F&SF. There are a few other regulars like The Del Rey Book of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Asimov’s Science Fiction, Apex, and Analog, but F&SF definitely appears the most regularly.

In their year in review there are a bunch of charts about book sales and publishers and types of books published. I’ll be honest, charts sort of make my eyes glaze over—reasons I didn’t become a scientist—but it is useful to see how many SF or Fantasy novels have been published year to year (SF held steady from 1996 to 2004 by Fantasy increased), or which publishers are publishing the most books, or which publishers published the most of Locus’s Recommended books (Harper Collins, Tor, and Penguin Group).

I loved reading interviews with authors I like (somehow you managed to give me only copies of Locus with interviews with Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett, which is just fine with me).

I downloaded their 2018 magazine from their website and I’m interested to see some news related to Tor. It looks like their publishing team went through some significant changes, so I wonder if that has anything to do with the fact that they haven’t been accepting submissions since 2018. They were a place I wanted to submit but their latest update on their website says something like ‘we probably won’t reopen for submissions in 2019, we’ll keep you posted.’ But as far as I can tell, they’re still not open. Not sure what that means for their future.
The Necromancer Manuscript

The Necromancer

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23,778 words
The Necromancer

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Silver hated Valentine’s Day. It was just another one of those cheap holidays brought over from the mortal world. An excuse to jack up the prices on love potions, beauty spells, and already supernaturally expensive imported chocolate.

People kept bringing flowers into the apothecary and Silver had to smile and tell them, “What lovely flowers!” and “Happy Valentine’s Day to you, too!” as she gave them their drink orders.

“Coffee, goblin roast, with a shot of pender tree sap coming up. Always good for the nerves. You planning on popping the question?” The young man in question smiled shyly as she gave him his coffee. She wanted to throw it all over his neatly pressed tunic and leggings.

“We’re running out of powdered daisy,” Silver told Caton, the young herbalist who owned the apothecary. “Everyone wants it in their coffee this morning.”
Caton winked cheekily and pushed a strand of curling, honey-colored hair out of her face. “Love a good aphrodisiac on Valentine’s Day, eh? I’ll just pop out to the garden and pick some more, shall I?”

Silver turned back to the counter, her customer service smile firmly in place and continued to take orders from happy-go-lucky couples. Sunlight was streaming into the shop from the wide windows and the scent of coffee and spices hung in the air. Caton had hired some cherubs to flutter about the ceiling and play lutes and tiny harps softly. Periodically, one would throw confetti down upon the heads of whoever was unlucky enough to be standing beneath them. Why anyone thought flying babies were romantic was beyond Silver. She was rather proud of how well she was hiding her hatred.

Aidolyn breezed into the shop an hour late, as usual. Her cloying perfume drifted in clouds about her and her bright lipstick was faintly smudged, Silver guessed, by the man who was riding a white horse toward the castle down the busy cobbled street outside the shop. She didn’t recognize him but Aidolyn was seeing a different knight practically every week so that wasn’t surprising.

“Silvy, my darling!” Aidolyn cooed, giving Silver a kiss on the cheek. “Happy Valentine’s Day!” Silver hated when Aidolyn called her ‘Silvy’ but she had given up trying to tell Aidolyn that.

“Please be on time every once in a while,” Silver said but for all the notice Aidolyn took, she might have been talking to a hedgerow.
Aidolyn put on an apron and began to make the orders that were backing up: a cup of fairy tea (good for loosening morals and impeding judgment), and two mugs of strong, black peasant coffee with a shot each of wimblenut cream (for the passion).

“Do you have any Valentine’s plans? Got a beau?” Aidolyn asked Silver brightly.

“Of course, I don’t,” snapped Silver.

“Someone’s as bitter as coffee this morning.” Aidolyn giggled at her own wittiness.

“Maybe if you came to work on time, you’d see me in a better mood.”

Aidolyn stuck out her lower lip in a pout. “I tried to be here on time, I really did. But Sir Gladen is, well, something of a romantic.” She winked and Silver rolled her eyes. “You would not believe how hard it was to get out of bed this morning. And he kept hiding my clothes!”

“Ugh, stop. I don’t want to hear it.”

“He’s taking me out on the lake tonight to watch the sunset and drink fine wine,” sighed Aidolyn. “But honestly, Sil, you must have some plan for Valentine’s Day.”

Silver furiously wiped a tankard clean. “If you must know,” she said finally, “my parents are visiting.”

“Oh, won’t that be nice!” cried Aidolyn, her cornflower-blue eyes widening. “After all, Valentine’s Day is meant to be a time spent with all your loved ones.”

Silver didn’t answer. In truth, she was dreading the visit. Her father had business in the city—he carved fine and sometimes magical furniture (it depended on the wood). He and Silver’s mother lived in a village at the border between the Kingdom of Meryn and the Wildwood, a day’s journey from Ening City, but twice a year they came to the city to sell his work. It was very
high quality and many of the nobles and courtiers of the capital city furnished their castles with his pieces. Whenever they visited the city, Silver’s parents always came to stay with her.

Silver liked her parents and had always gotten along quite well with them, even after she had decided to move to the city to study herbs and small magics instead of learning to carve like her big brother, Benjamin (although he made aesthetic, rather than functional pieces).

This time however, Silver dreaded their arrival. Her mother was always reminding her that her uterus wouldn’t be young forever and she needed to get cracking before she shriveled up like an old maid. Silver had gotten so tired of this that she had invented a suitor and had written of him dutifully to her family every month, fabricating a romance that would have been worthy of the bard’s songs. But now they were coming and the game was up.

“It’s your break, luvy,” Aidolyn told her and she sighed with relief.

Silver moved into the storeroom behind the counter where Caton kept her potions and herbs and books. The herbalist herself was still in the garden gathering daisies. Silver shooed Caton’s rumpled, one-eyed cat, Growltiger, off the chair behind the table at the center of the room and sat down. He stalked off in a huff.

A book was sitting propped open on the table. It was open to a page on love potions. Now, love potions were no small magic and Caton was adamant that she did not practice big magic or the black arts.

Silver closed the book to look at the cover. The loopy, gilt script on the leather binding read Solomon Mea’s Guide the Black Arts of Magic. Silver was impressed. Apparently Caton was more devious than she appeared.
Flipping to the contents, Silver ran a finger down the list of spells and potions. A love potion would do if she could only find someone to use it on. She opened the book back to that page and skimmed the directions. She sighed. She didn’t have any bat’s wings or phoenix feathers. It was the full moon but she didn’t have a month to brew it.

She flipped back to the contents. A persuasion draft? But the sheep’s blood had to ferment in an oak barrel and she didn’t have time for that. Perhaps she could turn water to rum. She wondered how drunk her parents would have to be to forget that they had not actually met anyone but would believe her if she insisted they had. But no, it was impractical.

Charming rags to ball gowns and mice into horses: all the godmother essentials, truth serum and all the basic poisons, giving animals the ability to speak… no, none of these would do.

Then Silver’s eyes fell on the last spell in the book, labelled simply ‘Reanimation.’ Now that, she thought, could work.

She thumbed to the correct page. It was faded and there was dirt in the crease—probably, she thought, from the graveyard where the last body had been dug up. She ran an eye over the list of ingredients; it was simple enough, almost deceptively simple, and she had everything in the herbalists’ stores. Convenient.

Silver collected the beetle carcasses (to renew the body), the hummingbird wings (to get the heart beating again), the powdered unicorn horn (to rekindle the life-force), and the dragon shinbone (to balance the humors), and dissolved them in a pot of liquid mercury. She worked quickly since she only had fifteen minutes of her break left and who knew when Caton would be back in from the garden? There was a skull on the table with a stuffed raven perched atop it on
the other side of her cauldron. There was also a dripping candle. It made her feel very arcane and powerful. Only real witches worked in chambers such as these.

“Silver, honey, bring out some more pender sap when you’re done, will you?” called Aidolyn and Silver nearly upended her cauldron.

“Oh, yes, of course,” she called back, trying not to sound guilty.

She pricked her finger and let the drop of blood fall into the cauldron turning the contents magenta. It was the last ingredient. There was an incantation inscribed at the bottom of the page; she would have to do that at the graveyard. Silver poured the purple liquid into several vials (she’d made a triple batch, just in case) and tore the page with the incantation from the book. She hid the two extra vials under the stuffed raven and tucked the third and the incantation into a pouch at her belt. Then she cleaned out the cauldron and generally tried to look innocent when she returned to the bar with more pender sap.

“What’s with the grin?” asked Aidolyn as Silver handed her the pender sap. “Aren’t you in a bad mood today?”

“Yes,” Silver immediately dropped the innocent grin she had been wearing and tried to arrange her features into a more neutral expression.

Silver managed to beg off work a bit early, claiming an upset stomach and a headache. Caton sent her on her way with a poultice for her head and a liquid remedy for the stomach that smelled so strongly of sulfur, Silver suspected it would probably cure anything she had if it didn’t kill her first.
Silver walked to the outskirts to the city where there was a little graveyard that was usually empty of mourners and visitors except at night when the grave robbers, wizards, and witches came for more dubious purposes.

She opened the creaking gate and a chill February wind picked up slightly, sending leaves skittering over the dry ground. Silver felt delightfully excited. She was just like the daring heroines in the dusty, leather-bound books she liked to read so much.

Silver wound her way up and down the overgrown paths scanning the headstones. Some of them were leaning at odd angles, others were crumbling, the words carved into them barely legible. Creeping vines snaked up stones, claiming them for their own. For all of stone’s permanence, Silver suddenly felt that nature always takes back what is hers.

Eventually Silver found a grave that looked fairly fresh, and indeed, the date of death was barely a week prior. She located a spade and a pickax in a gardener’s cottage—luckily the gardener appeared to be out—and set to work unearthing Varior Skogil, as his stone proclaimed in tall, austere letters. He was a young man of twenty-four—at least she was assuming he was a man; Varior sounded like a man’s name to her—who had died the previous Wednesday. She wondered idly of what he had died.

She had never before considered how deep people are buried. It was hot and hard work. Silver paused to tie up her dark purple hair. After three hours, her boots and the hems of her skirts were muddy and Silver was over the whole digging thing. She stopped to rest and pulled out the page she had torn from the spellbook. She flipped it over hoping there might be a helpful grave digging spell there. Someone had written out an incantation in faded handwriting along with the instruction “Bless thy tools.”
Feeling a little silly, Silver said the incantation over her spade and pickax. Nothing happened. Silver sighed and looked up at the sky. It was already late afternoon. The soil was pretty soft but it was still going to take forever. She got back to work. It was a few minutes before she realized that the grave was deepening and widening much faster than she was digging. Plunging the spade into the soil felt like dipping it into water. Barely twenty minutes later, she had reached the coffin.

She used the spade to lever off the lid, and the cheap wood and nails gave easily. Varior was rather handsome for someone who was dead. It had been cold and the body had kept surprisingly well.

Silver climbed out of the hole. For a moment, exhaustion and dizziness swept through her. She knew wouldn’t be able to lift him out of the grave on her own so she’d just have to bring him to life where he was.

“Lords of Winter, Death and Night,” she began chanting a bit nervously. “Release to me this soul, upon lighting and thunder. Though the moon doth howl, let this spirit return to the mortal world to once more inhabit his body. Krewix izseod ab unum sres chanbeo Druzworhot et obetruc!”

Silver opened the magenta vial and poured the liquid over the man’s face. To complete the charm, she spat a glob of saliva onto his forehead, above the place right between his eyes. The liquid began to hiss and steam and Silver hoped she had done the incantation correctly. That last line had included a lot of words she wasn’t sure how to pronounce.

Just as Silver was sure it hadn’t worked, Varior Skogil opened his blue, blue eyes. A grin split his face when he saw her.
“Hello, lovely,” he drawled, “I didn’t know they made witches as pretty as you.”

Silver blushed and then hated herself for it. “I’m not really a witch,” she said.

“Oh?” Corpse-Boy had stood up in his coffin and was now propping an elbow on the edge of the pit. “Then pray, what are you?”

“I’m a barista.”

“How long have I been dead?” asked Varior. “Has the world changed so much that baristas now raise the dead in their spare time?”

Silver offered him a hand and helped him climb out of the grave. His hand was surprisingly warm and alive and she congratulated herself on a job well done. “You died last Wednesday,” she told him, deciding not to address the other question.

“Varior Skogil,” he said, shaking her hand when he was safely on terra firma.

“Silver Nightbrace,” she replied.

“A witch’s name if ever I heard one.” He had very white teeth and somehow he seemed to show all of them when he smiled. It was really a very nice smile.

Silver shrugged. “So, how did you die?”

It was Varior’s turn to shrug. “Oh, I was murdered. But no big deal. Now that I’m back I can make the bastards pay. I must say,” he continued, “you’ve done a marvelous job. I feel just like new. Do this often, do you?”

“Erm,” mumbled Silver, “not really.”

He helped her refill his grave and Silver was slightly nervous that she had brought back such a vengeful corpse. She was suddenly realizing that she didn’t know how to reverse the spell if she needed to.
“So for what dark purpose would a lady such as yourself wish to use a reanimated corpse, especially one so dashing and daring as myself?” he asked as they left the graveyard, both covered in mud.

“Um, well,” began Silver. Her planning hadn’t included the bit where she asked the corpse to pretend to be her boyfriend to meet her family. And what was she going to do afterward? Let him go on his merry way to take vengeance on his murderers? What if he deserved it? What if he was a criminal?

“I’d like you to meet my parents,” Silver said finally.

“Oh,” said Varior, “aren’t you at least going to buy me dinner first? What was your name again? Copper? Goldie?”

“Silv—” Silver started to say before noticing his sly smile and realizing the joke. “Very funny. Look,” she said, “I might have told them I have a boyfriend and they might be visiting tonight and I had to do something.”

“Don’t you think your methods are a little drastic? Not that I’m complaining, of course.”

“I’ve always been over-zealous,” Silver said waving a hand. “But the way I see it, you owe me. You would still be dead if it weren’t for me.”

“True enough, fine lady.”

“Quit with the fine lady nonsense. You’re my boyfriend, you can call me Silver.”

“And how long have we been dating, Goldie?”

Silver couldn’t decide if she was annoyed about the nickname, so she let it pass. “Five months,” she said.

“Five months! And I haven’t proposed? You should dump me.”
“I will. Later. But I need you tonight.”

“Tell me, is it the full moon tonight?”


