



THE SPECTACULARS



For my family



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THE SPECTACULARS

JODIE GARNISH



USBORNE

FORTUNE'S
EDGE'S
DISTRICT

RIVER
COLOSSUS

FREE
WINDS
DISTRICT

OPULENCE
THEATRE



BAROQUE DISTRICT

LUNAS
BAY

SHOPPING
ARCADE



LUNAS BAY
ARENA

OBSERVATORY



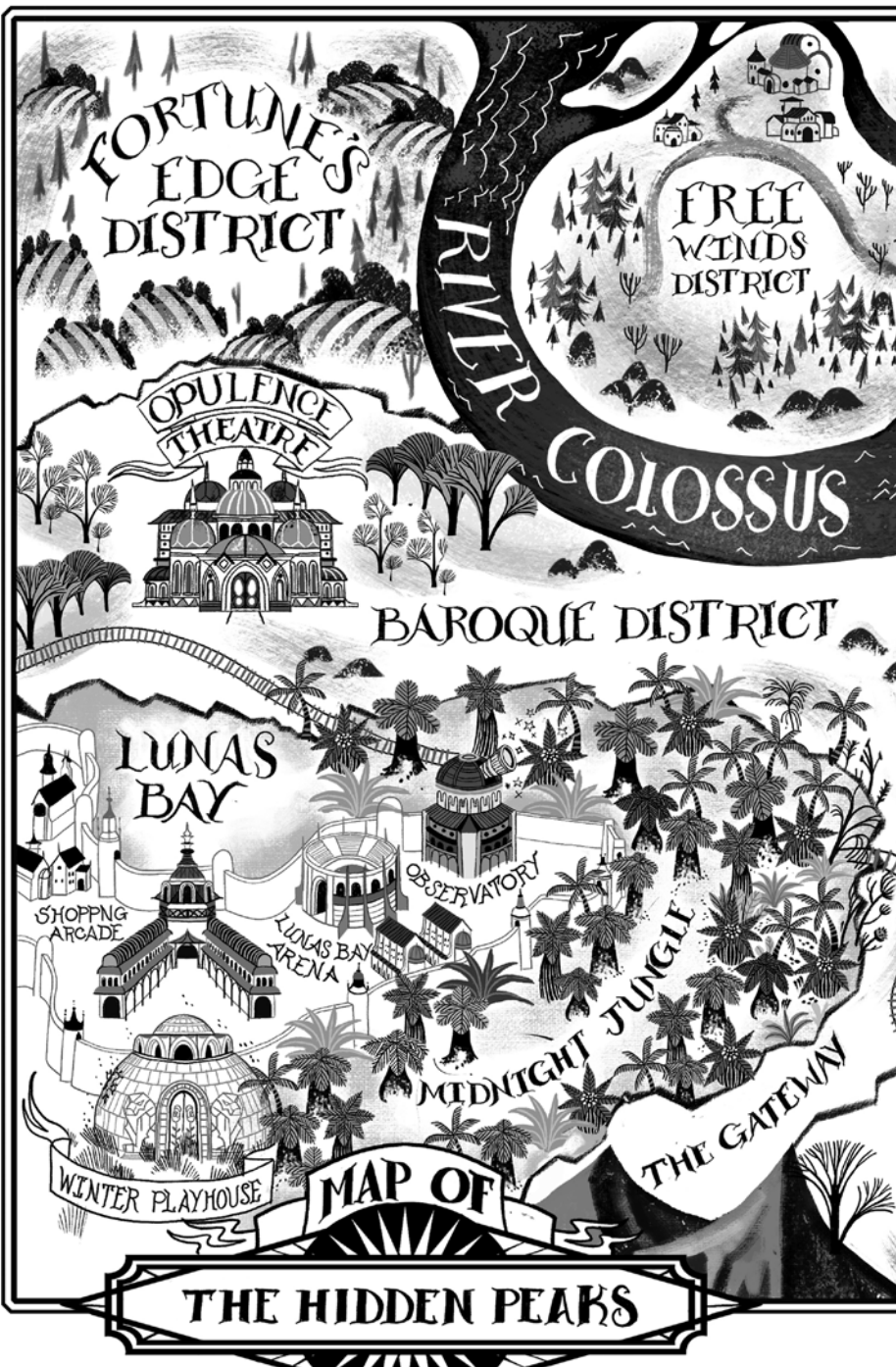
MIDNIGHT JUNGLE

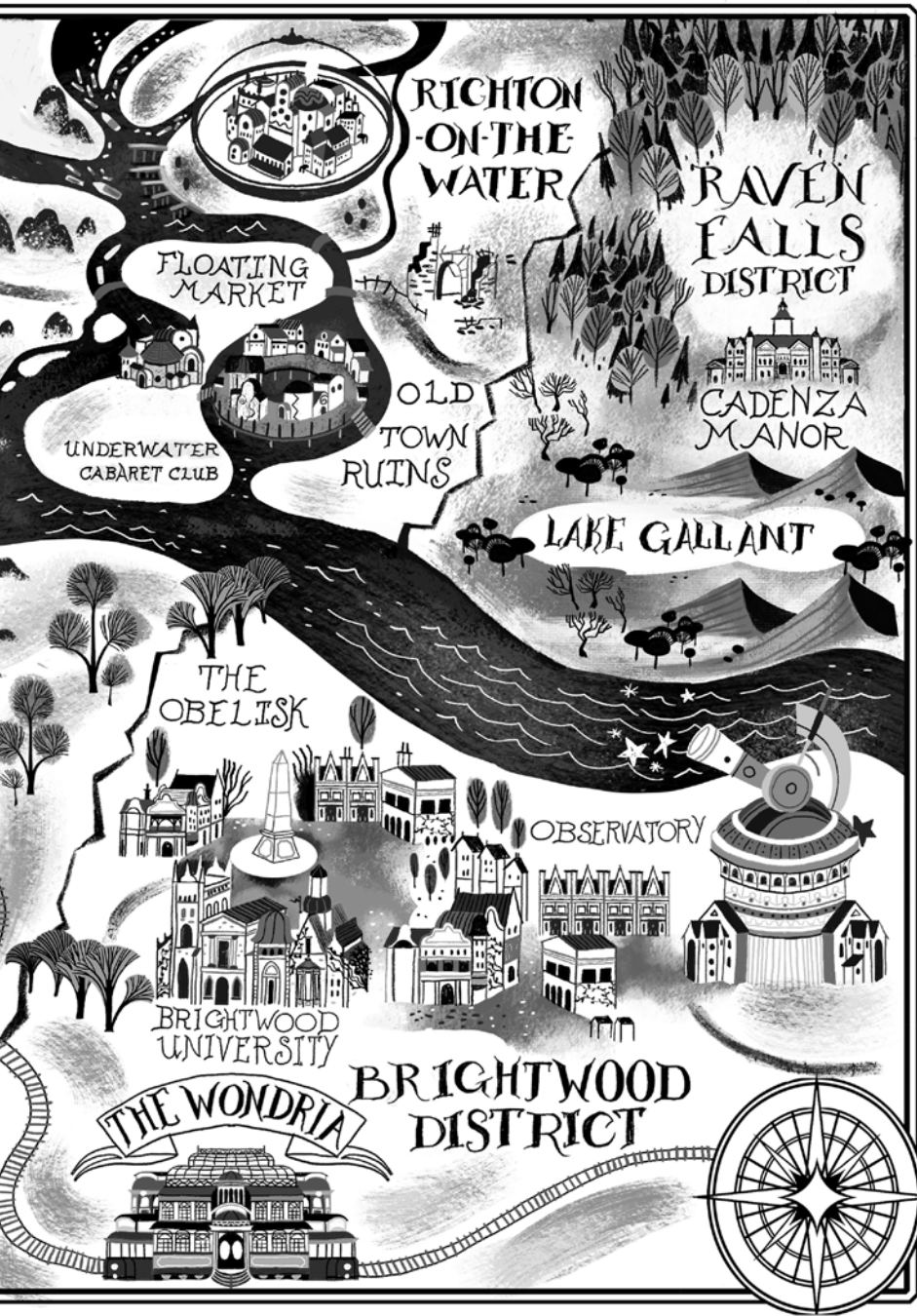
WINTER PLAYHOUSE

MAP OF

THE GATEWAY

THE HIDDEN PEAKS





RIGHTON
-ON-THE
WATER

RAVEN
FALLS
DISTRICT

FLOATING
MARKET

UNDERWATER
CABARET CLUB

OLD
TOWN
RUINS

CADENZA
MANOR

LAKE GALLANT

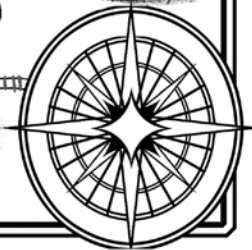
THE
OBELISK

OBSERVATORY

BRIGHTWOOD
UNIVERSITY

BRIGHTWOOD
DISTRICT

THE WONDRIA





PROLOGUE

A Most Daring Escape

As a government-owned locomotive, the tram was *not* supposed to be careering wildly up a steep mountainside, rattling noisily along a set of rusty tram tracks and scaring the wits out of several unsuspecting sheep. Then again, it also wasn't supposed to be being driven by three runaway rebels with a backpack full of mysterious light at their feet, and zero driving experience between them.

"Can't we go any faster?" a man with long, black locs called to the two other figures inside the driver's cab. "Lahiri?"

Nadia Lahiri, a woman with dark hair and sharp eyes, scowled back at him. "In case you hadn't noticed, we're trying to drive a stolen eight-carriage tram up a rather steep mountain," she snapped. "We'll get there as fast as we can, although you're obviously welcome to go and push the wretched thing yourself."

