

“While the beasts of prey, come from caverns deep, viewed the maid asleep.” –William Blake.

1

Tuesday, March 9, 1965

San Francisco

The rain was a soft pattering outside the classroom window.

A smooth rhythmic dance so unlike Blake’s rebellious paintbrush hovering over the canvas.

The other Mission High students sat in front of their easels, painting and creating. Some were pensive and focused; others were gabbing with their neighbors. Blake, on the other hand, was bleary-eyed and entirely unfocused. She had only managed four hours of sleep last night. Again.

She blamed it on the strange recurrent dream she’d been having for the last couple of weeks. A dream that was hell bent on consuming her sleep. Maybe her sanity. Mr. Brown walked around the lively classroom, stopping at each student to offer suggestions, words of encouragement, things like *excellent layering* or *what does this represent?* He wore a thick wool sweater with plain gray slacks that were an inch too long. The teacher was young, private, and forever distracted unless he was talking about art. His hands were clasped behind his back while an overly zealous operatic tune crooned from the little record player in the corner. And while Blake questioned his choice of music, this was her favorite place to be with its woody aroma of charcoal pencils, the intoxicating scent of oil paint on over-used palletes, and the pungent smell of brush cleaner. For her, this classroom smelled of dreams and possibilities.

In the gray afternoon light, Blake stared at her half-finished painting of a girl sleeping in the same Willow tree Blake had been dreaming about. She tapped her paint brush across the palm of her hand as if she could loosen the bristles into creative servitude.

Mr. Brown lifted the needle off the record and clapped his hands together loudly, to get everyone’s attention. “Okay, class I think we need some quiet, contemplative, centering time.” A few groans rose up. Blake, on the other hand, was more than happy to fall under the spell of one of her teacher’s meditations, close her tired eyes, and crash.

The rain fell steadily as Mr. Brown flicked off the lights, making the room a cool gray oasis. “Fold your arms on the tables and put your heads down.” His voice was soothing, velvety. Blake relaxed, inhaled, exhaled. Her eyelids grew heavier with every breath. Her limbs weightless.

“Now, imagine a calm quiet peaceful place,” Mr. Brown went on. “Let yourself go.” “Where to?” some smart alec asked, but Blake was already drifting.

She began to imagine a stroll along the bay when...

*A shadowy darkness unfolds.*

*Mist rises.*

*The Willow stands tall, its branches heavy with the weight of untold secrets. With a resounding crack, the dark trunk splits down the middle.*

*To reveal a moonlit scene of sweeping trees draped across a stately brick home. An imposing iron gate adorned with the name Devereux creaks open slowly as if a phantom is urging Blake inside.*

*On top of one of the gate's spires floats a pale blue heart, transparent as glass. At its center is the drawing of a single brown eye, half closed eyelid, long lashes. One inch lower, Blake thinks, and the iron will shatter the heart. Another appears on a different spire. And another. Large flakes of snow begin to tumble from the sky and then a woman's voice comes from inside the house, muffled and distant.*

*Blake's limbs are heavy. An unseen force is pinning her in place, forcing her to see the heart, forcing her to listen to the whispering wind.*

*Look. See. Remember.*

*"Blake?"*

Startled awake by her teacher's voice, Blake shot up, banging her knee on the table. A chorus of laughter rose up as the guy next to her, Bruce, said, "Sleeping beauty not getting enough rest?"

She threw him a glare before Mr. Brown quirked a brow and said, "Seems you're wanted in the office."

Half awake, Blake rose, adjusted her cardigan and smoothed her dark hair with all the dignity she could muster.

She took the pink slip from Mr. Brown and headed into the corridor where she found Olivia, the sixth period monitor. And her best friend.

"You won't believe what I just heard," Olivia squealed.

Blake, still a little light headed from her sadly short lived nap said, "You called me out of class for gossip?"

"Well, yeah," Olivia said nonchalantly leading Blake down the hall and out of Mr. Brown's sight. "Because it involves you."

"Me? What did I do?"

Olivia tucked a shiny blonde hair behind her ear and rolled her wide set, curious eyes. She had been Blake's first friend when Blake moved to San Francisco to live with her aunt Remi and uncle Cole after her parents' deaths ten years ago. Their friendship was cemented in second grade over snails. Willie Johnson had planted one in Blake's peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Olivia had been the one to save her from the impending doom of crunch and slime. Blake had been the one to clean the poor sticky snail before setting it free on lush piece of lawn outside. The two girls were immediately inseparable after that.

"You didn't do anything, but..." Olivia stopped, leaned closer. "You know Carl, the fink from P.E.? Well, he's friends with Richie and Richie is going to, or at least he *wants* to ask you to the prom!"

Richie Bannister. The boy with sharp blue eyes and a Beach Boy grin. The truth was that Blake hardly knew him —she had only sort of admired him from the baseball bleachers and in between locker stops for the last several months. He was quiet, barely speaking a few hellos, a couple of heys, and a single apology for knocking into her accidentally in the hall.

"Richie?" Blake tried to make room for a plausible explanation. "He doesn't even talk to me. Why would he want—"

"—because you're Blake Estancia. That's why. You're beautiful and talented and mysterious. Boys love mystery."

Blake disagreed with her friend's assessment. She was not mysterious. She was just busy. Still, her heartbeats grew into hard anxious thumps. "Liv, please tell me you didn't do this." It would be just like her to play matchmaker, and the thought of that was both endearing and humiliating.

