

Copyrighted Material

One

THE MASTER CAME INTO MY LIFE LIKE THE DUSK. SLOWLY, UNTIL all the city was covered in night. And I, a star waiting to burn.

It was winter, or nearly so, the cold before the snow when the air goes still around you and inside of you. The radiator in my little room in the boardinghouse was shaky at best and I shivered getting dressed, frost in the corners of the window. With the heel of my hand I wiped away the condensation, an unchanging view of the brick alley beyond. Though it was early I had eaten already—eggs and toast with margarine—but still my belly rumbled because it was not enough and never would be.

My breath quickly misted the glass again; I stepped away. Nine years into the economic depression and my basic needs were met, even if this was the coldest of rooms in the creakiest boardinghouse on the North Side of Chicago. Granted, the matron, Mrs. O'Donnell, served us more for dinner than most: baked beans with cornbread and Hoover stew. Dandelion salad, and potato pancakes, and potato soup. Boiled carrots and spaghetti, cabbage and dumplings—all of it fine, though none of it appealing. I knew I was fortunate, I did; and yet, even the guilt of ingratitude was not enough to banish my growing discontent.

This can't be all there is.

I was thinking of running away forever when there was a knock on my bedroom door. **Copyrighted Material**

I had made it part of my routine every morning, imagining how I would manage it: out the window, down the alley, through the park.

Hurrying, but not so fast as to appear suspicious, or as if I were going anywhere in particular. Hair up, no wind, a half-melted moon in the dim afternoon guiding me toward the open water, the lake like one long shadow. There I would wade into the water and the waves would carry me to another world entirely—to a place I had never been, and from which I would not be able to find my way back again. Or, at the very least, to a crack in *this* world, a place where magic coats everything like a layer of dust, where the wind smells sweet and night never comes. A place that has no edges and no end, where there is always *more*. More life, more light, more to see, and more to explore.

It was the fantasy of a little girl. A girl I had not been for some time and of course never would be again. One that still had a mother who would stop her if she tried to leave; one that still had the whole world open to her, and dwelled in that sacred place before a perfect, cherished dream became a less than satisfying reality. For years in the company of Near North Ballet, I'd been another girl in a row of perfect girls, another face, another body in a line of similar faces and bodies. Symmetry and seamlessness, every step and angle of the chin; every curve of the arm and lift of the leg, precisely the same as the girls in front and behind. After a while I'd begun to feel as if I'd run eagerly, wildly into a labyrinth of possibility only to find that it was instead a straight aisle, pressed among a crowd of equally eager girls all trying to unlock the same door at the end of this infinite corridor.

And so, stuck in one place, growing stagnant and unsure, a new dream had been born: If I couldn't dance the way I wanted to—ecstatically, with all eyes on me—I would run. As long as I was still in motion, my heart would keep beating, and nothing, not even death, could touch me.

More. There has to be more.

"Coming!" I called, as another knock came at the door, louder and more insistent. I turned from the window and hurried to pull on my favorite pale pink dress for church: the last dress my mother had ever made for me, a gift on the day I turned thirteen. A little worn around the seams, and tight across the chest, but seven years later it still fit, and I would wear it for seven years more as long as it didn't fall apart. I tugged on my stockings, hoping the tiny rip near the hip wouldn't reach

my knees and become visible to judging eyes. Sunday was the only day of the week I wore my hair down, shadow-black and falling in bouncy spirals well past my shoulders, much longer than Mamma ever used to let me keep it. Finally I slipped on my brown penny loafers and went to the door.

“Mistress is here.” It was Emilia, slightly breathless even though she stood absolutely still, her dark hair set in pins to curl. It was still half an hour before we would leave for church and she was never early for anything without a pressing reason. “She asked to see you right away. She’s waiting in the parlor.”

My heart gave a vicious kick.