The man, whose name was Morgan Fletcher, chewed his lip. He was a tall, broad figure, clothed in a royal blue coat and black leather boots. “We need more light,” he said, first to himself, then calling across to the third figure, “Roper! We need more light!”

Georgina Roper, a short-statured woman with a mass of blonde curls, nodded and ripped open the backpack at her feet. She rifled through it, throwing out a harmonica, a singing biscuit tin and a fat book entitled *101 Uses for Stardust in Musical Theatre*, before coming up with a single, tightly sealed jar. Within the jar was a silvery light, swaying gently in long, shimmering tendrils.

“Is that all that’s left?” Fletcher looked at the jar disbelievingly.

“That’s it,” Roper confirmed.

Behind them – far too close behind them – a sound echoed, bouncing around the mountains they were hurtling through. A klaxon. A warning.

“TRAM THIRTEEN. STAND DOWN. BY ORDER OF THE MINISTER OF THE SUNLESS PROVINCES, STAND DOWN.”

Every eye in the driver’s cab turned towards the window, looking back at where a stream of shiny black sledges was speeding after them, pulled by sleek hounds and gaining on them with every second.

“Fletcher,” Roper said urgently, glancing towards the engine that sat before them, sending out silver sparks. “We still have the astral flare. We can use it.”

“Are you joking?” Lahiri hissed. “It’s far too dangerous!”

