

CHAPTER SEVEN

Every Man Jack

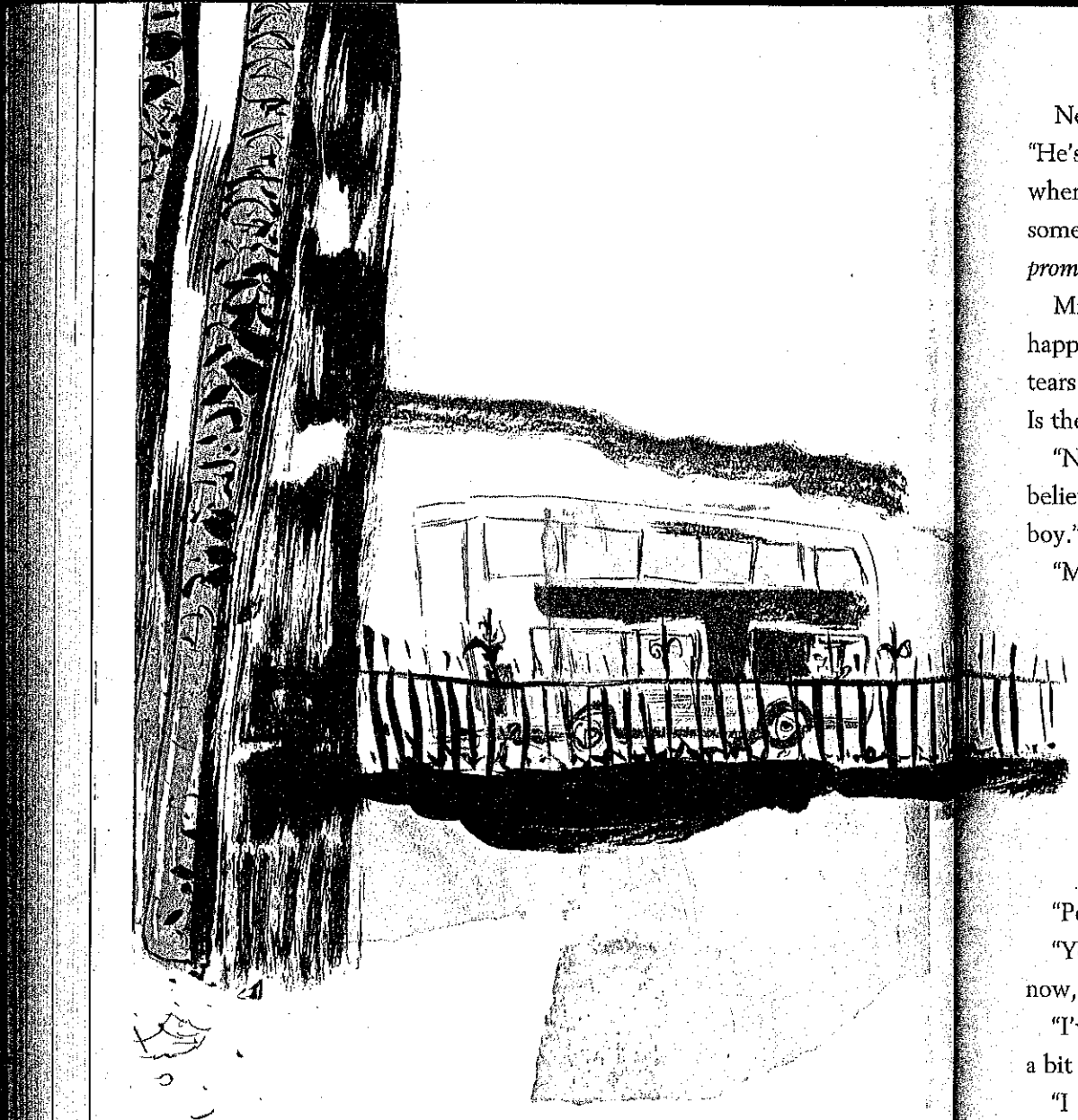
SILAS HAD BEEN PREOCCUPIED for the previous several months. He had begun to leave the graveyard for days, sometimes weeks, at a time. Over Christmas, Miss Lupescu had come out for three weeks in his place, and Bod had shared her meals in her little flat in the Old Town. She had even taken him to a football match, as Silas had promised that she would, but she had gone back to the place she called "The Old Country" after squeezing Bod's cheeks and calling him *Nimeni*, which had become her pet name for him.