“What do you think she wants?” It was barely a whisper. We looked at each other, and both of us knew, but neither wanted to say it in case it didn’t come true. The prima position—*Emilia’s* position—would be open soon, and though it was all anyone in the corps could talk about, I had refused even to think of it, as if my own hope was a monster that would turn me to stone if I slipped and looked it directly in the eye. I wanted the position; I burned with the wanting, the sun in my throat, and maybe that was the true reason I had not run away yet: There was still something to wish for. *Prima ballerina of Near North Ballet*. It was utterly impossible—and right within reach.

“To demand that you dance for her morning, noon, and night,” Emilia said in that way she had of teasing while also being perfectly serious. “So that she’ll never have to live for even one second without gazing upon your unparalleled grace and beauty.”

I smiled, but it was more for her sake than for mine. Was it the touch of destiny I felt then, or was it simply nerves pinching in? Of late Mistress reprimanded me more than anyone else in the corps, barking my name as she clapped her hands once, sharply, so that we stopped in a flurry, the music cutting out. She ordered us back to the beginning of the phrase each time I strayed even slightly out of formation, each time I smiled a little more widely than the others, or spun just a smidgen too quickly. It was a failure, she’d admonished, to stand out from the corps. Weakness, not strength. **Copyrighted Material** Do not draw the eye to only one part of the whole.

But, if I were a soloist, I would be a whole unto myself. Never again would I need to blend in.

And so I could think of no other reason for her visit but that she was about to promote me—or to fire me for my mistakes. There was, after all, another, perhaps more obvious choice, than me: Beatrice Lang, whose upper middle class family had enrolled her in ballet lessons practically the moment she'd learned to walk. Despite the war and the depression, she'd never known a day of wanting or weeping, of hunting for dandelion greens in the park to cook into a sauce, or watching her veteran father gamble away his meager savings. Sometimes I wondered if we lived in the same city at the same time at all, or if she had crossed from some other reality into our own, so far removed was she from the life I had known. Tall, and with hair so fair it shone almost white in the stage light, she was delicate in demeanor but powerful in execution, possessed of that elusive gravity we called *presence*. An ability that had never come easily to me, the radiation of an undeniable energy that turned eyes toward her as soon as she entered a room. She was very much like Emilia in that way, and so seemed Emilia's natural successor. As I thought of this my smile slipped, a short-lived thing, and Emilia must have seen. She took my hand, as gently as lifting a sculpted angel made of glass, and said, "Come, Grace. I'll walk with you."

The hallway was narrow and there wasn't much light, an electric bulb protruding from the ceiling every few feet. The stairwell was even darker, and though we were forced to descend single file, I never let go of Emilia's hand. Between the thick walls of exposed brick our footsteps echoed like the whispers of a growing crowd around a crime scene. Halfway down, I squeezed her hand and stopped. She stopped too, turning toward me with a question posed on her lips, but before she could ask it I threw my arms around her, hugging her tightly.

"What was that for?" she said, laughing, as I released her. I stood one stair above her, and she seemed so small as I looked down, even though on level ground we were precisely the same height.

"I'm going to miss you," I said. "That's all."

Emilia was leaving in the spring to get married, to make a home and start a family. Though I'd had plenty of time now to get used to the idea, my throat still burned the way it had the day she'd told me, as if I were inhaling shadows instead of air. Emilia was the only family I had now, the only family I'd had for the last seven years. Was there a place for me

in her new life, or would I linger like a splinter stuck deep into her palm, and it was only a matter of time before her protective skin pushed me out, the thing that didn't belong? I began to miss her, even while she was still right there in front of me.

"Not so fast," Emilia said as we stood in the stairwell, the ache of her imminent absence even more pronounced. "You're not rid of me yet."

She took my hand firmly and led the way again, our footsteps slightly heavier than they were before. Two floors down and we emerged into a much brighter corridor, the walls here papered in forcefully cheery stripes and the floor carpeted in soft beige that swallowed our footfalls. A smell of burnt coffee, strong enough to choke. At the end of the corridor was a closed door, looming like the entrance to the underworld. My heart seemed separated from my body somehow, its mad, mortal beat in my ears belonging to someone else. A monster, maybe. It was like that when I stepped onstage too. I became the tiniest bit inhuman.