Fletcher shuddered slightly as he recalled packing the astral flare. Unlike the light shimmering gently in the jar before him, the flare had hummed and pulsed, vibrating with power. He’d had to wrap it in several layers of cloth, not to mention his woolliest jumper, just to keep it from shaking the tram carriage apart.

“We don’t have a choice,” insisted Roper. “It’s the only thing that will get us out of this alive!”

Fletcher glanced back at the sledges again. He was the leader of the rebels who’d planned this escape. It had been his idea; it was his responsibility to keep everybody safe.

“Fletcher, don’t be a fool,” said Lahiri. “We should only be using approved Star-Stuff: dust and light. Astral flares are a restricted substance for a reason. We don’t know what will happen!”

“Well, we *do* know what’ll happen if they catch us.” Roper gestured backwards towards the sledges. “I’d rather risk the flare.”

Fletcher held up a hand to silence them both. He took a breath.

“Fetch the astral flare.”

Roper nodded and dived back into the backpack. This time, she retrieved a jar with a label taped across it:

*ASTRAL FLARE. HIGHLY EXPLOSIVE. VOLATILE.
EXTREMELY DANGEROUS. ONLY USE IN CASE OF
EMERGENCY. THAT MEANS YOU, McCUBBINS.*

Roper carried it towards the engine.

Fletcher pressed his hands to his forehead and sent up a silent plea. *This has to work*, he thought. *Please let this work*. He leaned back against the door that separated the cab from the rest of the tram carriages and closed his eyes.

