

When I pictured rural France in 1935, I envisioned sun-dappled fields of lavender that would capture me like a fragrant cloud. But that is Provence, not Reims, and I've landed indoors despite my best efforts. I hit a hay bale so hard I flip over it—I'm pretty sure I'll never master a graceful landing—and I know before I even open my eyes that I will find hay wedged into my hair, my mouth and...other parts. This hay has now hit more bases than Mark ever has.

On the bright side, the barn I've landed in is not the very modern one I saw in 1990. It's old enough that the wood has warped to let sunlight into open spaces. I see no trucks, hear no machinery.

As I force myself to stand, I feel the deadening fatigue setting in, my head fogged as if I have one of those colds that puts you to sleep for days. My limbs are growing heavier by the moment, weakness setting ever faster into my bones. A cow not four feet from me bellows a warning, and I can't even summon the energy to jump in surprise.

And I'm hungry. My god I'm hungry. *If I could just eat*, I tell

myself, *I'd have the energy for this*. I spot an apple sitting on a stool five feet to my left. Not the glorious oversized Honeycrisp apples at home—this one is small, a Macintosh perhaps, and it has that mattified rust color I avoid in the store. But right now it might as well be a large pizza with a side of cheese fries.

I grip the stall door, take one small step on trembling foal legs, but catch movement outside before I can take another and dive back down to the hay, trying not to cough as I inhale the dust around me.

It's a man who's entered. I can tell by the heaviness of his tread, the certainty of it. He moves through the barn and a bucket clangs against the metal hinge of the stall next to mine. There is a moment of silence, during which I hear no movement, no breath. "*Ici*," he says—to the cow I assume—and then mutters something else in French that I don't quite make out as he sets the bucket down.

The steps recede, and after a moment of silence I rise, forcing myself, one foot in front of the other, toward that apple. I've never wanted anything more in my entire life.

Except just as my hand closes around it, the man steps back inside the open barn door...pointing a gun straight at my head.

The shock of it makes me sway on my feet, yet I'm not as scared as I should be. The man is Mark's age, and he's handsome—a lock of dark hair falling over his forehead like some old Hollywood film star. It's hard to picture him as a killer. I'm more bothered by my own nudity than I am his gun.

"*Pourquoi etes-vous ici?*" he demands.

He wants to know why I'm here. *Good question*, I think. *I wish I knew*. I'm too exhausted and unsettled to form a reply in French. "Can I... Give me your shirt."

His eyes flicker downward. I guess he didn't notice I was naked until I pointed it out. My hair covers my breasts and my hands cover the rest, but he looks unsettled anyway. "I think not,"

he replies in perfect, British-accented English. "In order to give you my shirt I'd have to put down my gun."

It's illogical, but his British accent sounds sort of posh and James Bond-ish and puts me at ease. Granted, lots of villains in James Bond movies have British accents too...but they generally don't look like this guy. "I'm looking for Marie? Marie-Therese Durand?" I explain. "Do you know her?"

I wait for a sign of recognition. Instead his eyes narrow and he raises the gun higher, pulling back the hammer. "There is no one here by that name," he snarls. "You need to go back where you came from."

I sway on my feet again and grab the stool to hold myself steady. "Please lower the gun," I whisper.

A hint of softness passes over his face before he blinks it away. He grabs a horse blanket hanging off the wall and throws it at me. "Are you ill?" he demands.

I somehow manage to catch the blanket and wrap it around me, but the effort of standing up on my own is getting to be too much. With each moment that passes I feel a bit further away from him, as if I'm sinking fast in a very deep, very dark lake. "No. Please just let me talk to Marie-Therese and then I swear I'll go."

I meant to sound stronger, more forceful, but it feels as if I'm speaking to him from under water.

"Again, there is no Marie here," he says. "So you can go right now. Don't think for a moment I'm reluctant to use this gun."

I don't entirely believe him, but even if I did, I wouldn't have the energy to obey. I'm barely remaining on my feet.