“Oh no, no, of course not. Are you?”

“No!”

“Well, it’s worth asking.”

“If I was a werewolf, would I be inviting my parents to dinner tonight?”

“You know, that would be a clever hunting strategy.” Varior tilted his head, considering.

Silver whacked him on the arm. “Watch it. I got you out of that grave, I can put you back.” Though she wasn’t actually sure she could.

Varior held up his hands in surrender.

They reached Silver’s cottage presently. She lived in a little house on the edge of a field by the palace stables. Apart from the bathroom, the cottage had just one big room, though Silver preferred to think of it as “open-plan.” Her bed was tucked into a corner by the fireplace and the kitchen was grouped around the gas stove on the other side of the room. There was a fine oak table in the center of the room that her father had made. Silver flipped the light switch, which she still found satisfying. Electric lights were becoming more common for private homes in the Kingdom of Meryn, but they were expensive since all the materials came from the mortal world.

Silver and Varior washed up, in an effort to make it appear that they hadn’t both just crawled out of a hole in the ground. Varior helped Silver prepare dinner and set the table as they awaited the arrival of her parents.
It was all going so well: Silver’s parents had cooed over Varior and he had simpered impressively, good impressions had been made all around, and everyone was now comfortably tipsy. Varior clinked his knife against his glass, “Mr. and Mrs. Nightbrace, it’s been so lovely to finally meet you both and I cannot thank you enough for making me feel so accepted into your loving family.”

Silver snorted but managed to turn it into a cough.

“Now it seems only right to do this with you present. I’ve been thinking about it for a long time but,” he raised his wineglass in Silver’s direction, “will you marry me and make me the happiest man alive?”

Silver’s mouth dropped open in horror as her parents applauded and squealed in delight. “Oh Silver,” her mother said breathlessly. “You could wear the dress I wore.”

Not that horrid, white, lace monstrosity, thought Silver.

“You’ll be married in the Cathedral, of course,” said her father. Silver felt briefly bad for not having been to mass since moving to Ening City, before that was overshadowed by panic at how she was going to get out being engaged to the recently reanimated corpse of a man she had just met.

“Come on now, Goldie,” Varior said, smirking. “Don’t leave me hanging.”

Fortunately, Silver was saved from answering because, at that moment, a pack of goblins broke down the door with a splintering blast. Goblins were only about four and half feet tall, but when twenty or thirty of them were streaming into your house with their slimy gray-green skin and their sharp teeth, all bristling with weapons, they seemed pretty intimidating.
Silver’s father screamed and dove under the hefty table he had designed and built, just as her mother leapt onto the top of the table wielding a heavy metal tankard and screaming like a banshee. She brought the tankard down on the head of the nearest goblin, which crumpled to the floor. Immediately, Varior was locked in combat with several goblins, using one of the ornate candelabra they had set out on the table for ambiance.

Silver was frozen in place as fighting swirled around her. Her father grabbed her hand and yanked her under the table beside him. He shouted something that she didn’t hear but it was probably along the lines of what she was already thinking: Varior is wanted by goblins? Well, fuck.

It occurred to Silver that she should have been more curious about exactly how Varior had ended up dead in the first place.

In the Kingdom of Meryn, no one messed with the goblins. They ran everything under the castle dungeons. They were crime lords and gangsters and masters of the black market. They let King Festus call himself the monarch but everyone knew who was actually running the country. Obviously Varior had upset them somehow, and they had killed him for it. Someone must have seen them walking through town earlier, recognized Varior, and tipped them off.

Stupid, stupid, Silver thought. Why hadn’t she been more careful? He had been murdered! He told her! She should have realized that if the murderers saw him walking around, distinctly not dead, there would be trouble.

She ran through the possibilities in her head. Goblins were still flooding in through the front door. Her mother, who had jumped to the floor, and Varior couldn’t hold them off forever.
“Get ready to run!” she screamed at her father. She surged to her feet, knocking the table over and sending the three remaining candelabra flying onto the bed. Silver grabbed the broom that was leaning against the wall and plunged it into the fire that was hissing and spitting in the fireplace. When it was blazing, she lifted it to the roof and set the thatch on fire. Last, she threw one of her father’s ornately carved stools through the back window.

Varior, Silver’s family and Silver herself escaped out the window as the tiny house went up in flames. Silver’s landlord was not going to be pleased. She imagined trying to explain to him what had happened and gave it up with a sigh.

They made it across the field in the darkness, the only spot of light Silver’s burning house, and stopped in a glade to catch their breath. Silver’s father expressed himself with several well chosen profanities before asking Silver what had happened. She said something diplomatic and reassuring but not memorable and persuaded her parents to go to a nearby inn, which they did without too much grumbling.

When they were gone, Silver turned to Varior with one raised eyebrow.

“I stole the ring of Silas,” he said without preamble.

“You what? No, you didn’t.”

“I mean, I wasn’t alone, I had a team.”

“Wait, wait,” Silver said putting up her hands. “I thought King Festus had the ring. Didn’t he give it to his wife?”

“One of his mistresses actually, but it’s more complicated than that.”

“Start talking.”

“Hey, you brought me back from the dead. I didn’t ask for this.”
“Yes, and now I’m demanding an explanation because I am your benefactor.”

Varior rolled his eyes. “Okay, so like eight hundred years ago the goblins made this epic ring, right?”

“Right,” Silver said even though she didn’t actually know anything about the ring of Silas except that it was beautiful and people kept ending up dead over it. Some said that it was a symbol of God ordaining King Festus the rightful ruler of Meryn, but Silver was skeptical of this logic. Varior had stolen the ring, but that didn’t make him the rightful king.

“Then shortly thereafter the ring was given to Silas, first king of Meryn, as a peace offering. But obviously, humans and goblins have never been very good at keeping the peace. Anyway Silas claimed it gave him the right to rule, a gift from God or whatever. But legend has it that the Raven King, lord of the Fae, sent a magical sickness to kill King Silas and his wives, and his daughters mysteriously disappeared. Since King Silas died without an heir, his righthand man took over, and kept the ring. It’s been in his family ever since. The kings have guarded the ring jealously, but King Festus is a byproduct of more than eight hundred years of inbreeding and he wanted to show it off. He gave it to Portia, that famous actress, who also happens to be his favorite mistress. The goblins got wind of this and they’ve wanted that ring back since the peace was broken, so after one of her shows, the goblins attacked Portia in her backstage dressing room and left her in a faint, sans both ring and ring finger.”

“Lovely,” Silver said, unconsciously grabbing her left hand in her right to make sure she still had all her fingers.

“So the King hired me and my boys to recover the ring from the goblins.”

“You and your boys?”
Varior produced a business card from somewhere on his person, blew some grave dirt off of it, and handed it to Silver. It read: Skogil Brothers, Expert Artifact Recoverers, Discreet and Fairly Priced.

“You’re thieves?” Silver fairly shouted.

“Artifact Recoverers,” Varior corrected, sounding hurt.

“I don’t believe this.”

“Look, you don’t have to worry about a thing. You just disappear and I’ll go my own way and we never have to see each other again.”

“Um, hello? I set the goblins on fire! They’re after me too now, and it’s all your fault!”

“My fault?” shouted Varior and he would have said more if a tall, dark haired man hadn’t stepped from behind a tree at that very moment and said, “I knew I’d find you with some girl, Varior.”

“Excuse me, I am not just some girl,” Silver exploded, not even caring who the other man was. It had been a long day and she had had enough. “I brought his sorry ass back from the dead!”

“And it all would have just been easier if you’d stayed dead, little brother,” the man said, grinning evilly as a cloud shifted and moonlight fell across his rugged face. “This time I guess I’ll just have to kill you myself.”

“Who the fuck is this, anyway?” Silver rounded on Varior.

“Run.” Varior grabbed Silver’s hand and dragged her toward the forest.

“We can’t go in there,” Silver said. “That’s the Wildwood.”
The trees whispered ominously, crisp, ruby leaves rustling. It’s just the wind, Silver thought.

“Right now it’s the lesser of two evils, trust me,” Varior said, tugging her across the border into the Wildwood and deeper in to the Autumn Forest. Silver was sure that at any moment a Fae lord would turn them into mice for trespassing. Humans didn’t go into the Wildwood unless they never wanted to come back out.

They heard soft laughter from behind them. Then came the howling.

“Oh no,” moaned Varior.

“What now?” sighed Silver.

“Remember when I asked if it was the full moon?”

“Yes?”

“Well—there’s no nice way to say this—he’s a werewolf.”

“Perfect,” muttered Silver. But at any rate, werewolves were probably better than ax-mad goblins or sinister Fae lords. In fact, she quite liked dogs.

“This way,” hissed Varior and he dragged Silver into a creek which they followed up to a pool beneath a waterfall. They dove under the falls where a cave cut deep into the rock, hidden by the rushing water.

Silver held her breath and they heard the werewolf howling and barking in the distance. Eventually the sounds receded and they could hear only the waterfall and each other’s muffled breathing.

“How did you know about this place?” Silver asked looking around at the cave, its walls slick with the spray from the falls. “And who was that?”
“Every good thief has a few secret hideaways.” Varior sighed and dropped his forehead into his hands. “Things just got a lot more complicated than I thought they were. That was my big brother.”

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me.”

“I can’t believe him. He had me killed!” Varior shook his head. “Bastard.”

Silver couldn’t believe that the only thing she’d been worried about that morning was not having a suitor for her family to meet. She was pretty sure something similar had happened to the heroine in one of the stories she had read and the moral had been Be Careful What You Wish For, or something. These things never occur to a girl before she does something stupid. Silver sighed.

“So, what are we going to do about it?”

“Well, first, I’m going to take his head—” Varior mimed a violent gesture.

“That’s not what I meant, you idiot. What are we going to do about the goblins and your psycho-ass brother?”

Varior stared at Silver with his mouth slightly open and she could see that he was completely at a loss for what to do.

Honestly, did she have to do everything herself?

“Like it or not, we’re stuck together until we sort this out,” Silver said, putting her hands on her hips and staring squarely into Varior’s distractingly blue eyes. “First we have to figure out what happened. You and ‘your boys’ were trying to steal back the ring. Did you?”

Varior grinned toothily. “It was pretty epic, not to brag.”

Silver rolled her eyes and said under her breath, “Of course not, who would brag about that?”
“The goblin security is really tight so I was the only one they sent into the tunnels and the others were supposed to be helping me from the outside.”

“Supposed to be?”

“Well, obviously, I got betrayed. When I made it out, there was someone waiting for me and I got stabbed in the back. That’s how I died.”

“You’re making me wish I’d never brought you back to life,” muttered Silver, rubbing her temples.

“That’s it!”

“What?”

“We’ll raise an army of the dead!”

Silver gaped at him. “Excuse me?”

“You’re a Necromancer right?”

“A Necro—? No, I’m a barista!”

“The fact that I’m standing in front of you kind of disproves that. Come on, we’ve got to get back to the cemetery.”

Silver didn’t think this was a great idea, but she didn’t have a better one and anything that involved leaving the Wildwood sounded like a good plan to her. So they left the sanctuary behind the waterfall to sneak back into town.

“How did you do it, by the way?” Varior whispered. “Did you have to sell your soul to the Devil? Or maybe you have a great grandmother who was Fae? Were you blessed by a pixie at you christening?”

“I was cursed by a pixie once.” Silver offered, ringing out her skirt as they walked.
“Cursed?”

“I caught her at the edge of the Wildwood—I grew up very near the northern border of the Autumn Forest—and she bit my finger and shouted a curse at me as she flew away. My hair has grown in purple ever since.” Silver supposed she was lucky not to have caught anything with stronger magical powers, though it was pretty annoying that no dye or bleach would change her hair color.

“Hmm,” said Varior thoughtfully, “then you must just have innate magical abilities.”

“I really just followed the directions out of a book.”

Varior looked at her, eyebrow arching.

“No, really. Today was the first time I’ve ever brewed anything more magical than coffee spiked with fairy wine.” Silver said, “And speaking of, we’ll have to go back to the apothecary to get the extra potion vials I made.”

“The woman who thinks of everything.” Silver couldn’t decide if Varior was flattering her or mocking her. She decided she didn’t like it.

“Yeah, well, maybe I could bring an army back from the dead, but I certainly couldn’t control one. You’re proof of that.”

“We’ll just have to persuade them.” The grin on Varior’s face made Silver nervous.

“Persuade them?”

“At knifepoint, perhaps? I mean, speaking from experience, I don’t want to go back to being dead.”

The apothecary was in the middle of the evening rush and someone was leading a rowdy drinking song. They ducked behind the bar and Silver led him into the storeroom where Caton
kept her herbal supplies. The extra vials of Raise-the-Dead potion were right where she had left them, beneath the stuffed raven on the table.

“Will that be enough?” asked Varior. “How much did you use on me?”

“The whole vial,” Silver said.

“You may not be aware of this, but two does not constitute an army.”

“Well, I wasn’t planning on raising an army, now was I?” Silver snapped. “Maybe we can make some more.”

She flipped the spellbook to the correct page.

“Damn,” she murmured, “I used all the hummingbird wings earlier.”

“So that’s it then? You can’t make anymore?”

“If you don’t have all the ingredients, you can’t make a magic potion.”

Silver and Varior looked at each other for a moment. A long howl pierced the quiet night and moonlight fell across the table.

“Two soldiers are better than none,” Varior said.

“Let’s go to the cemetery.” Silver picked up the spellbook, thinking it might just come in handy later.

“It’ll be just like a date,” Varior said. Silver punched him on the shoulder.

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“Do this one,” Varior’s voice came from a few rows away in the cemetery. “I think he was a knight.”

As quickly as they could, they unearthed him. They had to use the spell Silver had found earlier to speed up the digging. The corpse turned out to be rather older than they were expecting.
Silver had some doubts. Would his flesh come back once the spell was done? She performed the spell anyway, repeating the complicated words that she had used over Varior.

“What the ruddy hell are you lot doing?” the no-longer-dead Sir Rollo demanded. “How dare you drag me back to this world?”

“You were dead,” said Varior.

Silver twitched her mouth in displeasure. The corpse had not regained its flesh. Sir Rollo was still a dusty skeleton in armor, except now he could talk.

“I know I was dead, you ninny! What if I like being dead? What if I like not being asked to fight in the King’s bloody, pointless wars?”

“How could you possibly have found the only corpse in the whole cemetery that prefers being dead?” Silver asked Varior.