Unbeknownst to him, directly on the other side of this door were two children engrossed in an equally important conversation, whispering between themselves in a serious fashion. The girl, whose name was Harper Woolfe, bobbed her head decisively.

“Mr Grinwart. Definitely,” she said.

The blue-haired boy next to her snorted. “Nah. When we took that bend earlier, he barely blinked. It’s going to be Hattie Dwight; she’s already looking green.”

“You’ve forgotten one very important thing.”

“What?”

“Grinwart had second helpings of beans at dinner.” Harper nodded, satisfied. “That’s definitely going to be coming back up.” She opened the book in her lap and carefully wrote down the wager:

*Harper Woolfe: Mr Grinwart. Trick Torres: Hattie Dwight.
Winner gets seven chocolate plums.*

Another klaxon wailed out from behind them, and Harper looked over her shoulder. They’d been instructed to stay seated during the escape, but no one had listened to that. Instead, everyone was crowded around the windows, watching the mountains flash past and craning their necks

to see the black sledges speeding after them.

“What’ll happen if they catch us?” Harper whispered to Trick.

“Fletcher said we wouldn’t want to know,” Trick replied.

Harper twisted a lock of coppery hair between her fingers. “I don’t understand. Why can’t they just let us go?”

“*STAND DOWN. STAND DOWN.*” The booming voice came again.

“I think they need a cup of tea,” Trick suggested. He believed very strongly in the healing powers of tea.

Harper closed her eyes and tried to pretend that she wasn’t sitting in a stolen tram, being chased by the police forces of the Sunless Provinces. Instead, she pictured home: the city of the Smoke, the largest – and dirtiest – city in the Provinces. Specifically, she pictured the borough that she’d grown up in: a borough lined with grand theatres and music halls, lit up by neon lights, rich with the smell of buttered popcorn and roasted nuts. She could practically hear the sounds of the ushers as they tried to attract people into their venues...

“Adriana Phillips – she can sing up a storm! No, literally – watch as she conjures thunder and lightning with her repertoire of tempestuous tunes! Half-price tickets for seats in the ‘Splash Zone’, complimentary rain ponchos provided.”

“The Utterly Un-Royal Theatre Troupe presents ‘Lost in the Jungle’, complete with immersive scenery – watch as the theatre around you transforms into a real-life jungle! Patrons enter at their own risk; compensation not offered for tiger bites.”

“For one night, and one night only, presenting Buster Yang and his reflection – the greatest comedy duo in town! Tickets on special offer, six bob each!”

Harper’s reminiscing was cut off by a huge shudder that suddenly rocked the tram. A blinding flash burst out from the driver’s cab, and Harper and Trick both threw themselves away from the door as a roar of triumph rose up from the crowd gathered around the window. Harper and Trick glanced at each other, then ran towards them, elbowing their way through the mob to get a look outside.

As soon as she did, Harper felt a bit sick. The mountains were now flashing past at blinding speed. Twisting around, Harper could see the police sledges quickly disappearing out of sight, becoming no more than a line of tiny black dots, unable to keep up with the speed at which they were now moving.

“Three...two...one...YEESSSSSSSS!” Trick threw his hands up as Hattie Dwight turned, ran to the corner, and was promptly sick all over the floor.

“What?” Harper yelled as Mr Grinwart carried on staring out of the window, unperturbed.

“I win!” Trick cheered. “Seven chocolate plums, please!”

Harper huffed. “Well, don’t blame me when all your teeth fall out and the Tooth Raven comes and steals them for his child-chomping machine.”

Trick blinked. “That isn’t what the Tooth Raven does.”

“That we know of,” muttered Harper.

“Oi, shut up, you two!” An old man leaning by the window scowled at them. “I’m trying to hear the radio!” He turned the volume up, and a broadcaster’s voice came echoing through Carriage One.

“...Going live now to the latest in several major security breaches across the Sunless Provinces, concerning the so-called ‘Spectaculars’. Categorized as beings with ‘unique performance abilities’, these Spectaculars have been growing in numbers ever since they first appeared at the turn of the last century, with large communities emerging all over the Sunless Provinces. The great city of the Smoke has seen a particular upsurge in these Spectaculars, converging in the Theatre Borough in the underskirts of the city. Despite our great Minister graciously allowing them to practise their abilities peacefully over the years, their powers have increased exponentially, leading the Minister to regretfully deem them a Grade Six Dangerous Species last year...”

