

Sarah and I are hanging half in, half out my bedroom window, passing the bottle of vodka back and forth.

"We could off her?" Sarah suggests, all her words slurring into one.

"How would we do it?" I ask, swigging a huge gulp of vodka.

"Poison. It's always the best choice, hard to trace."

"Let's poison him too, and all his stupid gorgeous brothers." I can feel the words sticking to the insides of my mouth. "He didn't even wait a week, Sarah."

"That doesn't mean anything. He's hurt."

"God, how can he like her?"

Sarah shakes her head. "I saw the way he looked at you in the street, like a crazy person, really out there, more demented than demented, holy Toledo tigers bonkers. You know what I think? I think he put his arm around her for your benefit."

"What if he has sex with her for my benefit?" Jealousy maddogs through me. Yet, that's not the worst part, neither is the remorse; the worst part is I keep thinking of the afternoon on the forest bed, how vulnerable I'd felt, how much I'd liked it, being that open, that me, with him. Had I ever felt so close to anyone?

"Can I have a cigarette?" I ask, taking one before she answers.

She cups a hand around the end of her smoke, lights it with the other, then hands it to me, takes mine, then lights it for herself. I drag on it, cough, don't care, take another and manage not to choke, blowing a gray trail of smoke into the night air.

"Bails would know what to do," I say.

"She would," Sarah agrees.

We smoke together quietly in the moonlight and I realize something I can never say to Sarah. There might've been another reason, a deeper one, why I didn't want to be around her. It's that she's not Bailey, and that's a bit unbearable for me – but I need to bear it. I concentrate on the music of the river, let myself drift along with it as it rushes steadily away.

After a few moments, I say, "You can revoke my free pass."

She tilts her head, smiles at me in a way that floods me with warmth. "Done deal."

She puts out her cigarette on the windowsill and slips back onto the bed. I put mine out too, but stay outside looking over Gram's lustrous garden, breathing it in and practically swooning from the bouquet that wafts up to me on the cool breeze.

And that's when I get the idea. The *brilliant* idea. I have to talk to Joe. I have to at least try to make him understand. But I could use a little help.

"Sarah," I say when I flop back onto the bed. "The roses, they're aphrodisiacal, remember?"

She gets it immediately. "Yes, Lennie! It's the last-resort miracle! Flying figs, yes!"

"Figs?"

"I couldn't think of an animal, I'm too wasted."