“No idea,” muttered Varior. “Come on, we’d better try the other one.”

When Sir Gregor rose from the dead, he tried to bring his broadsword down on Silver’s head. Luckily, he hadn’t been buried with it. Silver felt a little dizzy and nauseous and was suddenly realizing how woefully underprepared she was to be practicing magic. She had gotten quite lucky with Varior, apparently. She was also wondering if there was a way to boost the spell’s effectiveness for those who had been dead longer. Sir Gregor was half rotted away when he climbed out of his grave, his odor rather pungent.

Before Sir Gregor could find a different way to try to kill Silver, a troupe of goblins bore down upon them. Sir Gregor, who was apparently just looking for something to hit, lay into the goblins with a fury. Sir Rollo walked over to a tree, sat down, and folded his arms, resolutely refusing to fight for Silver and Varior. He did seem be enjoying the ruckus, however.
Despite Sir Gregor’s immense size and obvious bloodlust, it was clear they were going to lose this battle. Hoping the angry corpse could hold them for a few minutes, Varior and Silver dashed back toward the apothecary.

“Okay, genius,” Silver hissed, “what’s plan B?”

“It’s your turn.”

“I have one idea,” said Silver, “but it’s illegal.”

“Like bringing people back from the dead isn’t illegal?”

“All right, fair,” Silver said, although the legality of reanimation had not occurred to her.

“Follow me, and stay close.”

The goblins that had escaped the wrath of Sir Gregor were now following Silver and Varior. Silver was very tired of being chased.

The apothecary was still open; it was always open, partly because if you sold coffee in the morning and alcohol at night, your establishment would always be crowded, but also because the apothecary was a waypoint between worlds. A spell gone wrong had shredded the thin fabric that separated Faerie from the mortal world leaving open windows that had allowed the first human crusaders through. Nowadays it was mostly traders and tourists that moved through the waypoints.

Silver led Varior through the bustling apothecary to a room to the left of the bar. They crashed through the door into a line of people waiting to show their exit documents to the knight from the Border Security Corps. Silver looked over her shoulder, knowing the goblins couldn’t be far behind. She grabbed Varior’s hand and began shoving her way to the front of the line, where she ran past the guard’s booth without stopping.
“Hey!” The guard shouted, looking up from stamping a woman’s passport. “You can’t do that!”

But Silver and Varior were already past the guard and facing the slit in the air where the world didn’t quite line up. Without hesitating, they jumped through. The world bent around them as they crossed the threshold and they arrived in a room very like the one they had just left. There was a line of people waiting to get into Faerie but Varior and Silver followed the signs directing new arrivals to customs. Yet another line stretched before them to get a stamp from the mortal government. Silver blew through this station too.

“Oi! Stop there! You’ve got to go through customs!” called the guard.

“We have nothing to declare!” shouted Silver before barreling through yet another door. They burst out into a rowdy pub.

“Where are we?” asked Varior.


“I didn’t know there was a waypoint in your apothecary.”

Silver took Varior’s arm and tugged him past the crowded tables, toward the door that led out onto the street. Behind them, several border security guards had just shouldered their way into the pub, now dressed in Scotland Yard uniforms.

“Stop those two!” one of them shouted.

Silver crashed into the barmaid who had been trying to deliver someone’s pint. She swore loudly as the drink slid to the floor, and Silver and Varior slipped past her and out into the night.

Varior paused on the pavement, staring around. “The mortal world has so many more lights,” he said. The street was lit by neon signs, advertising a multitude of places to get curry.
Laughter burbled from outdoor seating areas crowded along the street.

“They’re going to catch us,” snapped Silver as she dragged him down the street and into an alley. In the pub they could hear a commotion. Silver suspected the goblins had now arrived on the scene too.

They hurried down a graffiti-coated alley and out onto a brick-lined main street. The smell of spicy food wound around them. There were a lot of people moving up and down the street. Silver and Varior attempted to blend in.

“I just realized I haven’t eaten since last week,” Varior said.

Silver checked her pocket watch. “You ate two hours ago at my house.” She remembered her house was now burned to the ground and frowned.

“Oh, right, well, running from goblins burns a lot of calories. What do you say we get a snack?”

“We have to keep moving.”

“I can walk and eat.” Varior shrugged modestly.

“Boy, aren’t you talented?” Silver rolled her eyes and started walking. They had to get farther away from the pub. She felt conspicuous in her dress and weskit. She had only just remembered that mortals didn’t dress like that anymore. Everyone who worked in downtown Ening City dressed as though it were the Middle Ages; it was supposed to be charming for the tourists.

Silver marched them along for a couple of blocks until her stomach gave a traitorous growl and Varior smirked, the left side of his mouth quirking up. He took her hand and tucked it into his elbow and led her over to a stall set up on the side of the street.
He glanced up at the sign. “My lady is peckish. Give us your finest samosas.”

“Right-o,” the man said, putting two samosas each in two paper bowls.

“Keep the change,” Varior said magnanimously, handing over some gold coins. Varior whisked Silver off down the street.

“Oi,” called the man, “I don’t accept foreign coins. Oi!”

“Don’t look back,” Varior said to Silver, tugging her along. They turned off into another alley. Every inch of the brickwork was painted with murals and graffiti. Music leaked out of several clubs.

“Mortal art is quite interesting,” Varior said looking up at a huge painting of a stork.

“I can’t believe you just stole samosas.”

“I don’t even know what samosas are and besides, I didn’t steal anything,” Varior said, offended, “I paid good money for these.”

Silver laughed and while her mouth was open, Varior popped a samosa into it. “Mm,” Silver closed her eyes. She swallowed. “Why don’t we import food like this?” London had some of the best Indian food outside of India.

“We could,” Varior had already finished both his samosas and was eyeing Silver’s. “We could open a shop—Varior and Goldie’s Imported Mortal Delicacies.”

“We should keep moving,” Silver said, smiling in spite of herself. She had imagined owning her own shop, maybe an apothecary or a bookshop or a bakery, but now that she had brought someone back from the dead, that seemed a little mundane. Still, it was a nice thought, selling samosas and empanadas and sushi with Varior.

“Do you know where we’re going?” Varior asked as they set off again.
“My goal was ‘away from the pub.’ But I know there’s another waypoint in London. The official tourist entrance is in Trafalgar Square, it connects to the tourist information center by the docks in Ening City.”

Silver savored her second samosa, and they walked past several trendy looking pop-up shops, two rowdy pubs, and a stumbling bachelorette party making its way to a psychedelic club.

“So,” said Silver finally, “what’s it like, being dead?”

Varior sighed, his brows drawing low and together over his forehead. “I knew you’d ask, sooner or later.”

She shrugged, “I can’t help being curious.”

“There was a tunnel of light and I went toward it and I was greeted by fluffy-winged angels in togas,” Varior said, flatly. “Happy?”

“No,” said Silver. “I refuse to believe it was so bland. You were dead. The greatest mystery of life. I mean you could potentially bring down the whole religious establishment with your experience.” Silver had been skeptical for some time about the whole concept of religion.

“You want it to be exciting? Fine, I can do that,” he was quiet for a moment, staring into the distance. “I hurtled down a black slope into the flaming maw of Cerberus, but I gave that beast the ole one-two-three and went along into Hell yelling for the Devil to come and get me if he wanted me.”

Silver looked at him. He did not speak or look back at her. His eyes glittered in the yellow streetlights. She waited, considering for the first time that dying might be something of a scarring experience. Varior hid it with bravado but she could see that death had frightened him.
“When I escaped from the goblin tunnels,” a hard edge had crept into his voice, “I was supposed to meet my brother, and I guess that I did. At any rate, someone put a knife between my shoulder blades. I never saw who did it, but I know now it must have been one of my brothers. He held me while I died.

“You’re right. There was no light, there were no angels. There was no Devil and no Cerberus. It was dark and very, very cold. I walked a long time in the dark, but I never met anyone else. I don’t know, maybe I would have just kept walking forever if you hadn’t brought me back. Maybe I would have eventually made it to Hell.” He shrugged but it was more of a shiver.

After a moment he continued, “And then I felt a drop of water on my forehead and my eyes were opening and there you were, like sunlight after winter.”

Silver bit her lip. She hadn’t set out to be anyone’s savior. In fact her reasons for resurrecting him had been entirely self-serving. “It wasn’t water,” She said, finally.

“What?”

“For the spell, I had to spit on your face.”

“Oh. Gross.” Varior was shaken out of his dark mood and he gave her a half-smile.

“Hang on, brothers? Plural? You have more than one?” A werewolf brother was already more than she could handle.

“There are four of us. Samwell is the oldest and Thorley is the youngest and you’ve already had the pleasure of meeting Cain, the second oldest. And then of course there’s me. The best.”
Silver sighed, “That’s more Skogil brothers than I was prepared to deal with.” There was a lot, actually, about this whole situation, that she had not been prepared to deal with. “So Cain is the one who’s a werewolf?”

“Yeah.”

“Was he bitten recently?” Silver asked, unsure if that was a touchy topic.

“Nah, it was ages ago. We used to live on the street. Poor little urchins, learning from the street school of poverty. Not much protection. You know, same old sob story.” Varior said it breezily, but Silver still felt pity for the orphaned Skogil brothers.

“And he didn’t bite the rest of you?”

“He’d never hurt us on purpose. He used to lock himself up at the full moon for our protection.”

“In case you’ve forgotten, you were killed by one of your brothers and threatened by Cain quite recently.”

Varior shook his head, hurt creeping into his eyes. “Yeah, that’s what I don’t understand. We were all very close. We were all each other had. So why did they kill me?”

He sounded so sad that Silver reached out, intending to give him a comforting pat—she couldn’t imagine being betrayed by her brother, and being dead sounded lonely and frightening—but a large hand grabbed her by the upper arm and swung her around. She looked up into quite the ugliest face she had ever seen. A hooked nose protruded over a gash of a mouth surrounded by patchy gray facial hair. Deep-set, piggy eyes stared down at her.

Goblin, was the only thing Silver had time to think before Varior had slammed an umbrella patterned with the Union Jack down on his head.
“For England!” shouted Varior as the man crumpled.

“Where’d you get that?” Silver asked, but Varior was already handing the umbrella back to an elderly lady carrying her shopping home.

“My lady,” he said with a courtly bow.

The woman shuffled quickly off, eyes wide.

“Better get out of here,” Varior said, grabbing Silver’s hand. “I think I see some more.”

“Goblins,” Silver said.

“Tell me, why do they look like super ugly humans?”

“Ask me again when we’re not running for our lives.”

“This way,” Varior pulled her past a sign reading ‘Evening Art Talks at the Whitechapel Gallery,’ under a stone archway, and into a white-walled building that was filled with people looking at…rocks? A curator was explaining the deep emotional turmoil of the artist which was represented by the precise placement of each multicolored boulder in the haphazard-looking pile.

“Mortal art,” muttered Silver who had no patience for such things. Her brother Benjamin on the other hand, loved everything about contemporary art, and prided himself on his avant-garde wood carvings. Silver just didn’t get it.

Varior pulled her into the coatroom and they peered out as the goblin-men streamed into the gallery after them. Silver could feel Varior’s hot breath on the top of her head and she was suddenly aware of how close she was to him. He smelled like pine and she was vaguely jealous that he managed to smell good after having been dead only that morning. They were still holding hands. They were in a coatroom together. Slowly, Silver looked up at him, wondering when her life had turned into a romance novel.
Well, she thought, you did want a boyfriend.

Varior was looking down at her, a curling, tawny lock falling onto his forehead, the left side of his mouth tugging up in a mischievous grin. It was a rather nice mouth.

He put his hand on her cheek. He bent his head, aiming for her mouth. “My fiancée,” he whispered.

She was quite a lot shorter than he was. “I never said yes,” she whispered back, her lips almost brushing his jaw. Her eyes closed involuntarily.

There was a crash and they sprang apart, or as far apart as they could, given the confined space.

“We’ve got to go,” Silver dragged Varior out of the coatroom and out of the art gallery.

Behind them, they could hear the goblins destroying probably priceless art and patrons screaming. They raced down the street, turning almost at random, hoping to throw off pursuers. They ran beneath a set of elevated railway tracks and past the Tower of London, which looked more like it belonged in their world than this one.

Panting, they came to a halt on the riverbank, Tower Bridge stretching out before them, the lights swooping up to crest the towers.

“Wow,” said Varior, gaping.

“Wait, have you never been to the mortal world?” Silver asked.

“Nah, it was too expensive. Our parents died when we were young so we never had the money to eat, much less to apply for visas. That’s how I got this thin and enviable physique. And there’s a mountain of paperwork you have to do, I mean, if you don’t just run past the guards. I can’t believe that worked, by the way. You been before?”
Silver motioned for him to follow and they began walking across Tower Bridge, double-decker buses and black cabs speeding past them. “Yeah, we came once when I was younger on vacation. Dad sold a singing boudoir to the Queen so we came for a few days as a treat.”

Varior threw out an arm to stop her. “Wait, witches can’t cross running water right?”

“I’m not a witch, and anyway I think that’s an old wives’ tale. I don’t even think magic works here. They’ve got their own magic substitute.”

“Explains all the…” Varior trailed off, gesturing vaguely at the cars. “Oh, now you can tell me why the goblins looked like humans when they caught up to us.”

“Waypoints have concealing magic. They make non-humans humanoid until they cross back to our world.”

“What happens when humans come to our world?”

“They have to hire a tour guide and I think it’s pretty expensive. Some backpackers got lost in the Wildwood and were never seen again so now there are more regulations. There’re all sorts of rules about what tourists can bring back.”

“Good, we probably want to keep tourists from getting into trouble with magic.”

Right, thought Silver, if she’d had a tour guide, maybe she wouldn’t have gotten into trouble with magic. “Sometimes they’ll come and buy pixie dust packets to smuggle back. I think they call it Ecstasy here.”

“Isn’t that illegal?”

“Of course it is, that’s why it’s called smuggling.” Silver glanced over her shoulder but there were so many pedestrians and tourists on the bridge, despite the late hour, that she couldn’t
tell if the goblins were following them yet. “We have to find a tube station. I don’t know why I
didn’t think of it sooner.”

“A what?”

“A public carriage station. Excuse me,” Silver said to a woman pushing a pram past them.

“Where’s the nearest tube station?”