"Please," I beg. "I can't...I'm too—" I reach for the wall and use it to stay upright. If I fall to the ground right now—if I allow myself to fall asleep—I'm not certain I will ever wake up.

Footsteps approach and from around a corner comes a shockingly lovely girl, about my age with the kind of eyes you'd never see on a human—a deep forest green, like the man's, but backlit,

as if a fire shines just beyond the pupil. The eyes of a time traveler.

"Mon Dieu," she whispers, staring at me as if I'm a ghost. She hisses at her brother in rapid-fire French and he lowers the gun.

My mouth opens to ask if she is Marie-Therese. But I pitch face first to the ground instead.

When my eyes open, I'm lying on a grossly uncomfortable bed in a sunlit room. It takes a moment of staring at the exposed wood ceiling, listening to squawking chickens in the distance, before I remember I'm not in my own time.

My arrival here is a bit of a blur, sort of like when you rise in the middle of the night to deal with something you're only half-aware for. I remember the man with the gun, and an exhaustion like I've never felt before.

Most importantly, I remember the woman who appeared just before I passed out. In memory, she had the face and eyes of a time traveler—it's our hallmark, the unusual eyes, the symmetry of our features. If I'm right, she had to have been Marie Therese Durand. There are too few of us for this to be a coincidence.

I rise slowly. Every muscle in my body hurts and the fatigue weighs so heavily on me that I am sorely tempted to lie back down. Except the sooner I get downstairs, the sooner I can return home.

I'm still naked, but a dress lies on the chair across from me, white and dotted with small pink flowers. It's already too hot for a

dress. I think longingly of home, of tank tops and shorts and air conditioning, before I slowly pull it over my head.

I limp down the stairs like an old woman, gripping the handrail for support, and find myself in a room that is plain by the standards of home: stiff velvet chairs, a small coffee table covered with a lace tablecloth, a few vases. But the house itself is well-constructed and elegant: high ceilings, arched windows, and French doors that lead to a small stone porch off the side of the room. In the distance, I see what must be a vineyard. If you have to pass out in a strange place, this wasn't a bad one to choose.

"Ah, awake at last," says a musical voice. I turn to find the woman from the other night, smiling at me as if I'm long-lost family. "I thought you'd never get up!"

I'd doubted my memory a bit but now I'm certain: she is a time-traveler. No human has eyes like hers.

"Are you Marie-Therese?" I ask.

She glances over her shoulder before she gives a small nod. "My brother Henri - you met him before - thinks I should not reveal my identity, but he's being ridiculous. You already know what I am on sight, just as I know what you are. Here, come to the kitchen." She turns and I follow her into a room that is slightly less ancient than I was expecting, but still pretty rustic. Cracked farmhouse sink, old cabinets that appear hand-made, copper pans hanging from the ceiling and a big white and black Aga stove.

"Please sit," she says. "You must be famished. Is it always like that with you when you time travel? It must be highly inconvenient." She speaks of the gift so openly, so plainly, as if it's the color of the sky or the day of the week. I was raised to do the opposite.

I take a seat at the rough-hewn trestle table, where she's placed a loaf of bread and a small pot of jam. "I'm not sure. I've never gone this far back before."

I long to shove bread into my mouth like a savage, like it

might be ripped away from me. I'm so hungry it feels as if I could never get full. It's only by force that I take reasonably sized bites.

"How far have you traveled, exactly?" she asks.

I flush. How is it possible that I'm ashamed of what I'm able to do, and *also* ashamed of the fact that I'm not good at it? "I guess that depends on what year it is," I admit. "I'm...not great at landing where I plan to."

"It's 1938," she replies.

Three years closer to the Nazi occupation than I intended. I should have been more careful. "Then I've traveled...fifty-two years."

"*Mon Dieu*," she says on a gasp. "Fifty-two *years*?"

For better or worse, the future remains a mystery to her, just as my future remains one to me. While the past is neatly blocked off, what lies ahead for my kind is a blur, a haze. It would be like jumping off a ledge on a foggy day, clueless to whether you were five feet in the air or five hundred.