Emilia stopped before the door and turned to me. "All right, let me look at you."

I stood at attention while she fluffed my hair, raking her thin hands through my curls, and then pinched my cheeks to coax a rosy glow to the surface. When Emilia was satisfied she took a step back and nodded.

"I'll wait here," she promised. "Just outside."

The thought of her presence—even on the other side of the door—calmed me. But only slightly.

As if sensing us standing there, a voice came through the door, a voice like a gray cloud holding on to its lightning for just a minute more. "My colombina, is that you? Come in."

"Well," I said, and could think of nothing else to say or do but to face whatever awaited me.

"*Merde*," Emilia said as I turned away: the wish of good luck that was usually reserved for the stage. I nodded once, then twisted the heavy doorknob and stepped into the parlor.

Though Mrs. O'Donnell was the matron, it was Mistress, in fact, who owned the boardinghouse. It used to be her home, before she'd moved elsewhere—I'm not sure where, as she never invited any of us over—and began renting out the rooms in order to keep her dancers close to the studio. And so, when I entered the musty parlor, I marveled as al-

ways at Mistress's taste—or lack thereof—in décor, the room replete with several faded chintz chairs and long gray curtains obscuring the windows, catching and killing the sunlight before it could trespass. It smelled old. It *was* old—the house had been built fifty years ago, in the 1880s. Now, in 1938, it was all rotted wood and mothballs, mildew and dust. Mrs. O'Donnell burned scented candles but it only enhanced the stench, not banished it.

Mistress sat in a chair with her back to the window, dressed in a navy tunic-top dress belted at the waist, a matching tilt hat resting in her lap. As always, her long, graying auburn hair was twisted on top of her head. She was much older than she looked, her back straight and her chin held high. When she danced she moved like moonlight—precise, direct, but still with an air of otherworldliness about her, of night. Not that she danced much anymore; she was at least sixty—though she never did complain of aches and pains—and she had a company to direct—a severely underfunded one. It was rumored she'd had a steady patron twenty or so years ago—back when her daughter, also a dancer, was still with the company—but either he had left to apply his patronage elsewhere, or he'd lost all his money in 1929 when the stock markets first took a severe tumble. Either way, I suspected that now it was only through the sheer force of her will that Near North Ballet still functioned at all—her fists clenched around it, her refusal to let go.

She managed her dancers in much the same manner.

“Close the door behind you,” she said to me, and I obeyed. The latch clicked like teeth, a hard bite. “Sit.”

I sat across from her, my stomach roiling. Sometimes, after a long day of rehearsals, fresh bloodstains in our shoes, the other girls and I would whisper behind our hands, calling her a harpy, a witch who wanted to bathe in our blood and steal our youth. But all the while I knew she wasn't a witch, not the way we meant it, because heroes and villains did not exist in life as they did in stories.

Here there were only those who smiled when they said something kind, and those who smiled when they said something cruel.

Mistress was both **Copyrighted Material**

“Colombina, how are you sleeping?” she said, and my heart spun in

my chest, tripped, and fell flat. *Just tell me why you're here.* “Are you eating well?”

She knew I ate as well or as badly as anyone else in the company—as anyone in Chicago, for that matter—and sleep was parallel to a miracle when it came without a fight.

“Yes, Mistress,” I said, staring at the pinched skin of her neck instead of her eyes. I wondered if Mistress’s daughter—whose name I didn’t know because Mistress rarely spoke of her—had ever felt like this beneath her mother’s gaze, pinned like prey. I’d never met the daughter, or seen her, and I didn’t know where she was now, if she was dancing for another company—which had possibly caused the rift between her and Mistress—or if, like Emilia, she had retired to start a family. Did Mistress have a nickname for her daughter like she had one for me? No other girl currently in the company could say the same, and I clung to this, that I alone was Mistress’s colombina. That though she had been cross with me lately, I was still special, still deserving of my place.