“That’d be London Bridge, dearie.” She pointed upriver to the next bridge, “Walk along
the river toward the Shard and if you pass the bridge, you’ve gone too far.”

“Shard of what?” whispered Varior.

“Thanks,” said Silver, tugging Varior in the direction the woman had pointed.

Varior stared out over the muddy waters of the Thames, the hazy illumination from the
skyscrapers bleeding into the water. “Their boats are different,” he finally said.

“The HMS Belfast,” said Silver, “one of their old warships.” She thought about the port
in Ening City and the big, three-masted ships that brought trade goods to Meryn from across the
sea. How different the iron hulled warship must look painted in camouflage with canons jutting
from its gun decks. Silver shivered, thinking of the firepower.

“How do you know so much about the mortal realm?” Varior demanded.

“Unlike you,” Silver said, “I actually went to school. We learned all about the mortals
and the crusade that resulted in the colonization of Faerie and the creation of the Kingdom of
Meryn on the edge of the Wildwood.”

“But,” said Varior, “most humans can’t use magic, or not innately anyway, so how could
the mortals have had enough power to subdue the Fae? They’re much stronger than we are.”
“The first humans arrived in Faerie by mistake. They were part of a crusade in Jerusalem in the 1100s. When they found themselves in Faerie they tried to convert the Fae to Christianity, and when that didn’t work, they started cutting down the Wildwood, you know, because humans can barely look at a tree without wanting to cut it down.” Silver rolled her eyes. “Anyway, this made the Fae very angry, understandably, but it also weakened them because they’re tied to the spirits of the forest, who were dying with the trees. The humans were all wearing iron armor which made them immune to spells and they sowed little bits of iron along the borders they cut in the Wildwood, so the trees could never grow back and the Fae could no longer cross the border. So the Fae were forced to retreat into the remaining forest and Silas declared himself the king and built Ening City as a trading port on the coast. Now we humans control the deforested strip of land between the ocean and the Wildwood.”

“Fascinating,” said Varior. “Who knew what I was missing in school?” He almost sounded wistful.

“School was pretty boring, honestly.” Silver hurried to say. “What were you doing when you weren’t wasting your time in the classroom as a boy?”

“Oh, we were very enterprising youths, we had to be, if we wanted to eat. My brothers and I…acquired many rare and magical artifacts from the people of Ening City and sold them to the goblins. Then we volunteered our services to people who had recently and tragically misplaced rare and magical artifacts to recover them, for a fee, of course.”

“Of course you did. Come on, the station is this way.”
They followed the tube signs, a red circle with a blue line through it, to the station. The gleaming, glass-plated skyscraper nicknamed the Shard rose sharply over the station. People were streaming to and fro in a great hurry.

“Damn,” whispered Silver, watching as people scanned a blue card and pushed through the turnstile. She didn’t have any mortal money. She looked around wildly, hoping help would magically appear.

Her eyes fell on a black cat that was washing itself languidly by the entrance. As if sensing her gaze, he raised his head, meeting her eyes with one bulbous yellow one. His right eye was missing and his right ear was in tatters from some long ago street fight.

“Growltiger?” murmured Silver. If Caton’s cat was here it couldn’t be a coincidence.

He stretched and yawned and walked off toward a gate labeled ‘Emergency Exit, do not enter.’

Sure she was going mad, Silver followed the cat. A black cat, she thought, this was just like a fairytale. She hated being a cliché.

“I don’t think we can go in that way,” said Varior when Silver pushed through the gate.

“And suddenly you’re a stickler for the rules?” Silver snapped.

Varior put up his hands. “Whatever. You’re in charge, witch-lady.”

“I’m not a witch!” Silver said, louder than she’d intended.

They rode down the escalator, which was endlessly exciting for Varior and followed the cat past a pair of musicians singing Wonderwall.

The tattered cat sprang lightly onto the incoming train and Silver and Varior followed, pressing past peeved Londoners.
“Are we following that cat?” hissed Varior.

“Do you have a better idea?” Silver whispered defensively.

“Not dying in some strange underground contraption sounds better than this.”

“Just think of it as a long carriage pulled by really fast horses.”

A cool female voice overhead reminded them to mind the gap between the train and the platform, and the doors slid shut. The train lurched forward and Varior fell against Silver. She caught a whiff of pine again as she propped him back up to standing, and she thought of his face close to hers in the darkness of the coatroom, his jaw brushing her lips. He clutched at the overhead handles and gazed wide-eyed out the windows into the rushing blackness.

“Take a deep breath,” Silver murmured, not sure if she was talking to Varior or herself.

“It’s going to be all right.”

The cat had gone back to licking his hindquarters in the corner and Silver was questioning every instinct she’d had to follow him.

“This train terminates at Edgware,” said the female voice. “This station is Angel.”

“We’ll change at King’s Cross for the Picadilly Line,” Silver said, more for her own benefit than Varior’s. She traced the Picadilly Line to Leicester Square on the map posted by the doors. “Then we can walk to the Trafalgar Square waypoint.”

The train stopped and the doors hissed open. Silver and Varior pressed themselves back out of the way to let passengers on and off.

“Varior!” cried a voice as the doors shut again.

Oh no, thought Silver.
“It’s good to see you!” A young man with wire rimmed glasses said, shoudering his way through the other passengers. He had the same strong jawline and tawny hair as Varior.

“Thorley,” said Varior, balling his fists. “I wish I could say the same about you.”

“You wound me,” said Thorley clutching his chest, “you really do. And you should know, I was against betraying you, but Sam was paid a lot of money by Miss Portia to make sure you didn’t come back. You know the King is sort of a jealous type.”

Silver stared at Varior, who avoided her look. “You told me that the goblins stole the ring from her.”

“Um. Did I?”

“You slept with her, didn’t you, and stole her ring and sold it to the goblins? You lied to me. Ugh, I can’t believe I believed you,” Silver spat. She didn’t understand why she was so angry. Other passengers were beginning to stare in a disgruntled and disapproving way. No one did disgruntled better than Londoners.

“Silver, don’t—” Varior reached for her arm, but before either of them knew what was happening, the train had stopped again and Thorley had pulled him out of the train and onto the busy Kings Cross platform.

“Varior!” Silver cried, starting after them, but then the black cat was under her feet and she was falling. “Damn you,” she breathed. The cat looked at her and blinked his one yellow eye. The doors slid closed.

“Where are you taking me?”

The cat yawned.
At the Hampstead stop, the cat exited the train, tail held up like a tour guide’s flag. Silver followed. She thought about Varior in the hands of his murderous brother and almost turned around to get back into the station. She could get on a southbound train. She could go back to King’s Cross to look for him. She sighed. She wouldn’t be able to find them. Thorley was probably headed to the Trafalgar Square waypoint and they would be long gone by the time she got back there.

Sensing she wasn’t following, Growltiger stopped and looked back at her. He meowed reproachfully.

“All right. You win. I’ll just follow some cat that looks like it’s been hit by a bus into the dark. That sounds like a great idea.”

Out of the station and down the street she followed the bobbing tail. The cat really was a bit the worse for wear.

“Growltiger,” she said, remembering the poem Caton had taken the name from, “the Terror of the Thames.”

The cat’s tail twitched but he did not look back.

They came to a wide green space, folding open in the middle of the city. Growltiger bounded into the grass. They wended their way along, past joggers and walkers and children and dogs that tried to bark at Growltiger but retreated, tails between their legs at his hiss. They took overgrown paths, and the other evening visitors thinned out. The sounds of the city receded, and all Silver could hear was her own heavy breathing and the calling of the birds. They walked for what seemed like hours, the cat always just at the edge of her vision, almost leaving her behind.
At last, they came to a wide open clearing with a very large tree growing at the center of it. Looking up, Silver wondered where the stars were, but maybe, she thought, London’s bright lights were obscuring them. There was no one else around. The cat walked up to the trunk and sat down before it, facing Silver. He looked so damn smug, she wanted to throttle him.

“So?” she asked, “What now? You’ve brought me to this tree in the middle of fucking nowhere, what’s your plan?”

Growltiger hopped to his feet and, with a flick of his black tail, he disappeared behind the tree.

“You’re not getting away that easy,” Silver muttered, starting after the cat.

She moved toward the trunk of the tree, over thick roots that made the ground uneven. Her foot caught under a root and, for the second time since meeting that damned cat, she was falling…into snow?

Silver lifted her head; snowflakes were falling all around her and she was sunk in a snowdrift. She scrambled up. The large tree was still beside her, but now, instead of being somewhere in the middle of Hampstead Heath, she was surrounded by a glittering ice forest. Icicles hung from leafless branches and pine trees were dusted with snow, like powdered sugar.

Oh no, thought Silver. The tree must be a waypoint and she had just stumbled into the Winter Forest, the territory of the Raven King.

Silver whirled and ran back past the tree, hoping to end up in London again, but somehow, the waypoint was closed.

“You won’t be able to go that way,” rasped a voice and she spun again.

“You.” It was Growltiger.
If cats could grin, this one did, revealing his sharp teeth. “Me,” he said.

“You talk now.”

“How insightful it is,” Growltiger said scornfully. “Come this way. The King is waiting.”

“The King! The Raven King?”

The cat did not deign to answer.

Silver looked around for another way to go, but again, frustratingly, the cat was her only option. She didn’t want to freeze to death lost in the Wildwood.

Muttering swearwords under her breath, Silver tramped through the snow after Growltiger. The sun was just coming up, the gray, cloud-filled sky gradually lightening. She thought back to all the stories she had heard about the Wildwood and the Fae who lived there. She had never been so deep into the Wildwood. She reviewed rules for staying alive in their territory:

1. Do not eat or drink Fae food or wine. It was well known that Fae fare could trap humans in the Wildwood, addicting them to the heady magic.

2. Do not anger the Fae. Everyone knew how unpredictable the Fae were. Beguiling hosts one moment, then cursing you to be a squirrel until true love’s kiss the next. She had even heard the Spring Court kept human slaves. She shivered.

3. Try to find a way to get home. Holding a mental map in her head, Silver knew she was almost as far from home as it was possible to be and not be in the ocean. She would have to walk for miles through the Winter Wood and over the Dwarves’ mountains and then all the way through the Autumn Forest before she’d be back in Meryn. All the while trying not to get eaten by a wyvern or enchanted by a Fae lord or imprisoned in a tree by a wood
nymph. She signed. Perhaps there were more waypoints, or maybe there was a way to reopen
the one she had come through in Hampstead Heath.

“Why didn’t you speak to me before?” Silver called, fighting her way through the snow
while the cat stepped lightly over the drifts.

“I am a cat. We do as we please.”

“Ha. I bet you can’t talk in the mortal world. Magic doesn’t work there.”

Growltiger flicked his tail dismissively. “It is not magic. Cats are cats.”

This was not an answer, but that was typical of cats, Silver supposed.

“What’s with this waypoint? I thought all the waypoints were monitored by the Border
Security Corps.”

“This is the Raven King’s own personal waypoint.”

“He has his own waypoint?” Silver’s boots and skirts were soaked through and she was
feeling pretty miffed about being fetched by a cat just to go meet some man. Who did this Raven
King think he was anyway? Entitled asshole. Men were the same in every species. If he wanted
to see her so badly, why didn’t he just come to her instead of making her trek through this frozen
wasteland? She thought about all the things she would say to him when she finally got there.
She’d give him a piece of her mind. She’d—but then she remembered her second rule for
surviving the Wildwood: Do not anger the Fae.

She sighed. How many humans had wandered into the Wildwood never to come out
again? Bedtime stories were full of maidens trapped among the Fae. She didn’t want to end up
one of them.
She could remember her mother’s voice falling into the cadence of a bedtime story. Once upon a time, the King had twelve daughters, each more beautiful and accomplished than the last. They were demure and pious and loved nothing more than dancing.

Silver rolled her eyes, remembering the familiar words. The story had been one of her favorites when she was younger, but now she felt the princesses were a little lackluster. Demure and pious? Come on.

The King loved his daughters very much, but he desired a male heir, for he feared what would become of his young kingdom without a son to carry on his name.

Silver was skeptical about how much the King had loved his daughters.

So the King called upon the Raven King to ask for a spell. The Raven King obliged and charmed the King’s favorite wife, guaranteeing that her next child would be a boy. In return the Raven King took all twelve of the King’s daughters deep into the Wildwood. But a sneaking sickness took the King and his wives and his unborn heir. A retribution from God for asking for magical help.

Silver’s mother had always told the story this way, but Silver had also heard versions in which it was the Raven King who had sent the sickness, because a Fae would never give you quite what you asked for.

It is said the twelve princesses have remained young through the centuries, dancing in the glittering Fae courts night after night. Many a young girl, charmed by this notion, has wandered into the Wildwood, never to be seen again.

“They are all dancing with the Raven King?” Silver remembered once asking her mother as a little girl.
“Look at me, Silver,” her mother had said seriously. “The Wildwood is not sparkling parties and immortality. It is hedonism and pretty masks that hide the faces of beasts. It will devour you.”

The ice palace rose abruptly before Silver and Growltiger, stabbing at the gray sky with sharpened spires. Silver pushed snow-dampened hair out of her eyes and gazed up at the palace. The spires reminded Silver of teeth and she thought again of being devoured by the Wildwood.

“This way,” said Growltiger, unnecessarily.

They climbed the wide palace stairs past silent Fae guards in silver uniforms. All the white and gray made Silver feel like she’d been dropped into a lithograph illustration from her old fairytale book. The guards ignored Silver’s curious glances, staring straight ahead into the falling snow, their fur collars turned up. Silver wondered if it was always snowing here.

The frosted doors swung silently open and they stepped over the threshold into the Raven King’s castle.

Silver was freezing.

The cat led her down a dizzying labyrinth of glittering hallways and then suddenly, they were in an open, rectangular courtyard. A double row of silvered, skeletal trees lined a long stone walkway, at the end of which was a large black throne. Someone was sitting in it. Well, perhaps lounging was a better word.

The Raven King—she supposed he must be the Raven King—was slouched sideways in his throne, one leg thrown over the arm of his chair. His dark head was down, resting on his chest as though he was sleeping. He was shaped like a human, but Silver was most struck by the enormous black raven wings that spread from his shoulders and lay splayed, cascading over the
arms of his throne and reaching all the way to the ground. A circlet of ice was wound into his hair.

Silver gaped at him. No storybook illustration had ever done him justice.