I open my mouth to say more, but am cut off by a preemtory knock as the door swings open. A woman steps over the threshold, basket hanging off her arm. Her mouth is pinched, her eyes narrowed. "*Marie, tes poules sont—*," she begins, her words dying off as she notices me. "*Qu'est-ce que c'est? As-tu un invité?*" She sounds positively indignant to find me here.

Marie-Therese's mouth has opened to reply just as Henri bursts in the door, looking at the two of us with panicked eyes. I remember thinking he was handsome when I first saw him, but in truth the word barely does him justice. He has features that would be called exquisite were they on a woman—high cheekbones, Roman nose, full mouth. But with a strong jaw and broad shoulders that leave him not feminine by any stretch of the imagination.

"*Oui*," says Marie, shooting an alarmed glance at Henri. "*Notre cousine...um...Amelie. Amelie Durand.*"

"Our cousin Amelie," Henri translates, looking me hard in the

eye, as if I'm a child in need of scolding. "Amelie, this is our neighbor, Madame Beauvoir. *Amelie est aux Etats-Unis. Elle ne parle pas le francaise.*"

I'm tempted to argue that I do indeed speak a little French, but the guy *did* just hold me at gunpoint. It might prove useful to overhear what he believes he's saying in private. Between my exhaustion and how fast they talk I struggle to follow the conversation anyway. I catch a few sentences here and there: *she's had a long trip, the daughter of our uncle, we were not expecting her.* Mostly what I get from the conversation is Henri's eagerness that I be gone. That for every time his sister expresses pleasure at my arrival and suggests I might stay a while, her brother says precisely the opposite.

At last Madame Beauvoir rises to leave. She looks me over from head to toe like a dress she might consider purchasing, though she doesn't especially like it. "*Elle est très belle, n'est pas?*" Madame Beauvoir thinks I'm beautiful. Maybe she's not as awful as I thought.

Henri shrugs and gives another small scowl, looking at me, as he replies. My teeth grind as I translate his response in my head: *I don't see it, but not all men have options.*

He walks her to the door and watches her drive off before turning back inside and latching the door behind him. "*Dieu,*" he says, glancing at me. "Trust the old witch to barge in just as the new witch finally wakes."

*Witch* harkens a little too closely to the type of words my mother used all my life. And I might put up with them from her, but I'm definitely not putting up with them from him. "I'd watch who you start calling names."

He glances at me. "Is that right? Because I'm fairly certain you can't jump right now, and I'm the one with the gun." He turns to Marie-Therese. "And why exactly would our *American* cousin have a French name?"

Marie-Therese heaves a sigh. "I panicked. The only American

females I could think of were Amelia Earhart and Eleanor Roosevelt. And she's too pretty to be named after Eleanor Roosevelt."

He comes forward with heavy steps, reluctantly taking the seat across from mine. "And did you get her actual name," he asks Marie-Therese, "or were you too busy giving her yours?"

My mouth opens but Marie-Therese holds out a hand to stop me. "No, don't. For your own safety, it's best you give us as little information as possible. So for now, you are Amelie Durand. I am Marie-Therese, as you know, and the sullen one here is my brother Henri."

A muscle ticks in his jaw. "Well don't get attached. We have no idea who she is or what she's capable of."

"What she's *capable* of?" Marie-Therese asks with a laugh, setting a round of cheese in front of me, along with more bread. "She was practically comatose for two days after she traveled here. You can't think she's capable of much."

She's right, but it's not the most flattering defense I've ever heard.

"Maybe it was all an act," he counters.

I turn toward Henri with an exasperated exhale. "What on earth do you think I'm planning to do? I'm a college student, not a criminal mastermind."

He rolls his eyes. "Believe me, I know you're no criminal mastermind. You couldn't even manage to steal an apple from my barn without being caught. Now tell us why you're here."

I'm deeply tired again, and my temper has begun to fray. "I'm here to help you, though you're making me wish I hadn't bothered."