There is always my little window, I thought, reassuring myself in case things were about to go terribly wrong. *Out the window, down the alley, through the park. No matter what happens, this is not the end.*

“Look at me.” Mistress leaned toward me, a cup of steaming coffee in her hands.

I raised my gaze, trying to keep my face blank. “It’s very important we keep you in perfect condition, now that you’re rising from the corps.”

I inhaled so sharply that I almost choked. “I’m . . . ?”

“Yes. Can you believe it?” Mistress said, watching me keenly. “Grace Dragotta, prima ballerina assoluta.”

Prima ballerina assoluta. It was like she had cast an enchantment, and for a full minute I could say nothing, do nothing, display no reaction at all. I was dizzy, more so even than when I’d stood at the top of the Tribune Tower with my older brother, Lorenzo, beside me—*Come on, gotta surprise for you, bearcat. How’d ya like to touch the sky?*—and gazed down at the city below for the very first time, as high as I had ever been or would be again. I had come so far, I had worked so hard; but still the moment held an air of unreality, a second of lucidity in a dream when you look around and think, *No, none of this is happening.*

“You haven’t said a word.” Mistress set her coffee on the low table between us. It clinked against the glass. “Your evident surprise at this is almost insulting. Are you not my colombina? My sweet, shy bird? You flew through my window, and I did more than mend your broken wings. I gave you new wings, bigger and better, stronger, so you could soar higher, faster, so you could tear through the night and bring me back stars.” She clicked her tongue against the roof of her mouth, startling me with the sudden, staccato sound. “Haven’t I molded you into the proud ballerina you are today? Haven’t I shaped you into the beautiful young woman I see before me? Why shouldn’t the artist responsible for such a transformation be rewarded for her fine work? Answer me.”

“I never doubted you, Mistress,” I said quickly, and it was true. Only overwhelmed, I didn’t know whether to laugh or to cry. In the end I did neither—Mistress loathed strong emotions, claiming they only belonged on the stage. I settled on a smile, not too wide, and I showed no teeth. “I’m honored. Truly.”

Mollified, Mistress sat back with a sigh. “There’s more, colombina. Would you like to hear it?”

“Yes,” I said, and concentrated very hard on not scratching an imaginary itch in the corner of my eye, or picking at the skin around my nails. Mistress didn’t take kindly to fidgeting either—one’s movements should always be deliberate, she said. “Please, tell me.”

“You will be dancing the Golden Firebird this season.”

This time I couldn’t hide my bewildered delight, and I covered my cheeks with my hands to obscure at least some of it, the flush that had risen to my face. The Golden Firebird was the lead role of *The Firebird*, the Russian composer Igor Stravinsky’s breakthrough ballet. As far as I knew, it had not been performed in America yet, but was regarded overseas as a masterpiece. It was the story of a prince named Ivan and the Firebird he finds in the forest that helps him rescue thirteen sleeping princesses from the clutches of the sorcerer Koschei the Deathless and his scheming demons. A pure fairy tale, with good triumphing over evil and true love conquering all.

“But . . . Emilia . . .” I said, still trying to wrap my mind around all of this. It was true that she was leaving, but she had not left yet. “This is her farewell season. Shouldn’t she dance the lead one last time?”

“Are you the ballet mistress here, or am I?” Mistress sounded as close to *amused* as I’d ever heard her, exasperated but not angry. “Miss Menendez will serve as your understudy, in case something goes wrong.”

A deep coldness swept through me, hardening in the spaces between my bones.

“Goes wrong?” I echoed, my voice as small as a child’s.

“Yes, well, you could fall and break your neck on the stairs, or suffer some other hideous disaster.” Mistress’s gaze drifted toward the window. “If it makes you feel better, your friend will be featured prominently, as always. The role of Princess Ekaterina will suit her just fine.”

I nodded, relieved. She did believe in me, but of course, every prima has an understudy. And the princess was the next best role—some would even argue that it was equal to the Firebird. So really, there was no reason to feel guilty about pushing Emilia out early. Her farewell season would still be a great one, perhaps even her best yet.