“Dangerous species!” the old man exclaimed. “As if we ain’t even human!”

“Because of our ‘unique performance abilities’,” another muttered. “What does he think we’re going to do – lead a tap-dancing revolution? *Pas de bourrée* him straight out of office?”

“That’s how they turn people against each other, you see,” the old man said darkly.

Harper looked down. It wasn’t pleasant to remember the Minister’s sudden campaign against the Spectaculars – the curfews, the restrictions, the suspicious looks from neighbours who’d always been perfectly friendly before.

“This morning, in a series of planned revolts, Spectaculars all over the Sunless Provinces hijacked multiple public transportation vehicles, from commuter trams in the Smoke, to the Minister’s personal turtle-drawn submarines in the Cragg Islands. Citizens reported ‘scenes of chaos’ as they were ‘strongly encouraged’ to remove themselves from the vehicles...”

“That was funny,” guffawed the old man. “Remember that woman with all the poodles? The look on her face when we told her to get off the tram!”

“She threw one of them at me!” a woman said indignantly. “Literally *threw a poodle at me.*”

“The stolen vehicles appear to be heading north, although their destination is as yet unknown. The Minister’s police forces are giving chase as we speak...”

“Don’t you worry, kids,” said the old man, noticing Harper’s anxious face. “We’re not the first to have this happen to us. The Sunless Provinces have never been able to tolerate those with magic in their bones. They drove out the Witches centuries ago, the Fae-Folk, the Goblins and Kobolds. They were bound to do the same to us sooner or later. But you know where they all went.” He winked. “Through the gateways, where no one could find them.”

Harper felt a shiver run down her spine at the mention of the gateways. At six years of age, they hadn’t been party to the rebellion plans, but she and Trick had eavesdropped on enough conversations to have picked up the gist; a series of secret gateways that led to a hidden land – a place of refuge

for magical folk. A date had been set: one day for Spectaculars across the Sunless Provinces to make a break for the gateways. They'd boarded the trams with whatever possessions they could carry, dodged any flying canines, and turned their attention to the mountains. Harper didn't want to think about what would happen if they failed.

To distract herself, she turned back to the matter of Mr Grinwart. He was still standing at the window, and was starting to look a little peaky...

"Ooh. You've got your plotting face on. What are you thinking?" Trick demanded.

"Let's bet again," Harper suggested. "Double or nothing?"

Before Trick could answer, the door that separated Carriage One from the driver's cab opened, and Fletcher – their leader, and Trick's uncle – strode through.

"Everyone, I appreciate that this is an exciting and nerve-racking time. However, we are almost at the gateway, so could I please ask all of you to return to your seats until we're safely across."

Harper groaned. Her seat was next to her parents', all the way back in Carriage Eight – the very last carriage of the tram. She'd snuck up to Carriage One to see Trick as soon as she could – after all, if you were going to see a new world for the first time, you wanted your best friend beside you.

"Do we have to?" she wheedled, trying out her most endearing expression as she looked up at Fletcher. ("What's

wrong with your face? You look like you've got gas," Trick muttered next to her.)

"It's just till we're on the other side of the gateway," Fletcher assured her. "Trick – back to your seat."

Trick rolled his eyes, then jumped up. As he stood, he suddenly swayed slightly, stumbling and putting his hand against the wall for support.

"You all right?" Harper frowned.

"Just – felt dizzy." Trick blinked.

"You're not gonna throw up too, are you?" Harper asked. "*That* wasn't part of the bet."

Trick seemed to shake himself, then grinned at Harper. "I'm fine. Anyway – see you on the other side!"

Carefully avoiding the puddle of sick on the floor, Harper set off, making her way down the long aisles, until she finally got back to Carriage Eight.

Harper's dad glanced at her as she stepped into the carriage. "Betting game?"

"Yep," Harper sighed. "Trick won."

"Harper, come look at this!" Her mother gestured to Harper. She lifted Harper up so she could see out of the window, where a blue light was shining on the horizon ahead of them.

"It's the gateway! We've made it!" Her dad punched the air.