Henri leans back in his chair, arms folded across his chest. "Help?" he scoffs, his pretty lip curling up at the corner. "Is this a joke?"

"Henri," snaps Marie-Therese. "*Tu es impoli.*"

"You've forgotten," Henri says to his sister, "that our future savior doesn't speak a word of French."

I'm officially sick of his shit. "You don't have to be rude about it."

He rolls his eyes. "And you don't have to be idiotic about it. Who arrives naked in a country where she can't speak the language?"

Marie swats his arm and turns to me. "Ignore him. Our mother insisted we both become fluent in several languages. Henri seems to forget not everyone has been so fortunate. Please continue."

"By all means," says Henri, turning back to me, "you were in the process of telling us how you—who showed up here naked and defenseless and proceeded to sleep for over two days—could offer assistance?"

His attitude leaves me longing to lash out rather than respond, except...he has a point. I'm young and terrible at time jumping. Aside from giving them some vague warnings about the future, I have nothing to offer.

I sigh, trying to think back to the weeks and weeks of nightmares before they finally got a little too realistic. They were always about Marie-Therese—other things came up too but since they made no sense to me, I mostly ignored them. "My sister told me to find Marie-Therese, and I was hoping she'd understand. All I know is it's got something to do with saving people and a circle of light."

Marie-Therese's jaw drops and the legs of Henri's chair land heavily on the floor. They exchange a quiet, stunned look that worries me. It obviously means way more to them than it does to me. "*C'est elle*," Marie-Therese breathes, so stunned she's reverted to French. *It's her.* "*Ma mere*— my mother, she told me you would come."

*Ummmm...what?* "I don't know your mother. This is the furthest I've ever gone back."

But Marie's eyes are bright, her head nodding eagerly. "She told us someone would come and would be important to us," she argues. "That you would help us. It must be you."

I shake my head. "I seriously doubt I'm the person your mother was expecting, but maybe if you told me what you need help *with* I could do something."

She and Henri exchange another look. It's clear that whatever it is she wants, Henri wants the opposite.

"Marie," he growls. "*Non.*"

*We need to know,* she hisses back at him before she turns to me. "My mother left three years ago without explanation and never returned. If I travel back to see her, she won't tell me anything. She'll realize she's not going to return, and she won't say a word. But *you* could go."

The conversation and Marie-Therese's expectations have begun to drag on me like a weight. It's the fatigue coming back, I'm sure, but the fact that I'm going to disappoint her in a minute doesn't help. "You really have no idea where she went?" I ask.

Marie-Therese stares at the table. "Her car was found in Paris, along with her clothes, but we have no idea what year she was visiting."

A chill goes down my spine. I have a disappearance in my family as well—my aunt, who was also going to Paris. Though it happened before we were born, the mystery of our missing aunt always fascinated Kit. More than once she suggested I should travel back in time to help her. But if two people disappeared going after the same thing, I'm certain I don't want to be the third. "What's the Circle of Light thing about?"

Marie-Therese's eyes widen. "Did your mother never tell you the prophecy?"

Henri's eyes narrow. "Marie, if she doesn't know, it's not your place to tell her."

Marie shrugs. "She's a time traveler. She's supposed to know," she says before returning to me. "The prophecy says that there

will be a child born after a great war—it calls her the *hidden* child—who will produce this circle of light, which is somehow supposed to lock our pasts. My mother thought it would keep us safe."

My shoulders sag. I don't especially believe in prophecies, particularly ones passed down by word of mouth. Honestly, it's a little shocking that both my aunt and their mother might have believed in it enough to actually go seek it out. "What's it supposed to keep you safe *from*?"

Henri frowns. "From you," he says. At my startled look he begrudgingly completes the thought. "Not you specifically. But from future time travelers. My sister, any children she might have...even those of us who don't have the power, we are all at risk. Any one of you can come from the future and destroy everything, can't you? Even this impromptu visit right now...what if you've changed something? What if the simple act of your arrival has led to some trickle that will become an avalanche?"

I close my eyes and take a small breath. Even in 1938, I can't escape people who think I'm evil, not that I disagree with them.