As they approached, he raised his head and opened his eyes, looking straight into Silver’s with his piercing, icy stare. His inky hair was gilded in frost. It was overlong and framed a thin, sharp face. A very handsome face, but he was cold, where Varior was warm.

The Raven King straightened up a bit, though he didn’t remove his leg from the arm of his throne.

“Thank you, my friend,” he said to the cat. His voice was soft, but even the snowflakes listened as he spoke.

Silver’s breath caught. The Raven King looked at Silver for a long moment and she felt suddenly naked. She crossed her arms over her chest, but stared resolutely back.

“I thought,” he said finally, “that you’d be taller.”

Silver’s mouth dropped open. She forgot all her rules.

“Well, I thought you’d be older.” Silver added, “And uglier,” even though she’d never imagined him ugly.

“I am old,” he said.

“You’ve aged well,” Silver said tartly. He looked no more than twenty years old, no older than she was.

He laughed a bit at that. “I didn’t bring you here to fish for compliments.”

“No? Well, before you tell me the real reason, I am fucking freezing. Got any blankets in this miserable ice box?”
The Raven King stood up…and up. He was so tall that Silver almost took a step back. He shook out his wings a bit and gave them one big flap. A hot wind swept the courtyard and everything rippled. When everything had solidified again, Silver saw that the icy courtyard had reformed itself into a cozy parlor with a huge crackling fire, surrounded by red velvet, cushioned armchairs. Her clothes had also been mercifully dried. She hurried over to the enormous fireplace and put her hands out to it, wiggling the feeling back into her fingers.

Growltiger stretched, curled up on a chair close to the fire, and promptly went to sleep.

The Raven King tried to fold his enormous wings but gave it up when he was unable to sit down. Silver snickered. The Raven King scowled and shook out his wings again, letting them splay out on either side of an armchair as he sat.

“So, why am I here?” Silver asked.

The Raven King sighed. “Do you really need to be told? I thought you were clever.”

“What business is that of yours? Why would you care if I was clever?”

“Black magic is my business. I’d rather idiots didn’t practice it. You’re my problem.”

“Problem?” Silver shouted, “I was just minding my own business!”

The Raven King steepled his fingers. “Bringing people back from the dead is decidedly not minding one’s own business.”

“What if dead people are my business? Wait, that sounded wrong.” Silver sank into an armchair, then sprang up again as she had tried to sit on Growltiger, who hissed at her. She chose a divan instead. She wondered if she should lounge on it. Fine ladies never sat on divans. They lounged.

“Reanimation is no small magic. How long have you been training?”
“Training? I just followed the directions out of a spellbook.”

“You can’t expect me to believe the first time you ever did big magic was yesterday.”

“I don’t care if you believe it. It’s the truth.” Silver crossed her arms.

“No human can just raise the dead on their first attempt,” the Raven King said rolling his eyes skyward. “Stop trying to impress me.”

“Why you puffed-up, self-centered—” Silver stopped, remembering whom she was talking to.

The Raven King raised a long, thin eyebrow—everything about him was long and thin. “Care to finish that sentence?”

“I only meant that my motives were innocent and I really am telling the truth. Sir,” she threw in for good measure. She folded her hands in her lap and looked primly at the Raven King.

“Well, it will be easy enough to check,” the Raven King waved his hand at a samovar resting on a round wooden table between them. “Have some tea.”

Silver looked at it skeptically. “You’ve put something in that, haven’t you.”

“Obviously. It’s just a truth potion. If you’re telling the truth as you say, you have nothing to fear.”

“It won’t trap me here forever if I drink it?” Silver asked, remembering her first rule.

“Gods, no, I don’t want to deal with you that long.”

Silver scowled. “There’s no need to be rude.”

She was telling the truth, of course, but she still didn’t want to drink his stupid truth potion. She poured herself a cup of tea. It smelled strongly of cinnamon and cloves. It smelled
lovely, but she was determined not to enjoy it. She sipped at it. The Raven King glared at her.

She took a larger gulp.

“Who sent you to ruin my plans?”

Silver choked on her tea. “Your plans? No one! I don’t know anything about that.” She drank some more tea, to show him it wasn’t a lie.

“Why did you bring him back from the dead then?”

Despite what she had said, Silver didn’t want the Raven King to think she was stupid. She decided to try a lie, partly just to see what would happen. “He’s my boyfriend and after he died the grief was killing me,” but blue smoke billowed from her mouth as she said the words. She coughed. “Sorry, just curious. I needed a suitor for my family to meet.”

“A suitor?”

“Yeah, they’re always nagging me about it.”

“And so you brought someone back from the dead?”

“It all sounds so drastic when you say it like that but I promise it seemed reasonable at the time.”

The Raven King sighed. “You mean it was by accident that you ruined everything?”

“Ruined what?” Silver drank the last of the tea and put the cup and saucer down beside the samovar. The tea really had been very good.

“Do you have any idea what you’ve done?” The Raven King rubbed his temples.

“I think I’ve made it pretty clear that I don’t,” Silver said irritably. “It’s probably the crown,” she added, “that’s giving you headaches. It looks heavy.”

The Raven King glared at her. “You are giving me a headache.”
“You’re both giving me a headache,” Growltiger said without opening his eye.

The Raven King blew out another breath and she thought he was probably counting to ten in his head to keep from exploding. “I’ve been considering schemes for stealing my name back for nearly seven hundred and fifty years and then you and those thieves just come waltzing in—”

“Your name?”

“That human,” he said the word like you might say ‘vaginal discharge,’ “stole my true name and put it in that stupid ring.”

“Your name is in the ring of Silas?”

“And it’s your fault that it’s still there,” the Raven King growled.

Silver thought this was a bit unfair. How was she supposed to know about his big plans? And besides, she hadn’t known that Varior had stolen the ring or what the ring contained.

“Necromancy is serious magic,” the Raven King said finally. “Your parents aren’t sorcerers?”

“My father carves magical furniture but it’s really more about the wood than him.”

“And your mother?”

“She used to be a boxing champion,” Silver said doubtfully, not sure what he wanted her to say. “She runs a tavern now.”

The Raven King shook his head. “Isn’t there anything unusual about you?”

This rather offended Silver. “There’s plenty of unusual things about me. I can make the best fucking caramel dragon bane macchiato in Ening City. I’m practically engaged to marry someone I brought back from the dead. I was cursed by a pixie once.”

“Hmm,” the Raven King said. “A pixie curse, that could be it. What was the curse?”
“Er. She turned my hair purple.”

“Ugh, forget it. I’ll just scry it.”

Silver raised her eyebrows. “That sounds interesting. Will you need a bowl of water?”

“Not that I need to explain it to you, but I’m looking for information about your past so
I’ll use your eyes.”

“My eyes?”

“Any reflective surface can be used for scrying.” The Raven King shifted his armchair so
that he was sitting directly across from Silver.

She sat up straighter.

“Hold still and don’t blink.” He reached out and tipped her chin up a little so she was
looking into his narrow, black eyes. His brows drew down over his forehead. His lips moved as
he murmured the words of a spell. His skin was ivory and very smooth; she made a mental note
to ask him about his moisturizer later. His features were sharp and chiseled, like they had been
carved from ice, except for his lips, which were almost effeminate.

She gazed into his eyes, hers unfocusing. His eyes expanded in her view, seeming to
absorb everything. She realized that their faces were very close together. She thought of Varior
pressed up against her in the coatroom. She thought of the way he smelled and how he had
looked when he had smashed that goblin over the head with an umbrella. She thought about the
panicked look on his face when Thorley had yanked him off the train.

Abruptly, she refocused her eyes and the Raven King’s face came back into focus. He
looked, she suddenly realized, like a poster she had seen in the tube station in London. The
poster had been for a K-pop band that was touring in Europe. He was still frowning and
muttering. Silver suddenly realized how ridiculous they must look, sitting pretty much nose to
nose starting at each other while he muttered nonsense words.

She burst out laughing, breaking their eye contact.

The Raven King sat back in disgust. “You ruined the spell.”

“I’m sorry,” Silver giggled, her hand over her mouth to keep in stray and unladylike
snorts. “What did you see?”

“Your great-great-grandmother mated with a winter Fae, so some Fae blood has been
passed down on your mother’s side. An affinity for death magic.”

“Ew, don’t say mated. Who was the Fae?” Silver knew that Fae from the different Fae
courts had different affinities for magic, although she hadn’t realized that death magic was
associated with the Winter Forest.

“Well, if you hadn’t distracted me, maybe I would have seen more. He was from the
Winter Court,” The Raven King ground his teeth. “I wonder who it was. I could kill him.”

“Wait, he’s still alive?”

“Presumably. Fae are immortal unless killed deliberately.”

“Oh, weird. I can’t believe my great-great-grandfather might still be alive.”

“He must be one of my more powerful spellcasters, or you could not still have the ability
to do magic with blood so diluted.”

“Why couldn’t my mother or my grandmother do magic then?”

“It can skip generations, or perhaps they never felt the need to raise a fake boyfriend from
the dead,” The Raven King said biting.
Silver decided to change the subject. “Well, congratulations, now you know why I can do magic. Who cares?”

“If you had been taught to use magic properly and hadn’t just discovered your power, we wouldn’t be in this mess.”

“Why do you care? It’s my mess!”

“You don’t get it. Magic has a price and reanimation is very expensive.”

Silver bit her lip. “What do you mean, expensive?” She hadn’t given up anything to perform the spells she’d done so far.

“A life for a life. So you have a debt to pay for Varior’s life.”

Her heart sank. “And the others,” she mumbled.

“Excuse me?”

“The others,” she said louder. “I’ve used the spell three times.”

The Raven King rubbed his eyes. “Ha haha,” he deadpanned. “That’s hilarious.”

“I wish I was joking,” Silver said.

“You’ll have to pay. Or send them back. Those are your only options.”

Silver shook her head mutely, thinking of Varior, of how very alive he was.

“I’ll deal with you later. I have to go figure out how to fix all this.” The Raven King stood up in a storm of feathers and flapped his wings again.

When the room resolidified, Silver was alone in a bedroom with a four-poster bed. She fell onto it, not knowing what else to do.

Silver wished she could talk to Varior. She pulled out Solomon Mea’s spellbook and flipped to the contents. Maybe there would be a way to contact him from here. Her finger paused
on a scrying spell. That would let her see him but not speak to him. Her eyes scanned the guest room that the Raven King had banished her to. There was an ornate bookcase in a corner with another cushy armchair and a crackling fireplace. Feeling as thought there was no way black magic spellbooks could be housed in such a cozy environment, Silver went to investigate anyway.

The books were all huge leather-bound tomes stamped in gold and they did in fact look like spellbooks, as though the Raven King was showing off just how wealthy and learned he was. Silver rolled her eyes. Male egos. She began pulling books off the shelves. *Midnight Rituals for Devil Worshipers* read one gilt cover; Silver put that one back. *Charming Princes into Animals: It's for Their Own Good, Really!* Silver sincerely doubted the princes in question would agree, but maybe that was the point. *Alchemy for Dummies* sat beside *Charms for the Charmless: How to Get Her to Love You*; Silver almost threw that one straight in the fire, although, she supposed she might have found that particular volume helpful yesterday. Was it only yesterday? She sighed.

Behind *Incantations to Influence the Weather*, Silver saw a small volume topple over, as though someone had tried to hide it in the back. She pulled it out. *Practical Necromancy for Beginners* read the no-nonsense lettering painted on the black linen cover. Well, that looked perfect; Silver was a little surprised at her good fortune. The book was just the right size for Silver’s hands; the others had all been enormous. She took it over to the bed and flopped down on her stomach, paging through the book. The book fell open at a passage describing the basics, as though it knew exactly what level she was at.
The Necromancer is a witch who might, depending on her purposes, commune with the dead or reanimate corpses. Spells to reanimate the dead vary widely in skill level and efficacy. It is generally agreed that if one is trying to achieve a life-like state, one should find a corpse that is quite recently dead. As decay increases, so efficacy decreases. A payment to Death will be required.

Silver paused. That was what the Raven King had said too, that a “payment to Death” would be required. She wondered what that meant. The Raven King seemed to think it would be a life for a life, but perhaps the book would give her more options.

More commonly, Necromancers will recall spirits for information about the afterlife, about the past, or to act as a Spirit Guide through the Netherrealms. The Necromancer will have strong psychological connections with her subjects.

That sounded promising. Maybe she could contact Varior via this strong psychological connection they were supposed to share. Silver turned the page. The book didn’t say anything about having to pay a price of some kind to speak to her ‘subjects,’ so Silver figured it was safe to try. Besides, the Raven King had done a bunch of magic around her earlier and he hadn’t appeared to give up anything.

Silver set about following the spell’s instructions. It looked similar to the scrying spell in Solomon Mea’s book. She went over to a desk that sat in front of a window that looked out onto the endless frozen forest. There was a silver bowl and a pitcher, a crystal, and a number of
candles on the desk. She wondered if they had been there all along or if they had only arrived because she needed them.

She filled the bowl with water from the pitcher. She lit two of the candles and put one on either side of the bowl. She sat down at the desk and looked back at the book. Next she was supposed to chant Varior’s name nine times and then draw a pentacle in the water with the crystal before dropping it into the bowl. Then she was supposed to open her mind. After that the book became rather vague but she gathered that it would be obvious from there.

Following the directions, Silver chanted Varior’s name, drew the pentacle and put the crystal in the water, feeling a little silly as she did so. She closed her eyes and held her arms out palms up, throwing her head back, not because the book had told her to but because she had a mental image of witches summoning spirits in this pose. She tried not to think of anything. After a moment, she lowered her arms and looked into the bowl.

“Silver? What are you doing? Are you in my head?” Varior was tied to a chair in the middle of a barren room. Silver was looking down on him. He looked all around, straining to see behind the chair. “Where are you?”

“It worked,” breathed Silver and she almost lost her concentration.

“Something worked, that’s for sure,” said Varior, still looking for her.

“I’m not there. I’m in the Winter Palace.”

“Like the Raven King’s palace?”

“Yeah.”

“And you’re still alive?” Varior stopped looking around. “This is weird, I don’t know where to look.”
“I can see you from above,” Silver offered. “Yes, I’m alive for the moment, and you appear to be, too.”

Varior squinted at the ceiling where she assumed there was a light source. “My brothers aren’t going to kill me yet. I haven’t told them where the ring is.”

“You know where the ring is?”

“I hid it before I came out of the tunnels. Had a bad feeling. Justified, it now transpires.”