Now Silas was gone, and Miss Lupescu also. Mr. and Mrs. Owens were sitting in Josiah Worthington's tomb talking to Josiah Worthington. None of them was happy.

Josiah Worthington said, "You mean to say that he did not tell either of you where he was going or how the child was to be cared for?"

When the Owenses shook their heads, Josiah Worthington said, "Well, where is he?"





Neither Owens was able to answer. Master Owens said, "He's never been gone for so long before. And he promised, when the child came to us, promised he would be here, or someone else would be here to help us care for him. He *promised.*"

Mrs. Owens said, "I worry that something must have happened to him." She seemed close to tears, and then her tears turned to anger, and she said, "This is too bad of him! Is there no way to find him, to call him back?"

"None that I know," said Josiah Worthington. "But I believe that he's left money in the crypt, for food for the boy."

"Money!" said Mrs. Owens. "What use is *money?*"

"Bod will be needing money if he's to go out there to buy food," began Mr. Owens, but Mrs. Owens turned on him.

"You're all as bad as each other!" she said.

She left the Worthington tomb, then, and she went looking for her son, whom she found, as she expected to, at the top of the hill, staring out over the town.

"Penny for your thoughts," said Mrs. Owens.

"You don't have a penny," said Bod. He was fourteen, now, and taller than his mother.

"I've got two in the coffin," said Mrs. Owens. "Probably a bit green by now, but I've still got them right enough."

"I was thinking about the world," said Bod. "How do we even know that the person who killed my family is still

alive? That he's out there?"

"Silas says he is," said Mrs. Owens.

"But Silas doesn't tell us anything else."

Mrs. Owens said, "He means only the best for you. You know that."

"Thanks," said Bod, unimpressed. "So where is he?"

Mrs. Owens made no reply.

Bod said, "You saw the man who killed my family, didn't you? On the day you adopted me."

Mrs. Owens nodded.

"What was he like?"

"Mostly, I had eyes for you. Let me see . . . he had dark hair, very dark. And I was frightened of him. He had a sharp face. Hungry and angry all at once, he was. Silas saw him off."

"Why didn't Silas just kill him?" said Bod, fiercely. "He should have just killed him then."

Mrs. Owens touched the back of Bod's hand with her cold fingers. She said, "He's not a monster, Bod."

"If Silas had killed him back then, I would be safe now. I could go anywhere."

"Silas knows more than you do about all this, more than any of us do. And Silas knows about life and death," said Mrs. Owens. "It's not that easy."

Bod said, "What was his name? The man who killed them."

"He didn't say it. Not then."

Bod put his head on one side, and stared at her with eyes

as grey as thunderclouds. "But you know it, don't you?"

Mrs. Owens said, "There's nothing you can do, Bod."

"There is. I can learn. I can learn *everything* I need to know, all I can. I learned about ghouls-gates. I learned to Dreamwalk. Miss Lupescu taught me how to watch the stars. Silas taught me silence. I can Haunt. I can Fade. I know every inch of this graveyard."

Mrs. Owens reached out a hand, touched her son's shoulder. "One day," she said . . . and then she hesitated. One day, she would not be able to touch him. One day, he would leave them. One day. And then she said, "Silas told me the man who killed your family was called Jack."

Bod said nothing. Then he nodded. "Mother?"

"What is it, son?"

"When will Silas come back?"

The midnight wind was cold and it came from the north.

Mrs. Owens was no longer angry. She feared for her son. She said only, "I wish I knew, my darling boy, I wish I knew."

Scarlett Amber Perkins was fifteen, and, at that moment, sitting on the upper deck of the elderly bus, she was a mass of angry hate. She hated her parents for splitting up. She hated her mother for moving away from Scotland, hated her father because he didn't seem to care that she had gone. She hated this town for being so different—nothing like Glasgow, where she had grown up—and she hated it because every now and again she would turn a corner and

see something and the world would all become achingly, horribly familiar.

She had lost it with her mother that morning. "At least in Glasgow I had friends!" Scarlett had said, and she wasn't quite shouting and she wasn't quite sobbing. "I'll never see them again!" All her mother had said in reply was, "At least you're somewhere you've been before. I mean, we lived here when you were little."