Marie-Therese frowns at him. "You've done nothing wrong," she assures me. "My mother believed the circle could keep us from having our futures stripped away."

I could point out that their futures could be stripped from them anyway. Reims is undoubtedly a town that will be Nazi-occupied soon enough, given its position between Germany and Paris. But I hold onto that information for now. I'm not here to change the past any more than is necessary to get back home. "I don't really see how I can help you with any of this," I tell her. "I'm sorry I got your hopes up."

"Please," Marie-Therese begs. "If you could get her to tell you her plans, we might still be able to save her."

Henri's face is drawn and sad in a way that makes him, momentarily, hard to hate. "Marie," he says quietly, "she's not trapped. She's dead, and that's something even you can't fix. No

matter what year she went to, she'd have found her way back to us by now if she were alive."

"You don't know that," Marie breathes. She turns to me. "Please consider it. I have to find her."

*You have to find them.* Kit's words again, ringing in my ear. Did she mean their mother and my aunt? Wherever they went, it was obviously very dangerous, which is not what I signed on for.

"I'm sorry," I reply. "My aunt also went missing in Paris, which tells me that what you're talking about might be a little harder than it sounds. And I'm just doing this one thing for my sister. Once I return to my own time, I'm never jumping again."

Marie-Therese laughs, as if I'm joking, or a child making insane promises I can't keep. "Of course you'll continue to jump. We can't stop ourselves."

Her laughter irritates me, perhaps because my greatest fear is that she's right. I've done nothing *but* try to stop since I started jumping a decade ago, and yet here I am, time traveling again when it feels like my whole future depends on giving it up. "I can," I reply.

Marie-Therese's hands press to the table. "Your aunt is missing, my mother is missing. How many others must there be? Don't you at least want to see if you can help?"

"I'm mostly interested in not dying," I reply. "Maybe we should all just take their failure as a lesson and stay the hell away from wherever they went."

Marie-Therese's shoulders drop. I barely know her and I already hate that I've disappointed her. "But your sister said you were supposed to help me."

My stomach swims uneasily. The nightmares have been unrelenting for weeks and escalated dramatically before I got here. If I don't provide *some* kind of help they'll start back up. I'm sure of it. "Maybe I can help in other ways. I can tell you what's coming."

"We don't want to know what's coming," Henri says firmly.

I'm officially too tired for this. I press my head in my hands,

resting my eyes. "Fine, whatever. I'm sorry I'm disappointing you. If you could give me one day here to rest, I'll be out of your hair."

"You're not going anywhere," says Henri. "You've identified my sister, a secret we've guarded our entire lives. I can't just let you go back and tell others."

Panic begins to rise in my chest. I think about my arrival, his hand on the hammer of the gun. He was really prepared to shoot me for being here. I wonder if he still might be.

My head swivels, looking for the exits and his eyes follow mine. "There's one exit to this home, and I stand between you and it. Don't even think about trying to get by me."

First he's demanding I leave, and now he's basically holding me hostage. One extreme to the next, and both extremes suck. Henri is proving to be far less delightful than those pouty lips of his might lead a female to believe. "And how do you propose to keep me here once my powers have returned?" I demand. "You're going to kill me? That's your plan?"

A muscle ticks in his jaw. "No. It's not my plan. I just haven't come up with a better one yet."

I was being sarcastic. I'm not sure he is.

"Look," I say with a heavy exhale. "I don't know what you think is going on here, but I'm not evil. I'm just a stupid college student who thought she might be able to help you, and you live more than five decades before my time anyway. What possible use is your sister's location to me?"

Marie-Therese looks at her brother as if it's a valid point, but I see something in his eyes before he averts them. Fear, knowledge. What does he know about this situation that his sister does not?

"You may remain until we figure it out," says Henri.

He rises and stomps out the door and I watch him go. My sense of self-preservation tells me I should run at the first opportunity. Except I've barely got the energy to walk, so running is out of the question.