Harper's father was a Spectacular musician. He and his band played stardust-infused instruments that filled people with so much joy it literally levitated them off the ground.

Harper had seen an old lady float out of her seat at one of their concerts and dance a sprightly two-step in mid-air. Her mother, on the other hand, wasn't a Spectacular at all, but a mechanic – but had anyone suggested that she allow her husband and child to escape without her, they would have received a firm bop to the nose.

The tram gained speed as it approached the blue light. As it did, however, Harper suddenly felt something strange: a clunking beneath her feet, like something had fallen.

“What was that?” she asked.

Her mother frowned. “I don't know,” she said. “Michael...”

The rest of her sentence was drowned out by a huge shudder that had them all tumbling against the wall. The whole tram tilted sideways, and Harper assumed that the first carriage must be passing through the gateway. For a moment, everything was screeching brakes and screaming, and a strange blue light that now seemed to surround them all. Then, with an almighty bang, something beneath them seemed to give way. Looking out of the window, Harper saw with horror that their carriage was still moving very fast – only now they were going *backwards*, falling away from the rest of the tram, which continued to speed through the blue light.

“What happened? What's going on?” Harper yelled. Her dad grabbed on to her and pulled her away from the window, just as one of the frames juddered and detached, glass shattering into the carriage.

“Harper, hold on!” he yelled.

There was a shrieking of metal, and Harper was vaguely aware of the sensation of a collision before she was catapulted across the room, and everything turned black.



Later that evening, Fletcher sat in the driver’s seat, staring out of the window. They’d brought the tram to a halt for the night alongside a mass of gleaming trees (were their leaves *blue*, Fletcher thought, or was he just exceptionally tired?). Most of the Spectaculars were already at work, harvesting Star-Stuff to replenish their stores and making plans for the conversion of the tram.

For all intents and purposes, the day had been more successful than they could have dreamed. Fletcher had already received messages from the other hijacked vehicles – the Spectaculars of the Cragg Islands had driven the turtle-drawn submarines through a gateway behind a waterfall, while those from the southern coastal cities had commandeered an airship and passed through a gateway hidden within a storm cloud. They were all safely in the Hidden Peaks, the place that had been a refuge for so many magical folks before them.

However, Fletcher couldn’t concentrate on any of this. He sat with a tumbler of honey water, slowly swilling the liquid around as one singular thought echoed around his mind. *I failed. I failed them.*

He had no idea what had happened with Carriage Eight.

If there had been any indication that the carriage was faulty, that it was coming loose... But the crossing had been so loud, so chaotic, that they were through and racing out the other side by the time anyone had realized that an entire carriage – and the four families inside it – had been lost in the process.

There was a sudden smell of smoke from a battered toaster that sat on the floor at Fletcher's feet. Fletcher looked at it expectantly, and a moment later, a piece of paper popped up. Fletcher seized the slip and scanned it, then yelled at the door.

“Lahiri!”

Lahiri popped her head into the cab. “What?”

“I've just heard from the Spraggs – they've found the gateway, they're on their way.”

Lahiri sprang into action. “Right. I'll send a canoe to pick them up.” She pulled out a notebook and flicked through it. “So...the McCubbins and the Ruizes are through already. With the Spraggs heading across... That just leaves the Woolfes.”

Fletcher frowned. “And nobody's heard anything from them?”

Lahiri shook her head. “Nothing. And with the mother being a non-Spectacular...We're a bit worried about them, to be honest.”

“Well, keep looking.” Fletcher rubbed his eyes. “I should go and speak to Trick; he's good friends with the Woolfe girl...”

“He’s outside,” said Lahiri. “Maybe give him a bit of time. It’ll be all right, chief. We’ll find the Woolfes. And once we do, we can start actioning the plans for converting the tram!”

“Sounds good.” Fletcher gave a huge yawn.

“Get some sleep, Fletcher,” Lahiri said firmly. “It’s been a hectic day.”

“I might take a quick five minutes,” Fletcher agreed, his eyelids already drooping. “But if there’s any word from the Woolfes, wake me up straight away.”

“I will.” Lahiri nodded. “Straight away.”



When Fletcher woke up, the Woolfes had not arrived. It was midnight, and the stars were falling.