"I don't remember," said Scarlett. "And it's not like I still know anyone. Do you want me to find my old friends from when I was five? Is *that* what you want?"

And her mother said, "Well, I'm not stopping you."

Scarlett had gone through the whole of the school day angry, and she was angry now. She hated her school and she hated the world, and right now she particularly hated the town bus service.

Every day, when school was over, the 97 bus to the City Center would take her from her school gates all the way to the end of the street where her mother had rented a small flat. She had waited at the bus-stop on that gusty April day for almost half an hour and no 97 buses had appeared, so when she saw a 121 bus with *City Center* as its destination she had climbed aboard. But where her bus always turned right, this one turned left, into the Old Town, past the municipal gardens in the Old Town square, past the statue of Josiah Worthington, Bart., and then crept up a winding hill lined with high houses, as Scarlett's heart sank and her anger was replaced with misery.

She walked downstairs, edged forward, eyed the sign telling her not to speak to the driver when the vehicle was in motion, and said, "Excuse me. I wanted to go to Acacia Avenue."

The driver, a large woman, her skin even darker than Scarlett's said, "You should have got the 97, then."

"But this goes to the City Center."

"Eventually. But even when you get there, you'll still need to get back." The woman sighed. "Best thing you can do, get off here, walk back down the hill, there's a bus-stop in front of the town hall. From there, you can catch the number 4 or the 58, both of them will take you most of the way to Acacia Avenue. You could get off by the sports center and walk up from there. You got all that?"

"The 4 or the 58."

"I'll let you off here." It was a request stop on the side of the hill, just past a large pair of open iron gates, and it looked uninviting and dismal. Scarlett stood in the open doorway of the bus until the bus driver said, "Go on. Hop it." She stepped down onto the pavement and the bus belched black smoke and roared away.

The wind rattled the trees on the other side of the wall.

Scarlett began to walk back down the hill—*this* was why she needed a mobile phone, she thought. If she was so much as five minutes late, her mother would *freak*, but she still wouldn't buy Scarlett a phone of her own. Oh well. She would have to endure another shouting match. It wouldn't be the first and it wouldn't be the last.

By now she was level with the open gates. She glanced inside and . . .

"That's odd," she said, aloud.

There's an expression, *déjà vu*, that means that you feel like you've been somewhere before, that you've somehow already dreamed it or experienced it in your mind. Scarlett had experienced it—the knowledge that a teacher was just about to tell them that she'd been to Inverness on holiday, or that someone had dropped a spoon in just that way before. This was different. This wasn't a feeling that she had been here before. This was the real thing.

Scarlett walked through the open gates into the graveyard.

A magpie flew up as she walked in, a flash of black and white and iridescent green, and settled in the branches of a yew tree, watching her. *Around that corner, she thought, is a church, with a bench in front of it,* and she turned a corner to see a church—much smaller than the one in her head, a sinister blocky little Gothic building of grey stone, with a jutting spire. In front of it was a weathered wooden bench. She walked over, sat down on the bench, and swung her legs as if she was still a little girl.

"Hullo. Um, hullo?" said a voice from behind her. "Awful cheek of me, I know, but would you help me hold down this, er, just really need another pair of hands, if it's not too much trouble."

Scarlett looked around, and saw a man in a fawn-colored raincoat squatting in front of a gravestone. He was holding

a large sheet of paper which was blowing about in the wind. She hurried over to him.

"You hold on to it here," said the man. "One hand here, one hand there, that's it. Frightful imposition, I know. Ridiculously grateful."

He had a biscuit tin next to him, and from the tin he pulled what looked like a crayon the size of a small candle. He began rubbing it back and forth across the stone with easy, practiced movements.

"There we go," he said, cheerfully. "And here she comes . . . oops. A wiggly bit, down at the bottom here, I think it's meant to be ivy—the Victorians loved putting ivy on things, deeply symbolic you know . . . and there we are. You can let go now."

He stood up, ran one hand through his grey hair. "Ow. Needed to stand. Legs got a bit pins-and-needlesy," he said. "So. What do you reckon to that?"

The actual headstone was covered in green and yellow lichen, and so worn and faded as to almost be undecipherable, but the rubbing was clear. "Majella Godspeed, Spinster of this Parish, 1791–1870, *Lost to All But Memory*," Scarlett read aloud.