Marie places a hand on my shoulder. "Don't worry. I know my

brother. He talks big but he doesn't have it in him to kill a pretty young girl."

I raise my worried face to hers. "I'd feel better if you'd just said he doesn't have it in him to kill anyone."

Her smile falters. "I wish I could tell you that too."

I return to bed for most of the day, so ill I'm beginning to wonder if perhaps I just truly have the flu, because the exhaustion is exactly the same. Even when I try to wake up I find myself drifting back to sleep, my dreams feverish and illogical, blending the morning's incidents with memories from home in various ways I'm certain never happened.

When I finally get downstairs again, Marie-Therese pushes me to sit and I'm too tired not to obey, but I also feel guilty just lounging here while she appears to be doing five things at once.

"Let me help with something," I say.

"You could knead the dough?" She slides it to me on a floured wooden board and goes back to check on whatever's bubbling on the stove.

When she turns back a minute later she laughs. "What are you doing?" she asks. "You have to form a ball and punch it down, with your ummm..." She holds up her closed hand. "Fist? Is that not how you do it in your time?"

I raise a shoulder. "I don't know. I've never done it before."

Her jaw drops. "Never? *Mon Dieu*. How? You must be very wealthy."

My family is anything but wealthy, which is sort of ridiculous given how many ways my ancestors and I could get money. "It's just not a thing people do in my time," I explain. "We're too busy. We just buy it at the store."

She frowns. "What is it that keeps you all so busy?"

I bite my lip. I'm not entirely sure, to be honest. "Well, most women work or they're in school. They aren't home to make bread." But it's not as if Marie-Therese has a life of leisure here aside from the bread, and when I'm not in class I have plenty of down time. "I guess maybe we're not all that busy. We'd just rather, you know, read. Or watch TV."

"TV?" she asks.

It slipped, but is there really any harm in explaining it? "Television. It's like a box in your house that plays movies and shows. I guess it hasn't been invented yet."

Her eyes go wide. TV has never struck me as a wondrous invention, but I see in her face that it really must have been something when it first came out. Like a rollercoaster that comes to your home when you want to ride it. "I've heard of something like this – it was at the world's fair, I think. I just never imagined it would become common."

"What about you?" I ask. "What do you do for fun?"

Her smile grows a little sad. "I help with the language classes at the church or sometimes see my friends. Things changed... after my mother left."

I feel my first flicker of guilt and dismiss it. I've done what I agreed to. I found Marie. If she and her brother don't want to know about the future, there's not much more I can do, and doing any more would be breaking a promise I made to myself, and also to Mark, even if he doesn't know I made it. I don't care what Marie-Therese or her brother say. The second I'm recovered, I'm going back home.



HENRI COMES in just before dinner. Even after a day outside, with sweat on his brow and bits of hay falling from his trousers, he's the picture of a handsome 1940s soldier, or movie star. All chiseled perfection, a lock of hair falling forward.

He walks into the room and sets apples on the table in front of me. His hands are large, tan from days spent outdoors. "So you won't need to steal them," he says.

I glance up. I've got just enough energy to slap that smirk off his face, I'd bet. "Are you always so pleasant to your female guests? I'm beginning to see why you're still single."

The look on his face is the very definition of amused arrogance. "You think I'm single for lack of options?"

Marie-Therese smiles fondly at him. "Our Henri can't throw a stick without hitting a lovesick girl," she says. "It's almost irritating going into town with him, the way they all stop us and try to talk to him."

I don't doubt for a moment this is true, but I still long for a way to take him down a peg. "I assume it must be entirely women who don't know you well," I murmur.

Henri arches a brow. "Do you always bait men who hold your life in their hands?" he asks.

I'm more annoyed by the remark than I am threatened, because I'm still hard-pressed to imagine him as a killer. Mostly I just see an arrogant jerk who thinks it's okay to hold women hostage and then belittle them. "Sorry. I'm not entirely clear on the rules," I reply. "No one's ever threatened to kill me before."

He turns toward the room just past the kitchen, which I assume is his. "With the mouth on you," he says, "I find that very surprising,"