Varior tried to shrug but his arms were bound too tightly.

“You are brilliant,” Silver said.

“I am?” Varior said, “I mean, yes, I am.”

“Tell me where it is.”

“Are you going to tell the Raven King?” Varior asked suspiciously.

“Yes, and then I’ll save us all.” Silver said, “You have no idea the real value of that ring.”

Varior bit his lip.

“Do you trust me?” Silver asked. She didn’t know if he should trust her, she didn’t know if she was worthy of it. She didn’t know if she could keep him alive. But she really did need him to tell her.

“Can you look in my head? I can show you the map.”

“I’ll give it a try. Hopefully it won’t hurt.”

“Hurt?” Varior protested, but Silver had already taken a deep breath and focused on his mind.

A flood of images and memories crashed into her. Everything was moving so fast she couldn’t tell what was going on. She focused on the ring and she was presented with a string of
memories, seeing them through Varior’s eyes. A man who could only have been Varior’s oldest brother was telling the rest of the brothers about the King’s ring that had come into the actress Portia’s possession. Then Varior was kissing the actress’s hand and she was giggling, not noticing as he slipped the ring off her finger. Silver hurried past some more images set in the actress’s dressing room; she really didn’t need to see that. She slowed down to watch through Varior’s eyes from the shadows as Thorley sold the ring to a goblin warlord and then the King was asking the Skogil brothers for their assistance in recovering an old family heirloom. Varior snuck into the goblin tunnels. She tried to memorize his path through the twisting, labyrinthine passages beneath Ening City. He fought past a few bodyguards and then decapitated the warlord. He took the ring and stowed it in his pocket. He made his way back through the tunnels toward the surface.

Silver-in-Varior looked around himself for foes before hiding the ring behind a loose brick in a spiral staircase. He exited the labyrinth and came up into the moonlight. The pain was sharp and immediate as Silver felt a knife slipping into Varior’s back. The memory of it took Silver’s breath away. A little blood bubbled from Varior’s mouth and Varior was eased onto the ground, propped against his attacker’s chest. He tried to turn his head, but he couldn’t. Varior’s vision wavered and darkened. The images stopped and Silver pulled back a bit out of Varior’s memories.

“Silver,” said Varior, “don’t hate me. I know I lied to you and I—I—about Portia—I’m sorry—”

“Are you sorry because you think I’m jealous, or are you sorry because you used a vulnerable woman to steal her ring?” Silver wondered if she was jealous.
“I…both?”

The door crashed open and two of Varior’s brothers backed in. Thorley rushed to untie Varior as Sam fought a group of goblins.

“Surrender!” cried the goblin who appeared to be in charge. He was by far the ugliest and the slimiest. The goblins had cornered the three brothers in the room. “We already have the wolf. Come quietly now.”

Silver suddenly felt dizzy and the scene in the bowl rippled and vanished. She had a brief realization that the digging spell had made her a little dizzy and tired both times she had used it. Perhaps that’s what the Raven King meant about the price of magic. She pitched forward against the desk and everything went dark.

#

“You idiot.” Blearily, Silver could see the Raven King’s thin face, swimming before her. She felt him gather her into his arms. He carried her over to the bed. “That spell could have killed you,” he growled. “Didn’t you listen to what I said about the price of magic?”

“You explain things poorly,” Silver murmured. “How was I s’posed to know what would happen? Nothing happened to you when used magic to transport us.”

The Raven King flared his nostrils angrily. “I have more practice than you.”

“I found your name,” Silver’s eyes were so heavy she couldn’t keep them open.

“Where?” he asked squeezing and shaking her shoulder. “Where is it?” But she had fallen asleep.

#
When Silver came to, the Raven King was sitting in a chair at her bedside, staring intently at her.

“Ah,” Silver said, starting and sitting up straight. “You creep, have you been here the whole time?” She paused, “How long have I been asleep?”

“About sixteen hours,” the Raven King said drily.

Silver glanced out the window and guessed that it must be morning again. She suddenly remembered Varior and the attacking goblins. “We’ve got to help Varior!”

“No, we’ve got to get my name. You said you knew where it was.”

Silver folded her hands on her lap. “I do. But what makes you think I will tell you?”

The Raven King’s face twisted into a scowl.

“I think,” Silver said primly, “that I would like to know exactly how your name got locked in a ring and what your plans were and how I got mixed up in all of them.”

“I could just force you to tell me by magic.”

“You could,” she agreed. “But I can leave the Wildwood, and you cannot.”

The Raven King ground his teeth. “You’re insufferable.”

“I know.”

“That upstart human—”

“You mean King Silas?” asked Silver.

The Raven King sneered. “He was no king. He and his crusaders came here by accident. Divine providence he called it. We met the humans cordially, we are not an overly warlike people, but they cut the trees for their fires and forts, and they sowed iron into the soil. They pushed us out of our coastal lands and their iron kept us from fighting back. But Silas agreed to
leave us alone if I gave him my true name. He imprisoned it in that ring and I was at his beck and
call, like a dog, like a slave.”

“So you cursed him and his family when he asked for help having a son,” Silver said.
Honestly she couldn’t blame him. Silas didn’t sound like a particularly nice guy.

The Raven King was taken aback. “No. I could do no such thing. The terms of the
binding prevent my causing direct harm to the royal family.”

Silver frowned. “But when the King and his wives and the unborn heir died of a
mysterious sickness, it was said that you had done it.”

“And I wonder who started that rumor. The next human to seize power, that two-faced
ancestor of King Festus, I’ll wager.”

Silver’s eyes widened, “You think it was murder?”

“You humans are petty like that. But thankfully, the fact that my name was in the ring
was a secret that Silas never shared. Unfortunately I could still not directly harm the holder of the
ring. So I sent my servant Caton—”

“Caton? Wait, my Caton? The apothecary?”

“She’s not yours, she’s mine. You clearly remember that I charmed the wife of Silas so
she would have a son. You remember what I received in return?”

“Oh, yes? Silas’s twelve daughters,” said Silver, not sure where this was going.

“They lived in the Wildwood under an enchantment, spending their nights dancing in the
Summer Court.”

“Under your enchantment?”
The Raven King waved a hand. “Oh, it hardly matters anymore. It was just a little revenge. With my name gone, I couldn’t do much more than hoodwink humans, but the King was forever beyond my grasp. Princes tried to save them, but most of them were turned into mice. The princesses stayed in Summer Court to serve the Erl King. He has a habit of turning maidens into birds.”

“Yeah, he sounds like a charmer,” Silver muttered darkly.

The Raven King shrugged unconcernedly. “I suppose this wasn’t preferable to them, and two of the princesses, the oldest and the youngest, escaped his court and came to me, asking for release. I agreed on the condition that they help me recover my name. So I set Caton, the youngest, up as an apothecary and I sent my werecat to oversee her as she learned some basic magic.”

“Growltiger?”

“The naming of cats is a tricky business.”

“It seems to me that the naming of anything is tricky business. Speaking of, what do your friends call you? I’m just wondering because ‘The Raven King’ is kind of a mouthful. Do people really say, ‘Oh hello, Raven King, how are you?’”

The Raven King stared at her. “I also answer to My Liege and Your Excellency and Oh Dark One.”

“Oh,” said Silver, unsure if he was joking. She didn’t know if he knew how to joke. “Well, anyway, RK, tell me more about Caton.”

Silver wondered for a moment if she was about to be blasted into tiny particles, but the Raven King let the nickname pass.
“I put her older sister Portia, the prettiest, in the path of the King and she seduced him, with help from cantrips from Caton. Caton has been his personal herbalist for a while so she was in a position to use her persuasion draft to get him to give the ring to Portia. Then they were to bring it back to me whereupon I would be restored to my power and then I would lift their enchantment and that of their sisters.”

“Wait, you made Portia prostitute herself to get her freedom?”

The Raven King raised his eyebrows. “I taught Caton magic. They could make the King believe whatever they wanted. She didn’t have to do anything that offended her sensibilities.”

Silver humphed. Now Caton’s spellbook made sense, she thought.

“And it all would have worked perfectly if you and those idiots hadn’t come along and fucked everything up.”

“They were just trying to make a living,” Silver said diplomatically.

“They’re thieves,” said the Raven King.

Silver shrugged. “So here’s what I propose: you send me back to Ening City, I’ll meet up with Caton and Portia and we’ll get your name back and save the Skogil brothers, who have been kidnapped by goblins if I’m not mistaken.”

“How do I know you won’t just keep my name and try to control me?”

“How do I know that you won’t try to take revenge on the human kingdom once you have your powers back?” Silver asked. “I mean personally, if a conquering army of humans had come to my kingdom, stolen my name and imprisoned me and all my subjects, I’d be pretty pissed off. But, you understand, I still can’t have you destroying the entire human kingdom as much as you might be justified.”
The Raven King considered her for a long moment. “I guess we will just have to trust each other.”

“And when I give your name back, I’d also like you to teach me magic properly and help me find a way to save Varior. Agreed?”

The Raven King nodded once, his face carefully blank. “Your first lesson is not to overextend your limits. I trust you’ve learned that one? If you try a spell too difficult, it can exhaust you, and if you’re not careful, it could kill you.”

“But why didn’t raising the dead take away my energy?”

“The rules of nature demand that you replace what you take. If you take or use energy for a spell, your own energy must replace it. But reanimation is different. It is a debt you must pay to Death, a life for a life, but you cannot give up yours.”

Silver bit her lip. Was she willing to kill someone to save Varior?

“Get ready,” the Raven King said, standing. “You must leave immediately for the city.”

“No. No, definitely not,” Silver said half an hour later. “Can’t you just open up a waypoint to London and then I can go back to the pub or Trafalgar Square and then through to Ening city?”

Silver and the Raven King stood on the steps of the ice palace, snow falling silently around them. The silent Fae guards still flanked the stairs. Silver glanced around at them. Could one of them be her great-great-grandfather?

“This will be faster,” the Raven King argued, “and I can’t just open up waypoints. I only have the one. Do you want to walk all the way back through the forest?”
“I’d prefer it to this,” Silver said under her breath. “What about Growltiger?”

“He’ll meet you there. Cats have their own ways. Come here,” said the Raven King, opening his arms and his wings at the same time.

Silver stared at the huge black raven wings. They were spread out straight from his shoulders, flexed to take off. God, they had to be twenty-four feet wide. She took a tentative step closer to him.

He rolled his eyes. “You’ll have to come closer than that.”

Silver shuffled closer and looped her arms around his neck. He was too tall to do it comfortably. He locked his arms tightly around her waist and took off, his wings whistling downward in one powerful sweep. Silver tried to scream but the air was rushing past her face too quickly. She squeezed her eyes shut.

“You don’t have to hold that tight.” The Raven King said, “I won’t drop you.”

“I’d prefer not to take that chance,” Silver said, not slackening her grip. After a few minutes, she was so cold that she didn’t think she’d be able to move until they were stood up in front of a fire and thawed out.

Silver opened one eye out of curiosity. The white forest was rushing past below them, sparkling and painfully bright. The line of white was broken by the rocky crags of the dwarves’ mountains, and then, abruptly, the air warmed as they crossed the boundary over the Autumn Forest. The Raven King alighted at the edge of the Wildwood that pressed against the outskirts of Ening City. The Raven King released Silver and she stumbled a bit, weak-kneed.

“You’ll need a feather.”

“Excuse me?” asked Silver once she had regained her balance.
The Raven King extended a wing. “Take one. You’ll need it to summon me when you have the ring.”

Silver reached out and grasped one of the long, black, glossy feathers and pulled. It came away surprisingly easily in her hand. With a whoosh that blew back Silver’s hair, the Raven King took off and began winging his way back to the Winter Forest.

Silver made her way carefully back to the apothecary in the afternoon light, hoping the goblins weren’t still looking for her. The apothecary had a Closed sign up in the window but Caton opened the door for Silver when she tapped.

Caton’s golden hair was braided and pulled back from her face and she wore the same plain homespun dress she’d always worn, but Silver realized there had always been an air of royalty about her. Caton led her over to a table where Portia was sitting. Growltiger was perched upon the table. The sisters didn’t look very happy to see Silver.

“So um,” Silver said at last, “am I fired?”

Caton snorted. “Think of it this way: if you hadn’t meddled, we’d have restored the Raven King, lifted our enchantment, and left the apothecary far behind.”

“Right, so, on probation then.”

Caton shrugged, “Maybe you’re up for a promotion.”

Silver and Caton sat down and Portia poured everyone coffee. It was rather surreal. Silver was having coffee with two princesses who’d been alive hundreds of years. And one of them was also a famous actress, although maybe that had all been faked with magic. Silver’s brain hurt.

“Where are the Skogil brothers? What’ve you done to them?” asked Silver.
Sighing, Caton said, “I’ve had three of them enchanted since we found out who stole the ring from Portia, so I persuaded them to kidnap the last one. He’s immune to my spells. I think it has something to do with having been dead. They were trying to get the location of the ring out of him but he wouldn’t tell. But then they were all kidnapped by goblins, who of course are still after the ring too. They’d love to be in control of the Raven King, plus it was their ring to begin with.”

“Great,” said Silver. “Well, good news: I know where the ring is.”

“Thank God,” cried Portia.

“What will we need for the summoning?” asked Caton.

Silver dug out Solomon Mea’s spellbook. She knew there was a summoning spell in there.

“And you stole my spellbook,” Caton observed, shaking her head.

“Erm,” Silver said. “Sorry. It all seems pretty silly now, Valentine’s Day.”

Caton waved a hand. “It doesn’t matter. You clearly have more of an affinity for magic than I do but it will still be best if all three of us cast it. I was worried before that Portia and I wouldn’t have enough power.”

Portia sipped her coffee. “I’m rubbish at magic.”

“We need your grounding and your energy. Growltiger can be our familiar.”

The cat yawned, pink tongue curling.

“We’ll need a crystal for focusing our psychic energy, candles, stardust powder—do you have any of that?”
Caton disappeared into the storeroom to check. She came back a moment later with a packet of iridescent powder.

“Perfect,” said Silver. “And I’ve already got something of the Raven King’s,” she produced the feather from her pouch.

“I have the crystals and the candles and some chalk in case we need to draw any symbols,” Portia said, checking her own pouch.

“We’d better get going then,” Silver said, “before the goblins kill my sort-of-fiancé.”

Caton cast a spell of invisibility over the three women and the cat and they set off across the city, to the tunnel entrance closest to where Varior had hidden the ring.