"And probably now lost even to that," said the man. His hair was thinning, and he smiled hesitantly and blinked at her through small, round glasses which made him look a little like a friendly owl.

A large raindrop splashed down on the paper, and the man hurriedly rolled it up and grabbed his tin box of

crayons. Another handful of raindrops, and Scarlett picked up the portfolio the man pointed to, propped up beside a nearby gravestone, and followed him into the tiny porch of the church, where the rain could not touch them.

"Thank you so much," said the man. "I don't think it's really going to rain much. Weather forecast for this afternoon said mostly sunny."

As if in reply, the wind gusted coldly and the rain began to beat down in earnest.

"I know what you're thinking," the gravestone-rubbing man said to Scarlett.

"You do?" she said. She had been thinking, *My mum will kill me.*

"You're thinking, is this a church or a funeral chapel? And the answer is, as far as I can ascertain, that on this site there was indeed a small church, and the original graveyard would have been its churchyard. That's as long ago as eight, perhaps nine hundred A.D. Rebuilt and extended several times in there. But there was a fire here in the 1820s and by that time it was already much too small for the area. People around here were using St. Dunstan's in the village square as their parish church, so when they came to rebuild here, they made it a funeral chapel, keeping many of the original features—the stained glass windows in the far wall are said to be original . . ."

"Actually," said Scarlett, "I was thinking that my mum is going to kill me. I got the wrong bus and I am already so late home . . ."

"Good Lord, you poor thing," said the man. "Look, I only live just down the road. You wait here—" And with that he thrust his portfolio, his tin of crayons, and his rolled-up sheet of paper into her hands and he set off at a trot down to the gates, his shoulders hunched against the driving rain. A couple of minutes later, Scarlett saw the lights of a car and heard the sound of a car horn.

Scarlett ran down to the gates, where she could see the car, an elderly green Mini. The man she had been talking to was sitting in the driver's seat. He wound down his window.

"Come on," he said. "Where exactly am I taking you?"

Scarlett stood there, the rain running down her neck. "I don't take rides from strangers," she said.

"Quite right too," said the man. "But one good turn deserves, and, um, all that. Here, put the stuff in the back before it gets soaked." He pulled open the passenger door, and Scarlett leaned inside and put his graverubbing equipment down on the backseat as best she could. "Tell you what," he said. "Why don't you phone your mother—you can use my phone—and tell her my car's number plate? You can do it from inside the car. You're getting soaked out there."

Scarlett hesitated. Rain was beginning to plaster her hair down. It was cold.

The man reached over and handed her his mobile phone. Scarlett looked at it. She realized she was more afraid of calling her mother than she was of getting into the

car. Then she said, "I could call the police too, couldn't I?"

"You certainly can, yes. Or you can walk home. Or you can just call your mother and ask her to come and pick you up."

Scarlett got into the passenger seat and closed the door. She kept hold of the man's phone.

"Where do you live?" the man asked.

"You really don't have to. I mean, you could just take me to the bus stop . . ."

"I'll take you home. Address?"

"102a Acacia Avenue. It's off the main road, a wee bit past the big sports center . . ."

"You *are* out of your way, aren't you? Right. Let's get you home." He took off the handbrake, swung the car around, and drove down the hill.

"Been living here long?" he said.

"Not really. We moved here just after Christmas. We lived here when I was five, though."

"Is that a brogue I detect in your accent?"

"We've been living in Scotland for ten years. There, I sounded like everyone else, and then I came down here, and now I stick out like a sore thumb." She had wanted it to sound like a joke, but it was true, and she could hear it as she said it. Not funny, just bitter.

The man drove to Acacia Avenue, parked in front of the house, then insisted on coming up to the front door with her. When the door was opened he said, "Frightfully sorry. I took the liberty of bringing your daughter back to you.

Obviously, you taught her well, shouldn't accept rides from strangers. But, well, it was raining, she took the wrong bus, wound up on the other side of town. Bit of a mess all around really. Say you can find it in your heart to forgive. Forgive her. And, um, me."

Scarlett expected her mother to shout at both of them, and was surprised and relieved when her mother only said, Well, you couldn't be too careful these days, and was Mr. Um a teacher, and would he like a cup of tea?

Mr. Um said his name was Frost, but she should call him Jay, and Mrs. Perkins smiled and said he should call her Noona, and she'd put the kettle on.