Olivia released an annoyed sigh. "Of course not." Then she grabbed Blake's hands and smiled. "I thought you'd be happy."

Happy. Terrified. Stunned. Was there a difference?

"I just wasn't expecting—" Blake inhaled slowly. "Just give me a minute to absorb it. And you're sure?" Her heart started to race again. "We can trust Carl the fink? I?" Liv rolled her eyes. "You think I would even mention it if I wasn't sure?" Prom.

Blake knew it was a right of passage, but she had given it little thought. She had been completely consumed by her art since she had applied, at Mr. Brown's urging, for the most competitive internship in the city with the amazing artist T.K. Grayson. He had been a child prodigy, had been compared to Picasso by the time he was fifteen, had shown his work in premier galleries all over the world by the time he was twenty. Had married and divorced two actresses and three models by the time he was fifty. Not exactly a role model, but getting the opportunity to learn from his artistic brilliance, to be his student, sort of overrode all that.

“Richie would definitely make for a nice prom picture,” Blake teased. “But it’s only March. The prom is two months away. There’s still spring break, exams...” *The internship*. “Maybe he’s an early planner. Or maybe he wants to clear the field.”

A tingle of excitement ran up Blake’s legs. “And you?”

“What about me?”

“Who are you planning on taking?” Blake knew Olivia would have her choice of who to go with.

“I’m keeping my options open. I’m kind of scared that Dean is going to ask me.” “Big burly football Dean?”

“The one and only.”

“Well he has liked you since ninth grade and he’s really nice and...”

“...nice is such a drag. And speaking of.” She reached into her pant pocket and pulled out a half used pencil with teeth marks and a ChapStick. She glanced over her shoulder then handed Blake the items, “Can you do your thing with these?”

“Who do they belong to?”

“A couple of guys I’m trying to choose between. I figured you might get a glimpse— good or bad and it would help me decide. So how about it?” She gave a coy expression. “Use your magic for your best friend?”

*Magic . . . ha*. She wouldn’t exactly call what she could do *that*. Magic was the thing that always felt out of reach.

When Blake was a child, she had wanted to possess her mother’s power. She would climb her backyard tree, raise her hands like a little sorceress and try to call the magic to her. To make it bend the branches, incinerate the leaves, blow a gust of wind. Blake’s longing grew to a size she couldn’t contain—year after year it stretched and pulled, tearing apart her ribs and clawing up her throat. But her mother’s magic never came.

And even though magic had run in both sides of her family, the greatest powers seemed to have been held by Blake’s grandmother Zora, a woman she only knew through stories. According to Remi, Zora had the astonishing ability to create any disguise she desired and move things with her mind. And then there was her extraordinary music and how she could use it to channel her powers. That was useful magic. Significant magic that changes the world and your place in it.

Sadly, Blake had *barely-there* magic. The rules were simple: She could sense things when she touched objects—a flash of the sea, or a single note of music, or the taste of lavender tea, or the fleeting feeling of regret. Nothing more. But the true power was in the object’s memories, not in Blake. If the object chose to speak to her through any one of her five senses, she could get a small sense of its history, which could be interesting, sure . . . just not earth shattering.

Blake’s inheritance occupied an in-between space—not as powerful as her mother and grandmother’s telekinesis, but not as slight as her aunt Remi’s ability, which consisted of sending a waft of air to anyone anywhere in the world. The truth was, Blake was just a bits and pieces girl.

“Nothing on ChapStick,” she said, handing it back to Olivia. “And the chewed up pencil? I saw a puddle of blood.”

Liv’s eyes went wide with terror. “Seriously?”

Blake laughed. “No, but it sounds more interesting than the soda fizzing I heard.” “Well, that’s not at all helpful,” she sighed.

“I better get back.”

Olivia inched closer, studying Blake’s face. “Hold on...you look terrible.” “What happened to beautiful and mysterious?”

Ignoring Blake’s attempt at humor, Olivia said, “Beautiful and mysterious but with serious bags. What’s the deal?”

“Just some weird dreams lately,” she admitted.

“About what?”

Blake thought about the dream she had just had in class with the spinning heart and an eye at its center.

“Just weird symbols and a tree and stuff.”

Olivia pressed her lips into a thin line. “Jung says that dreams are the psyche’s way of trying to communicate important stuff, so we should try to interpret them.” “Fine, but right now my psyche better get back to class.” Blake started to turn when Olivia caught her arm.

“I bet I could help you interpret them.”

Blake was about to argue.

“Look,” Olivia said, “you’d be helping me. I’m supposed to find a research project—” “—Liv. I am not going to be your project. And really,” Blake urged, “they’re nothing.” Blake headed back to the art room, where everyone was back to work on their freestyle

projects. Thirty minutes later, Blake set her unfinished painting in her cubby and packed up her supplies as the bell rang.

“Blake, can you hang back a minute?” Mr. Brown asked.

Shouldering her bookbag, she waited for the other students to file out before she headed to Mr. Brown’s desk. Maybe he had some kind of technique advice. Maybe he wanted to check in with how obviously distracted she’d been today. But instead he handed her an envelope.

The paper was crisp, cool against Blake’s fingertips. And then came the image of a shiny white floor just as Mr. Brown said four magical words:

“You got the interview.”