Mistress took a slow sip of her coffee.

“You look worried,” she said, eyeing me over the rim of her cup. “Don’t be. I have known that same fear of center stage, even while long-ing with all my soul for it. Stars burn—and burn out. Sometimes the fire is slow to consume and sometimes it happens quickly—too quickly, and your career is over. The dance is done. It’s frightening, but there is no stopping it once it has begun.” She leaned across the space between us and put two fingers beneath my chin, a light tap, before letting her hand fall away. “But if you must burn, colombina, why not burn the brightest?”

She had misinterpreted my anxiety over Emilia, and I inhaled a breath to explain, but then decided against it. I simply nodded, smiling a little as if her words had soothed me, when really the opposite of what she thought I was feeling was true: If anything, I feared *not* burning, of staying still with my feet stuck to the ground.

“Thank you, Mistress,” I said at last, and though I meant it with all my heart, the words felt insignificant. “Thank you for trusting me with this position, and this role.”

“Well deserved, little bird,” she said, and with that I was dismissed. I stood and left the room, forcing myself to move in a normal pace. I felt Mistress’s eyes on me, and tried very hard not to tremble beneath that dissecting gaze.

The hallway was darker than when I'd been there before, the shadows thinner and longer. Emilia waited right where she said she would be. She took my elbow and guided me back to the stairwell where Mistress would not overhear us, my steps so light it was almost like floating.

"Prima?" she whispered, when we were sure we were alone. Her eyes were bright like a beginning, like once upon a time. "Is it you?"

"It's me," I whispered, and suddenly it was real; it wasn't just a dream. Joy filled me like midday light touching every corner of a room. No longer would I be another faceless girl in the corps; after all, wasn't it my inimitability that had first gotten me noticed? Seven years ago I'd been brave enough to enter Mistress's studio and ask for what I wanted: to learn and to grow under her wing. I would burn, burn the brightest, and in burning become untouchable; no hand of god or man could hope to hold me down.

"Oh, Grace, I'm so happy for you." Emilia embraced me, closing the space between us so suddenly that I was nearly knocked off my feet. A laugh escaped me, a high, girlish sound. "I knew you would get it—I just *knew*."

I smiled, though Emilia couldn't see as she continued to cling tightly to me. Maybe Beatrice had been the conventional choice for Emilia's replacement, but I was special too—and this promotion was the proof. More like the moon than the sun, bright and a little strange, a touch of mystique that made you marvel at it night after night. Beatrice was bold and exciting, but I was ethereal, haunting, and mine was the performance the audience would remember long after it was done, lingering.

"I couldn't have done it without you," I said, thinking of all those long hours we'd spent in the studio after dark, Emilia acting as a second mistress to my instruction. At thirteen years old I'd been sorely behind the other girls in the ballet school, a thin, tired orphan who'd had no formal training in her childhood. Emilia had been a patient teacher, gently if relentlessly adjusting my legs and feet until I'd achieved near perfect turnout, leading me through stretches to expand my extension until I could penché with my leg in a six o'clock arabesque, my toes pointing perfectly to the sky. She watched me execute the same combinations, at the barre and in the center, over and over until I could do a triple pirouette without hopping, land a tour jeté without stumbling, a brisé volé

without fumbling. Until Mistress could find little fault with me, and I was ready at last to join the corps.

“Oh, you would’ve gotten there on your own eventually,” Emilia said modestly, and when she pulled away I saw that she was crying, just a little. She wiped her eyes, and as soon as hers were gone I felt the tears start in mine, as if we could only express emotion one at a time, passing it between us like shared food at a table, drinking from the same cup.

“I’m not so sure about that,” I said, and sudden footsteps at the top of the stairs made us both jump. A moment later Beatrice and her close friend Anna, who was also in the corps, appeared above us, slowing when they saw us.

“What’s all this?” Beatrice said, her voice flat as her eyes darted from Emilia’s face to mine. Our drying tears, our tremulous hands, evidence that something had happened—something momentous.