Over tea, Scarlett told her mother the story of her wrong bus adventure, and how she had found herself at the graveyard, and how she met Mr. Frost by the little church . . .

Mrs. Perkins dropped her teacup.

They were sitting around the table in the kitchen, so the cup didn't fall very far, and it didn't break, just spilled tea. Mrs. Perkins apologized awkwardly, and went and got a cloth from the sink to mop it up.

Then she said, "The graveyard on the hill, in the Old Town? That one?"

"I live over that way," said Mr. Frost. "Been doing a lot of grave-rubbings. And you know it's technically a nature reserve?"

Mrs. Perkins said, "I know," thin-lipped. Then she said, "Thank you so much for giving Scarlett a ride home, Mr.

Frost." Each word might have been an ice cube. Then, "I think you should leave now."

"I say, that's a bit much," said Frost, amiably. "Didn't mean to hurt your feelings. Was it something I said? The rubbings, they're for a local history project, it's not as if I'm, you know, digging up bones or anything."

For a heartbeat, Scarlett thought that her mother was going to strike Mr. Frost, who just looked worried. But Mrs. Perkins shook her head and said, "Sorry, family history. Not your fault." As if she was making a conscious effort, she said, brightly, "You know, Scarlett actually used to play in that graveyard when she was little. This is, oh, ten years ago. She had an imaginary friend, too. A little boy called Nobody."

A smile twitched at the corner of Mr. Frost's lips. "A ghostie?"

"No, I don't think so. He just lived there. She even pointed out the tomb he lived in. So I suppose he *was* a ghost. Do you remember, love?"

Scarlett shook her head. "I must have been a funny kid," she said.

"I'm sure that you were nothing of the, um," said Mr. Frost. "You are raising a fine girl here, Noona. Well, lovely cup of tea. Always a joy to make new friends. I'll be toddling off now. Got to make myself a little dinner, then I've got a meeting of the Local History Society."

"You're making your own dinner?" said Mrs. Perkins.

"Yes, making it. Well, defrosting it really. I'm also a

master of the boil-in-the-bag. Eating for one. Living on my own. Bit of a crusty old bachelor. Actually, in the papers, that always means gay, doesn't it? Not gay, just never met the right woman." And for a moment, he looked rather sad.

Mrs. Perkins, who hated to cook, announced that she always cooked too much food at the weekend, and as she ushered Mr. Frost out into the hall, Scarlett heard him agree that he would love to come round for dinner on Saturday night.

When Mrs. Perkins came back from the front hall, all she said to Scarlett was, "I hope you've done your homework."

Scarlett was thinking about the afternoon's events as she lay in bed that night listening to the sound of the cars grinding their way along the main road. She *had* been there, in that graveyard, when she was little. That was why everything had seemed so familiar.

In her mind she imagined and she remembered, and somewhere in there she fell asleep, but in sleep she still walked the paths of the graveyard. It was night, but she could see everything as clearly as if it were day. She was on the side of a hill. There was a boy of about her own age standing with his back to her, looking at the lights of the city.

Scarlett said, "Boy? What're you doing?"

He looked around, seemed to have trouble focusing. "Who said that?" and then, "Oh, I can see you, sort of. Are you Dreamwalking?"

"I think I'm dreaming," she agreed.

"Not quite what I meant," said the boy. "Hullo. I'm Bod."

"I'm Scarlett," she said.

He looked at her again, as if he were seeing her for the first time. "Of course, you are! I knew you looked familiar. You were in the graveyard today with that man, the one with the paper."

"Mr. Frost," she said. "He's really nice. He gave me a lift home." Then she said, "Did you see us?"

"Yeah. I keep an eye on most things that happen in the graveyard."

"What kind of a name is Bod?" she asked.

"It's short for Nobody."

"Of course!" said Scarlett. "That's what this dream is about. You're my imaginary friend, from when I was little, all grown up."

He nodded.

He was taller than she was. He wore grey, although she could not have described his clothes. His hair was too long, and she thought it had been some time since he had received a haircut.

He said, "You were really brave. We went deep into the hill and we saw the Indigo Man. And we met the Sleer."

Something happened, then, in her head. A rushing and a tumbling, a whirl of darkness and a crash of images . . .