“Growltiger has told us what happened and that you brought back a corpse as a suitor,” said Caton, “but how did you choose him? I mean, it’s a big graveyard. And you’re engaged now?”

“Honestly, he was the most recent death date,” Silver said, “but I’ve grown very fond of him.” She thought of his joking proposal. She thought, in different circumstances, she might have been happy to accept. But what if she couldn’t save him? She pushed the thoughts away.

“Why did you have him killed?” she shot back at Caton.

“I panicked. All of our planning and everything had blown up in our faces. I used a draft of persuasion to make the other three betray…yours.”

“Varior, his name is Varior.”

“Right, well. I bewitched the oldest brother to kill Varior and get the ring from him but Varior didn’t have it when he came out of the tunnel, I realized too late. I kept the brothers enchanted and tried to have them look for it. Of course, the goblins have also been looking for
the ring. It’s been a nightmare. Honestly, I should thank you for bringing Varior back. We might
never have found the ring. We even tried some finding spells, even though I knew they wouldn’t
work. The Raven King told us that since the ring is so magical, it resists spells.”

“I wish you hadn’t killed him,” Silver said.

Caton didn’t respond. Silver wiped the tears off her face impatiently.

#

The entrance to the tunnel was in the sort of alley that was behind a brothel and had every
intention of holding you up, taking all of your money, and leaving you for dead. The entrance
itself was a sewer grating.

“Charming,” said Caton, glancing around.

“I don’t think goblins have ever been accused of that.” Silver reached down and pulled
the grating open. It swung easily on hinges quiet from use. A staircase extended down into the
dark.

Portia pulled out a candle and lit it. The three women took a deep breath and Portia led
the way down the stairs that vanished under the city. Growltiger followed at her heels. Silver
closed the grating behind them. It fell into place with a hollow, final-sounding clang.

They descended a long time, the air growing colder around them. No one spoke. They all
seemed to be holding their breath in the silence.

Finally they reached the bottom of the stairs; the high-ceilinged tunnel stretching out
ahead of them was made of brick, and lit by torches in sconces. This rather surprised Silver who
had always imagined goblins living in dank, muddy, dark, nasty holes in the ground. Instead the
corridors looked quite like castle corridors, although without windows. Portia blew out her candle, so as not to waste it.

“Silver?” said Caton. “Lead the way.”

Silver shut her eyes, trying to remember what Varior had shown her. She led the other women down the tunnel and to the left when it forked.

“It was pretty close to where we came in because he hid it just before he went out into the alley…where, er, he got stabbed.” Silver shivered involuntarily, remembering the feel of the knife slipping between Varior’s shoulder blades.

They turned left again, off the main tunnel and into a cramped spiral staircase. They descended two full turns and then Silver stopped. She began tapping the bricks at eye level.

“It’s behind a brick somewhere around here.” The three of them all began tapping and tugging on the bricks. “It was right about eye level,” Silver said.

They continued searching.

“Are you sure?” Caton asked after a few minutes.

“This was the place I saw in his memory. He was coming up this staircase—”

Growltiger hissed. The sound of footsteps was coming from above them. Silver’s stomach dropped. Caton was still casting the invisibility spell but the staircase was so confined, she knew they wouldn’t be able to avoid detection if the goblins descended. The grunting voices of goblins echoed down the stairs. They were in the main tunnel above the staircase. The footsteps and voices grew louder. They must’ve been at the top of the stairs.

Caton whispered a spell and the footsteps paused.

“I think,” growled one voice, “that we should go a different way.”
“What?” shrieked a second, “but this is the quickest—”

Caton muttered something else.

“No, you’re right. We shouldn’t go this way,” the second voice amended.

The goblins turned away from the staircase and walked back into the main tunnel. Silver let out a breath in relief. Caton sagged a little against the wall, breathing heavily.

“I’m stupid,” muttered Silver.

“What?” snapped Portia. “It’s not here?”

“No, it is,” said Silver, “but it’s at his eye level, not mine.” She reached up to the row of bricks four rows above where she’d been looking and tugged on the edge of one of the bricks. It came away easily in her hand. She slipped her hand into the space behind the brick, hoping she wasn’t about to grab a spider or a rat, and felt around. She pulled out a ring.

It was heavy and gold with a teardrop-shaped, purple stone set into it. The stone glittered darkly.

“I’ve never seen a stone like this,” Silver said, staring at it.

“It’s iolite,” said Caton. “It’s a stone of awareness and vision. A good place to store the name of a king.”

“So it’s sort of like he lost his whole identity, not just most of his powers.” Silver felt sorry for the Raven King suddenly.

“We’ll have to be careful when we restore his powers,” Portia said.

“In what way?” asked Silver.

“We must keep him from decimating the human population in revenge, and keep his subjects from doing likewise,” said Caton.
“He and I have come to an agreement on that score,” Silver said.

“An agreement?” Caton asked. She shook her head. “That won’t be nearly strong enough. He will have to swear on his true name to our conditions.”

“Swear on his true name?”

“It is the most binding oath one can make.”

They made their way back up the stairs and into the main tunnel.

“Where should we do the summoning?” asked Caton.

“I want to find Varior first,” Silver said. “The Raven King said he would help him.”

“You won’t be able to free him and his brothers without backup,” Portia said.

Caton sighed, “We’ll go for backup. We should be able to hoodwink some of the King’s men. We’ll meet you where they’re being held.”

“You’ll be able to find us?”

“We’ll use with a finding spell. It’s what you’re planning on using to find him isn’t it?”

Silver nodded, “Something like that.”

“I know you won’t listen if I ask you to wait for us, but try not to do anything too stupid before we get there. We need to do the summoning soon. The longer we hold onto the ring, the more chance someone has to steal it.” Caton rolled her eyes. “You’re not even listening. Just go, we’ll catch up. Take Growltiger with you.”

Silver took off down the corridor, Growltiger loping along beside her. She groped in her pouch for *Practical Necromancy for Beginners*. There was something in there about a Necromancer being able to find her subjects. She paused in the light from a torch to read the incantation aloud. She closed her eyes and thought of Varior. After a moment, Silver felt a
strange tugging sensation, like there was a string tied to her heart, pulling her onward. She followed without hesitation.

She took a right fork and descended a staircase, turning left at the bottom. She ran along the new corridor for a while. As she tried to run past a heavily carved wooden door, the spell gave her a jerk in the other direction and she skidded to a halt, turning back to the door. She splayed her fingers against the door and thrust it open with a percussive word she had learned from Solomon Mea’s book. Ignoring the brief dizziness that overtook her, Silver hurried inside.

There was blood dripping from the corner of Varior’s mouth as evidence of past tortures when Silver crossed the threshold. He was tied to a chair at the center of the floor. It looked very like the last place he had been held prisoner.

The non-bloody side of his mouth twitched upward. “I knew you wouldn’t be able to resist a damsel in distress,” he said. “Never doubted you’d rescue—”

But Silver had crossed the room in three strides and kissed Varior hard on the mouth, a hand on either side of his face. She could taste blood, his blood, and he kissed her back softly. Her tears were on both of their faces.

“I’ve done something terrible,” she whispered.

“Don’t be so hard on yourself,” he said. “You’re a great kisser. Not sure what you were doing being single before I arrived on the scene.”

She half laughed, half sobbed.

“Silver,” Varior said gently. “Untie me so I can hold you.”

She moved to untie him. “What have they done to you?”
Varior was covered in oozing stab wounds, wounds that would have killed most men. Growltiger hopped up onto his lap, purring and kneading his claws on Varior’s thighs.

“Growltiger,” Silver said, “you’re not helping.”

Varior shrugged and then winced. “You made me pretty sturdy. I guess they can’t kill me, since, you know, been there, done that.”

“Oh, this is all my fault,” Silver breathed. She didn’t know if she loved Varior; they had known each other for less than three days, but she knew she had to save him if she could. She owed him that much.

She got Varior’s bonds undone and he shooed Growltiger off his lap, giving the cat a grudging pat.

“Hurry,” he said. “We have to get out of here before the goblins get back. I’m surprised they’ve been gone so long.”

“We have to get your bothers first,” Silver said.

Varior’s face twisted. “No, we don’t. They’d leave me.”

“I don’t have time to explain, but your brothers didn’t betray you. They were enchanted.”

Varior stared at Silver, emotions flickering across his face: confusion, pain, anger, hope, pain again.

“Come on,” Silver said. “Where are they?”

Silently, Varior led Silver to a small door leading off Varior’s cell.

Thorley and Samwell were tied back to back in the next room. Sam was slumped forward, apparently asleep and Thorley was sprawled backward, his head lolling against his brother’s.
Silver hurried to untie them. Varior moved to stand before Samwell, looking down at him his expression caught between longing and fear.

Sam started awake and whacked his head against Thorley’s, who also woke, groaning. Sam blinked in confusion at Varior. Slowly, a look of horror dawned across his face.

“Varior,” he whispered. “Can you ever forgive us?”

Varior hit him.

“Varior!” cried Silver. “Not the time.”

“Ask me again later,” Varior growled at his brother.

Thorley stood up, stretching and rubbing his wrists. “What I said on the train was true, by the way. I mean not the part about being paid by Portia to kill you, but that I was the one who resisted the enchantment the most.”

“Oh wonderful, you know that would be really comforting if I hadn’t still died!”

Thorley shrugged. “You look fine now. No harm done, eh? Invincible. Might be an improvement.”

Varior punched him too.

Boys, thought Silver, shaking her head. “Where’s Cain?” she asked Sam.

“This way,” Sam coiled the ropes that had lately been tied around him and led Silver and Growltiger to a third adjacent room. Before Silver could react, Cain, the wolf, had leapt at them, jaws snapping. Just as quickly, Sam had looped the rope around his neck and tugged him sideways, away from Silver and Growltiger, whose fur was standing on end, hackles raised. Thorley was beside them in an instant, tying a slipknot around the snapping, slavering jaws.
Once his mouth was securely shut, the brothers tied the remaining ropes into a harness and a leash.

Silver bit back a laugh. They looked like they were about to go walk the family dog—if, of course, the family dog was a vicious werewolf.

“Time to go,” said Varior, “before the goblins get back.”

“Yeah, where are the goblins?” asked Thorley.

They spilled out into the main tunnel and collided with a troupe of goblins.

“Ah,” said Thorley. “There you are.” He knocked aside a spear and punched the goblin holding it. Immediately, everyone was fighting. But the goblins had weapons and Silver and the boys did not. Thorley released the rope around Cain’s muzzle and set him on the goblins. Jaws snapping, Cain also managed to do some damage with his claws, bowling over several goblins. Growltiger was caterwauling as he scratched out the eyes of a goblin that had been heading for Silver, spear raised.

Hurry up, Caton, Silver thought desperately. She dodged sideways as a goblin thrown by Cain hit the wall behind her with a solid crunch. She managed to tug a spear from the goblin Growltiger had incapacitated and gave it a good thwack with the non-lethal end.

“Silver,” cried Varior and she spun to see him trying to hold off a goblin with his bloody arms. She tossed him the spear and he dispatched the goblin. A slimy body collided with Silver and she was on the floor, struggling to keep the goblin’s hands off her throat. Her fingernails scrabbled. The goblin’s hands tightened against her throat. Dark splotches gathered at the edge of her vision.

“Charge!” shouted a voice.
The goblin on top of Silver seized up and went still, its whole compact weight falling on her chest, knocking the last of the breath from her lungs. A moment later a knight had dragged the body of the goblin off of her. She pushed herself up, coughing and gasping, to see a squadron of knights led by King Festus, himself, bearing down on the goblins from both ends of the tunnel. Silver knew Caton was behind them, persuading them all onward. The King was too much of a coward to lead a charge without magical courage.

The fighting intensified as the soldiers and goblins clashed. The clanging of swords and the screaming of men and goblins echoed against the brick walls. For a moment, it looked like it would be an easy win for the soldiers, but then one of the goblins began making an ear-splitting, high-pitched, siren noise and goblin reinforcements began to pour in from—Silver couldn’t tell where.

“The summoning,” Caton shouted. “We have to do it now!” Somehow she and Portia had made their way to Silver’s side through the storm of blows.

Portia drew a circle with chalk on the floor by the side of the tunnel. Silver rushed over and the three witches jumped into the circle and took hands. The chalk lines would keep them safe for the duration of the spell. Growltiger crouched at Silver’s feet. Silver and Caton held the feather of the Raven King between them. Portia hastily lit a candle and held it in the hand joined with Caton. She held her crystal in the hand joined with Silver.

Silver chanted the words from Solomon Mea’s spellbook.

They released hands and Portia placed the crystal on the floor in the center of the circle with the candle atop it, cemented there by dripping wax. Silver pushed the feather into the flame until it caught, shriveling and folding in on itself until it fell to ashes.
Silver pulled out the ring and held it over the flame of the candle and the ashes of the feather. Caton threw a pinch of the stardust powder into the air where it hung, sparkling. The ring lifted off Silver’s palm and rotated slowly in the air, the stone pointed up. Caton, Portia, and Silver leaned in close, and together, they whispered the true name of the Raven King.

Several things happened at once: the spear of an extremely angry goblin sank into the stomach of King Festus; a goblin lunged for the ring spinning in the chalk circle and Varior jumped between the goblin and Silver, not knowing the circle would have protected her, and taking a spear in his thigh for his trouble; and the Raven King appeared, hovering above the chalk circle in the high-ceilinged tunnel.

The Raven King flapped his wings and everyone except the three witches, Growltiger, and himself froze; Varior was mid-stumble and King Festus had a look of surprise stuck on his face. All at once, the torches illuminating the tunnel went out, leaving the only source of light the candle, the stardust, and the spinning, glowing ring.

“Release to me my name and my powers,” said the Raven King.

But Silver’s eyes were on King Festus, frozen in the act of dying. She turned to Caton, the truth dawning on her.

“You brought the King here on purpose.”

“But,” said Caton, “we just summoned him.”

“No, not him, Festus. You were hoping someone would kill him.”

Caton shrugged. “He’s not the rightful ruler. He is descended from Silas’s lieutenant, who took the ring and killed him after my sisters and I were taken to the Wildwood.”
“Return to me my name!” cried the Raven King again, evidently angry that no one was paying any attention to him.