Emilia and I glanced at each other with secretive smiles.

“Perhaps we should leave the breaking of the news to Mistress. I’m sure she’ll make an announcement soon.” Emilia’s hand flew to her head, as if only just remembering that her hair was still in curlers. “Oh! We’re going to be late for church if we don’t get going. Shall we, Grace?”

“What news?” Anna said plaintively as we inched around them and ascended the stairs, but we pretended not to hear.

“I’m guessing we have a new prima,” Beatrice said with a touch of bitterness, and the echo of it—*prima, prima, prima*—followed me all the way back to my room, where I pulled the curtains over my little window, and finished readying for church.

Two

RHEARSALS BEGAN A FEW DAYS LATER, HOURS UPON HOURS spent in the high-ceilinged studio from first light to sunset, learning the choreography and then perfecting it. Every day in the studio brought us closer to the stage; every day I grew stronger. Sinew and symmetry, fire and finesse. Never slouching or slacking for even a moment, striving for perfection from every angle and finding something close. *So close.*

The first week was pure elation, sweat and breath and the beat of my heart—wild, insistent, *I am here, I am here*—and I couldn't take my eyes off myself in the mirror, even after Mistress admonished me. *The mirrors are only a tool, like the barre. They are not for vanity.* But I ignored her, greedily tracking my reflection, relishing the sight as well as the feel of every stretch and every bend, every chassé and fouetté and arabesque, reveling in the way my muscles obeyed my every command. I began to feel that if I couldn't see myself then I wasn't actually real, and that all of this—prima, Emilia, the Golden Firebird—would slip away from me when I wasn't looking. So I looked, and eventually, not even Mistress tried to stop me.

"Let's go out," I said to Emilia as we left the brownstone building two blocks north of the river where the studio was housed and headed back to the boardinghouse on Friday, the end of the first week. We had been rehearsing the scene where Prince Ivan meets the Firebird after he becomes lost in the woods, and so there had only been four of us in the

rehearsal: Emilia as my understudy, plus my partner, Will, who played Ivan, and his understudy. And me, of course. I was tired but not sleepy, famished but not empty. “Let’s go dancing!”

Emilia laughed, the cold burning two red spots on her cheeks. “*More* dancing? Haven’t you had enough?”

“Never,” I said, looking up at the buildings rising around us, their windows gleaming like a hundred eyes, glowing yellow against the darkening sky. “If I stop dancing, my heart will stop beating.”

“All right, all right,” Emilia said, taking my elbow and steering me out of the path of a man walking toward us, briefcase in hand, his trilby-hatted head bowed against the wind. “Let’s get cleaned up first.”

Club DeLisa was a jazz club with no drink minimum and no cover charge, and though the owners were Italian (which of course made them suspicious, even to me), they weren’t gangsters like the ones that ran the Green Mill or Friar’s Inn. Located in Washington Park, a predominately black neighborhood, Club DeLisa was the most prestigious integrated club in the city. Emilia’s fiancé met us at the boardinghouse, wearing a slightly out of style gray suit and his brown fringe styled like the actor Errol Flynn, wavy and thick. Together, we caught the bus at the stop on the corner; thankfully we didn’t have to wait very long. No need to engage in any lengthy conversations while we stood in our evening dress, restless for our glamorous night out to begin. On the bus I sat alone behind Emilia and Adrián, staring alternately out the window and at the back of their heads.

About nine months ago, Adrián Ramos had come into the Mexican panadería that Emilia’s parents owned in East Pilsen while she was working behind the counter, filling in for her cousin who had taken ill. He’d seen Emilia in the window while walking by; he said he’d felt as if he’d been asleep all his life and only finally woke up when he saw her for the very first time. He had come into the panadería looking for work, and Emilia’s parents had hired him as a baker. In only a few months he’d been promoted to lead pastry chef, and was even expected to take over the business someday with Emilia. He was kind, if quiet, timid with a wide, sweet smile. He was successful and reliable, and he would take good care of Emilia as well as the children they hoped to have, so what

was there to find fault with? Nothing, nothing—I knew this. But still, I couldn't help fancying that if Adrián hadn't come along, Emilia would have danced with me forever.