"I *remember*," said Scarlett. But she said it to the empty darkness of her bedroom, and heard nothing in reply but the low trundle of a distant lorry, making its way through the night.

* * *

Bod had stores of food, the kind that lasted, cached in the crypt, and more in some of the chillier tombs and vaults and mausoleums. Silas had made sure of that. He had enough food to keep him going for a couple of months. Unless Silas or Miss Lupescu was there, he simply would not leave the graveyard.

He missed the world beyond the graveyard gates, but he knew it was not safe out there. Not yet. The graveyard, though, was his world and his domain, and he was proud of it and loved it as only a fourteen-year-old boy can love anything.

And yet . . .

In the graveyard, no one ever changed. The little children Bod had played with when he was small were still little children; Fortinbras Bartleby, who had once been his best friend, was now four or five years younger than Bod was, and they had less to talk about each time they saw each other; Thackeray Porringer was Bod's height and age, and seemed to be in much better temper with him; he would walk with Bod in the evenings, and tell stories of unfortunate things that had happened to his friends. Normally the stories would end in the friends being hanged until they were dead for no offense of theirs and by mistake, although sometimes they were simply transported to the American Colonies and they didn't have to be hanged unless they came back.

Liza Hempstock, who had been Bod's friend for the last

six years, was different in another way; she was less likely to be there for him when Bod went down to the nettle-patch to see her, and on the rare occasions when she was, she would be short-tempered, argumentative, and often downright rude.

Bod talked to Mr. Owens about this, and, after a few moments' reflection, his father said, "It's just women, I reckon. She liked you as a boy, probably isn't sure who you are now you're a young man. I used to play with one little girl down by the duck-pond every day until she turned about your age, and then she threw an apple at my head and did not say another word to me until I was seventeen."

Mrs. Owens sniffed. "It was a pear I threw," she said, tartly, "and I was talking to you again soon enough, for we danced a measure at your cousin Ned's wedding, and that was but two days after your sixteenth birthday."

Mr. Owens said, "Of course you are right, my dear." He winked at Bod, to tell him that it was none of it serious. And then he mouthed "Seventeen," to show that, really, it was.

Bod had allowed himself no friends among the living. That way, he had realized back during his short-lived schooldays, lay only trouble. Still, he had remembered Scarlett, had missed her for years after she went away, had long ago faced the fact he would never see her again. And now she had been here in his graveyard, and he had not known her . . .

He was wandering deeper into the tangle of ivy and trees

that made the graveyard's northwest quadrant so dangerous. Signs advised visitors to keep out, but the signs were not needed. It was uninviting and creepy once you were past the ivy-tangle that marked the end of the Egyptian Walk and the black doors in the mock-Egyptian walls that led to people's final resting places. In the northwest, nature had been reclaiming the graveyard for almost a hundred years, and the stones were tipped over, graves were forgotten or simply lost beneath the green ivy and the leaf-fall of fifty years. Paths were lost and impassable.

Bod walked with care. He knew the area well, and he knew how dangerous it could be.

When Bod was nine he had been exploring in just this part of the world when the soil had given way beneath him, tumbling him into a hole almost twenty feet down. The grave had been dug deep, to accommodate many coffins, but there was no headstone and only one coffin, down at the bottom, containing a rather excitable medical gentleman named Carstairs who seemed thrilled by Bod's arrival and insisted on examining Bod's wrist (which Bod had twisted in the tumble, grabbing on to a root) before he could be persuaded to go and fetch help.

Bod was making his way through the northwest quadrant, a sludge of fallen leaves, a tangle of ivy, where the foxes made their homes and fallen angels stared up blindly, because he had an urge to talk to the Poet.

Nehemiah Trot was the Poet's name, and his gravestone, beneath the greenery, read:

Here lies the mortal remains of

NEHEMIAH TROT

POET

1741–1774

SWANS SING BEFORE THEY DIE

Bod said, "Master Trot? Might I ask you for advice?"

Nehemiah Trot beamed, wanly. "Of course, brave boy. The advice of poets is the cordiality of kings! How may I smear unction on your, no, not unction, how may I give balm to your pain?"

"I'm not actually in pain. I just—well, there's a girl I used to know, and I wasn't sure if I should find her and talk to her or if I should just forget about it."