“If we do,” said Caton, looking up at him, “do you swear not to take revenge on the humans, and that none of your people will do so either? Do you swear to honor my oldest sister Portia as the rightful queen of the humans? Do you swear to be our ally in times of war? And do you swear to continue Silver’s magical education and do your best to help her young man?”

The Raven King stared at her, furious.

“Tick tock,” said Silver, “or maybe I’ll just keep the ring.” Her hand twitched toward the ring.

“I swear,” growled the Raven King, not seeing another way out.

“Swear on your true and rightful name,” Portia said.

“I do so swear.” The Raven King said his true name and the air rippled with the power of it.

Caton took out a knife that had been hidden somewhere on her person and brought it down with force on the purple gemstone that held the Raven King’s name. It cracked open cleanly and a tiny, bright spark flew from the fragments into the Raven King’s mouth. He gave a great flap of his wings and was gone.

The torches flared up again and time restarted, the battle lurching back into action.

King Festus drew a rattling breath and died. The last of the goblins were killed or driven away by the knights and Portia went to stand over the dead King Festus.

“I, Portia, daughter of King Silas and true heir to the throne, claim the Crown of the Kingdom of Meryn.”
The remaining soldiers fell to their knees before her, though Silver suspected they were still enchanted.

“You’re the daughter of Silas?” Thorley asked, wiping blood from his eyes that flowed from a gash over his eyebrow. “You look great for being hundreds of years old.”

Portia gave Thorley a once over. “And you’re pretty handsome, for a thief,” she said.

Thorley blushed right up to his ears. Silver frowned; how easily he had forgotten that she and Caton had enchanted him and persuaded him to betray his own brother. Men.

“Come on,” Sam said. “We should all get out of here before more goblins turn up.”

Varior was lying on the floor, covered with innumerable injuries. Silver fell to her knees beside him, cradling his head in her lap.

“Hey witch-lady,” he murmured, blood burbling from his half-smiling mouth. “Think you can patch me up? It’s an odd feeling—knowing you should be dead, but not being able to die.”

A sob escaped Silver’s mouth and she put up a hand as if she could force the sound back in. Several soldiers were enlisted to carry Varior and the whole party returned to the surface, exiting the tunnels. Silver hoped she would never have occasion to go back down there again.

“Where should we take him, my lady?” asked one of the knights.

“Follow me,” Silver said and she led the way back to the apothecary.

They laid Varior out on several pushed-together tables. Growltiger hopped up beside him, sniffing with mild interest.

“Silver,” Caton said softly, “Portia and I have got to go. We have to secure the castle and get our sisters.”

“Of course,” said Silver. “Good luck.”
Thorley was outside, tying up Cain in front of the apothecary. Samwell skulked near the door, unsure what to do.

“Why,” asked Thorley, coming in after a moment, “isn’t he dead?”

“I brought him back to life,” Silver said. “Only I can send him back to death.”

Varior was breathing in strange gasping spasms and Silver suspected a punctured lung. She smoothed some of his tawny hair back from his face.

“Raven King,” she said loudly. “I need you. You swore to help him.”

“I do not appreciate being called like dog or a servant just because I made a vow,” the Raven King huffed a few minutes later when he landed in front of the apothecary. Cain growled at him and he growled right back. The werewolf cowered. The Raven King’s wings got stuck in the doorway and he shook them out angrily before coming into the apothecary. Silver raised her eyebrows. Sam and Thorley fell back to watch against the back wall. Varior’s eyes were closed as he wheezed on the table.

“Help him,” said Silver, “please. I don’t know what to do.”

The Raven King glared at her. “You should have thought of that before you raised him.”

Silver nodded. “I know.”

“Have you taken care of the other two?”

Silver shook her head.

“Go and do that,” the Raven King said more gently. “I will do what I can for him.”

Silver pressed a kiss onto Varior’s forehead. “I’m coming back. I swear.”

She left the apothecary with Growltiger trotting after her and headed toward the cemetery, hoping Sir Rollo and Sir Gregor would still be there. She was tired from all the magic
she had used back in the tunnels; she didn’t want to cast the finding spell unless she really needed it.

The sun was setting, turning the graveyard gold and stretching long shadows behind each of the headstones. It had been a very long day—a very long, what, three days?

The graveyard looked like a battlefield. Goblin corpses lay scattered around between the tombstones. Mercifully, the skeleton of Sir Rollo was still snoozing under a tree and Silver breathed a sigh of relief.

She dug out the *Practical Necromancy for Beginners* and flipped it to sending subjects back to the world of the dead. What would happen if she just left them? It couldn’t really be that bad, could it? She searched the book.

> *When a body is first raised, particularly a fresh body, it will regain life-like characteristics and it will seem like new. But do not be deceived. For this life-like state is not life. The corpse will be able to continue in this state for several days, maybe even weeks, before it begins to fade as if behind a veil. The corpse will still inhabit a place between worlds, neither living nor dead. Unless a living soul is traded for that of the corpse, it will never be able to cross fully into the land of the living. After the purposes of the Necromancer are served, she must kill the subject (for no one else will be able to) and then she must dispose of the body in such a way that it cannot be raised again. Burning or eating is recommended.*
Eating! Silver gagged. She looked back at the skeleton of Sir Rollo, breathing peacefully—though she didn’t know how that was possible since he didn’t have lungs.

He hadn’t wanted to come back to life anyway, she reasoned. Sending him back to the land of the dead would be a mercy.

She didn’t know how to kill an undead skeleton but she figured detaching the skull would be a good start. The skeleton made a gross cracking noise and the breathing stopped. Silver built up a pyre and heaved the skeleton onto it.

There was one last incantation to complete the ritual. Growltiger sat at her feet and placed a paw on her foot. Silver felt energy flow into her.

“Lords of Winter, Death and Night,” she began. “I return to you this soul. In clear skies, as the full moon sets, let this spirit return to the Netherrealms. Krewix izseod ab unum sres chanbeo Druzworhot et obetru.”

The flames reared higher, responding to the spell. The bones of the old knight were slowly reduced to ashes. Silver put out the fire, then recited the finding spell for Sir Gregor.

The heart-string tugged her back toward town and down the high street. It led her to a brightly lit tavern, from which a stream of patrons was leaving, all looking terrified. When she went inside, she beheld the half-rotted corpse sitting at the bar, downing pint after pint of beer while the terrified barman cowered as far from him as possible.

Silver approached the bar and the barman turned haunted eyes on her. There was a long kitchen knife lodged in Sir Gregor’s neck; someone had unsuccesssfully tried to rid the tavern of its undead patron. Growltiger hopped up on the bar to sniff the dead man.
“Well, you certainly did a better job on Varior,” the cat said, sitting down and wrapping his tail neatly around himself. “Your parents would never have approved of this one.”

Silver reached over and pulled the knife from the huge knight’s neck. He barely reacted, just continued drinking his beer. Silver supposed that there was no beer in the land of death. She plunged the knife into his back and twisted. He slumped forward, knocking over his tankard and hitting his forehead against the bar. She pulled the knife from his back and wiped it on his rotting clothes. She tucked it into her belt.

“Help me,” Silver said to the barman. “We have to take the body outside to burn it.”

The barman shook his head fervently.

Silver’s eyes flashed. “Either you help me move him or I’ll burn down your pub.”

In the end, he helped Silver take Sir Gregor’s body back to the cemetery where she burned him and said the incantation.

“You’re like a regular Grim Reaper,” observed Growltiger. “I bet you’d look good in a black hooded cloak and a scythe.”

But Silver didn’t want to deal with death anymore. She headed back to the apothecary. The Raven King was waiting by the door for her. Varior’s brothers were seated beside him and even Cain was slumbering beneath the table, dreaming doggy dreams.

“Is it done?” asked the Raven King.

Silver nodded heavily. She was very tired. She came over to Varior and took his hand. The Raven King had repaired all of his wounds and he was sleeping, breathing more easily.

“What do we do?” Silver asked.

The Raven King gave her a long look. “You already know.”
“No!” shouted Silver and Varior started awake, sitting up and squeezing her hand. “What about King Festus, all those goblins that died? Surely the price is paid.”

“It doesn’t work like that. It has to be intentional.”

“No,” said Silver. “There must be something else. You swore you would help!”

The Raven King shook his head. “I swore to do my best to help him. That I have done. He is no longer in pain.” He gestured at the repaired injuries. “You must do the rest.”

The Raven King turned and left the apothecary. Silver watched him take flight, heading for home.

Silver ripped open Practical Necromancy for Beginners again. There must be an answer hidden there. She flipped the pages of the spellbook and rummaged through them like a drawer full of odds and ends. There would be a solution in there somewhere. She knew it. Like a pearl in an oyster. There would be a way around what the Raven King had said. There had to be another way. Death didn’t have to follow life. She could find a way to bring back the balance, she knew it. But the pages were slipping through her fingers and the only thing she had was an ultimatum. She didn’t want to kill him. She didn’t want to send him back to that dark, cold, abyss where he’d been frightened and alone. She’d pulled him back once, been his lighthouse in the darkness. She couldn’t let him ebb back out into that sea.

She was crying in earnest now, nearly ripping the pages as she turned them.

“Silver,” whispered Varior. “What’s wrong?”

He tugged the book gently from her hands and looked down at it. His face barely changed but she knew he had read the passage about reanimated corpses being stuck between worlds.

“I guess that’s it then, isn’t it, witch-lady?” he said softly.
“No,” said Silver. “There’s another way. Another soul could take your place—”

Varior put his mouth over hers to stop her from saying more.

“It was good while it lasted, eh Goldie?” he whispered, his forehead pressed against hers.

“Don’t say that,” said Silver. “I’m a Necromancer, there must be a way.”

“Take me,” Sam said suddenly, rising and coming around to face Silver and Varior.

“What?” said Varior.

“I’m the reason you died in the first place. Take my life and you can stay.”

But Varior was shaking his head. “I can’t, Sam. It wasn’t your fault.”

“Please,” said Sam.

“No. The others,” said Varior, “they need you.”

“Then take me,” said Thorley. His usual joking tone was gone and his face was pale.

“Absolutely not,” Varior and Sam said together.

The sun was beginning to come up and the full moon had set. Under the table, the werewolf gave a high whine and transformed back into a man. Cain tried to get up but was entangled in the ropes that had been tied around his wolf form.

Thorley bent to help him, grumbling, “I’m just saying, I’m a non-essential member of this team.”

“What’s going on?” asked Cain. “What have I missed?”

Everyone stared at him, unsure how to explain all that had happened since he’d transformed.

“I have to kill him, or someone has to take his place.” Silver said finally.

“Well, that’s easy,” said Cain. “I’m a danger to everyone. Take me.”
“No,” said Sam. “I’m the oldest. I get to decide!”

Varior jumped to his feet. “I’m not letting any of you die for me.” He crossed the apothecary and hurried out into the street. Silver went after him.

Going through the door she smacked right into someone in sunglasses who was trying to come in. The person squeaked and flicked her sunglasses up onto her head. It was Aidolyn. Silver stared at her, her brain not comprehending why Aidolyn would be standing in front of her as Varior walked away down the street.

“Morning,” said Aidolyn, not as brightly as usual. “I’m hungover, but look, I’m on time!”

“Oh um,” said Silver at a loss. “We’re closed today, go home and get some rest. Thanks for being on time.”

“Oh excellent,” Aidolyn pushed her sunglasses back down over her eyes and let out an enormous yawn. “Sir Gladden will be so pleased.” She turned and headed back down the street.

Silver marveled for a moment that there were still people out there whose lives had not been irrevocably altered by the last seventy-two hours. Then she turned and raced after Varior. He was walking determinedly away from the apothecary but he had not gone far.

“Varior!” she called. She reached for his arm and turned him back to face her.

But in the same moment, he caught both her hand and the kitchen knife at her belt and before she knew what had happened, he was kissing her, pulling her body into his, pushing the knife into his heart with her hands.

“Varior!” she screamed as he stumbled, pulling them both to the ground as blood poured from his chest.

With shaking hands, she pulled the knife from his heart, but it was too late.
“Never let yourself think that you didn’t save me,” he whispered in her ear. His eyes were wide and so blue that it hurt to look at them.

For the second time, Varior Skogil died in the arms of someone who loved him.

#

Silver, Thorley, Samwell, Cain, and Growltiger stood on a hilltop, stars scattering the darkness above them, watching the flames consume Varior’s body. Silver took a deep breath and recited the incantation.

“So,” said Thorley when it was done. “He can never come back?”

“Never,” said Silver. Then after a moment, “Unless—”

“No!” said everyone else together.

Silver closed her mouth and watched the flames dance.

#

Dear Mom and Dad,

I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is that I am now the owner of the apothecary as Caton has moved to the palace to be personal magician to the Queen.

Everything in town has pretty much settled down since the change in leadership, though of course the goblins are furious that all their corrupt royal advisors have been fired. I am now living in the flat above the shop and my insurance covered most of the damage to my old cottage. I’ve paid the landlord the rest.

The bad news is that my fiancé, Varior Skogil, is dead. He has, in fact, always been dead. I’m sorry I lied to you and I know you don’t approve of black magic but there is no more denying
that I am a witch. I have begun to study magic with the Raven King and his associates and I promise to be more responsible with my spell casting in the future.

I hope you are enjoying the fine weather and tell Benjamin that I saw some interesting art on my recent trip to London that I’m sure he would appreciate.

Your loving daughter,

Silver

#

“I don’t think this is going to work,” said Growltiger. He licked a paw surreptitiously and peered into the cauldron on the table in the storeroom in the back of the apothecary, whiskers twitching.

“Yes, so you’ve said,” Silver said, rifling through some ingredients and not looking at him.

“It’s been a year now. You could just let him go.”

“Did anyone ask you for your opinion?”

“You don’t need to. I give it freely,” the cat said magnanimously, wrapping his tail tightly about himself.

“Too freely,” Silver grumbled.

“You only knew him for three days. You can’t possibly have fallen that deeply in love.”

“If you don’t stop talking, I’ll curse you.”

Growltiger yawned, “I’d like to see you try.” He stood up and stretched, arching his back.

“Well, don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

“Consider me warned.”
The cat leapt off the table and stalked out into the garden, tail aloft.

Silver lifted the ceramic urn of ashes and upended it into her cauldron. She pricked her finger, spat in the cauldron and then took out the finger bone. It was the only fully intact bone that had somehow survived the cremation. She kissed it then put it into the cauldron too.

I hope this works, she thought. She took a deep breath and began casting the spell.

The End

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