The ride across the city was long.

Half an hour later we arrived, but the tedious trip was worth it. The outside of the nightclub didn't look like much, only a short building with an awning over the door and enormous letters spelling Club DeLisa on its front, but the inside of the main room was inviting if a bit cramped: a square, high-ceilinged room host to a maze of tables and tightly packed chairs, a raised stage at the far end in front of which was an open floor for dancing, the wood shining in the cloudy light of the hanging lamps. Curls of cigar smoke and puffs of floral perfume; murmurs like wind under the door, gusts of laughter and shuffles of feet like a prelude of soft thunder before a storm. It was still early in the evening; most of the tables were unoccupied, so we picked one on the edge of the dance floor, nearest to the stage where a brass band had set up their instruments and began to play. Emilia and I sat together while Adrián went to buy drinks—a beer for himself, and martinis for Emilia and me.

“You were right,” she said as we waited for Adrián to return. We'd worn our best dresses, though Emilia's was finer than mine, made of a red, silky fabric that fell all the way to the floor. Mine had been Mamma's, and so was at least ten years out of style, pastel pink with a dropped waist and fluttery sleeves. Normally I didn't like to wear it—sometimes, when I let my guard down, I felt a warm weight on my shoulder, a hand that belonged to someone that, when I turned, wasn't there—but now I wanted her close to me, to share my joy with her in the only small way that I could. “We deserve a night of fun, don't we? To celebrate all that we've achieved?”

“Absolutely,” I said, thinking of my reflection in the studio mirrors, the girl I'd seen flying in the glass. “A celebration.”

The music was like a rush of blood to the head, smooth and quick. I felt it in my chest like a second heart, a fevered pulse behind my eyes and in my throat. I watched Emilia dance with Adrián while the club filled with bodies—men in suits just a little bit wrinkled, women wearing paste diamonds, sparkling so viciously in the light it was almost easy to

believe they were real and not made of lead glass. Then Adrián rested while Emilia and I took a spin together, laughing as we led each other in a lurching foxtrot, the liquor blazing in us like shooting stars. My feet were sore but I didn't mind it, and my curls grew limp and loose from their pins. All three of us were at the table, finishing up our second drinks, when a voice at my shoulder startled me.

"May I have this dance?"

A young man, about my age, held out his hand as he bent near to me, imploring. I stared, seeing not his face, but another's—one that had faded over the years despite my best efforts to remember, to hold him uncorrupted by time in my mind. The man before me had hair that was rich and dark, like mine, and his skin was olive like mine too. Definitely Italian, likely Sicilian, and yet, it was the way he carried himself—tall and loose, thin through the waist but broad through the shoulders, slightly hunched—that reminded me the most of Lorenzo, albeit a slightly older version of him. For a moment, I couldn't move or even speak. A touch on my shoulder, dreaded but familiar, a soft pressure pushing me down and down and down.

"Go on," Emilia prompted, and her voice, though gentle, tugged at me violently, wrenching me from a memory. The weight lifted from my shoulder, as if it had never been. "Grace, don't you want to dance?"

Without a word, I took the man's hand.

"So, where's your family from?" he asked as we swayed, the music having slowed, and I knew he didn't mean Chicago. His hands on my waist were cold—too cold. I could feel the ice of his palms through my clothes.

"Cefalù," I said, trying to focus on his face and not the one in my head. Of course, I had never been to Sicily, but Mamma had told me stories of her small fishing village near Palermo where she'd lived until the age of fifteen. My father's family had emigrated from Corleone, an inland town, but I didn't feel as much of a connection to it. He hadn't been around much to tell stories.

"Ah. I'm from Messina myself," the man said, and I was afraid to ask his name; Lorenzo was a common one. He didn't have an accent, so he must have come here when he was very young. "The shit on the tip of