Nehemiah Trot drew himself up to his full height, which was less than Bod's, raised both hands to his chest excitedly, and said, "Oh! You must go to her and implore her. You must call her your Terpsichore, your Echo, your Clytemnestra. You must write poems for her, mighty odes—I shall help you write them—and thus—and only thus—shall you win your true love's heart."

"I don't actually need to win her heart. She's not my true love," said Bod. "Just someone I'd like to talk to."

"Of all the organs," said Nehemiah Trot, "the tongue is the most remarkable. For we use it both to taste our sweet wine and bitter poison, thus also do we utter words both sweet and sour with the same tongue. Go to her! Talk to her!"

"I shouldn't."

"You should, sir! You must! I shall write about it, when the battle's lost and won."

"But if I Unfade for one person, it makes it easier for other people to see me . . ."

Nehemiah Trot said, "Ah, list to me, young Leander, young Hero, young Alexander. If you dare nothing, then when the day is over, nothing is all you will have gained."

"Good point." Bod was pleased with himself, and glad he had thought of asking the Poet for advice. *Really*, he thought, *if you couldn't trust a poet to offer sensible advice, who could you trust?* Which reminded him . . .

"Mister Trot?" said Bod. "Tell me about revenge."

"Dish best served cold," said Nehemiah Trot. "Do not take revenge in the heat of the moment. Instead, wait until the hour is propitious. There was a Grub Street hack named O'Leary—an Irishman, I should add—who had the nerve, the confounded cheek to write of my first slim volume of poems, *A Nosegay of Beauty Assembled for Gentlemen of Quality*, that it was inferior doggerel of no worth whatsoever, and that the paper it was written on would have been better used as—no, I cannot say. Let us simply agree that it was a most vulgar statement."

"But you got your revenge on him?" asked Bod, curious.

"On him and on his entire pestilent breed! Oh, I had my revenge, Master Owens, and it was a terrible one. I wrote, and had published, a letter, which I nailed to the doors of the public houses in London where such low scribbling folk were wont to frequent. And I explained that, given the

fragility of the genius poetical, I would henceforth write not for them, but only for myself and posterity, and that I should, as long as I lived, publish no more poems—for them! Thus I left instructions that upon my death my poems were to be buried with me, unpublished, and that only when posterity realized my genius, realized that hundreds of my verses had been lost—lost!—only then was my coffin to be disinterred, only then could my poems be removed from my cold dead hand, to finally be published to the approbation and delight of all. It is a terrible thing to be ahead of your time.”

“And after you died, they dug you up, and they printed the poems?”

“Not yet, no. But there is still plenty of time. Posterity is vast.”

“So . . . that was your revenge?”

“Indeed. And a mightily powerful and cunning one at that!”

“Ye-es,” said Bod, unconvinced.

“Best. Served. Cold,” said Nehemiah Trot, proudly.

Bod left the northwest of the graveyard, returned through the Egyptian Walk to the more orderly paths and untangled ways, and as the dusk fell, he wandered back towards the old chapel—not because he hoped Silas had returned from his travels, but because he had spent his life visiting the chapel at dusk, and it felt good to have a rhythm. And anyway, he was hungry.

Bod slipped through the crypt door, down into the

crypt. He moved a cardboard box filled with curled and damp parish papers and took out a carton of orange juice, an apple, a box of bread sticks, and a block of cheese, and he ate while pondering how and whether he would seek out Scarlett—he would Dreamwalk, perhaps, since that was how she had come to him . . .

He headed outside, was on his way to sit on the grey wooden bench, when he saw something and he hesitated. There was someone already there, sitting on his bench. She was reading a magazine.

Bod Faded even more, became a part of the graveyard, no more important than a shadow or a twig.

But she looked up. She looked straight at him, and she said, “Bod? Is that you?”

He said nothing. Then he said, “Why can you see me?”

“I almost couldn’t. At first I thought you were a shadow or something. But you look like you did in my dream. You sort of came into focus.”

He walked over to the bench. He said, “Can you actually read that? Isn’t it too dark for you?”

Scarlett closed the magazine. She said, “It’s odd. You’d think it would be too dark, but I could read it fine, no problem.”

“Are you . . .” He trailed off, uncertain of what he had wanted to ask her. “Are you here on your own?”

She nodded. “I helped Mr. Frost do some grave-rubbings, after school. And then I told him I wanted to sit and think here, for a bit. When I’m done here, I promised to go and

have a cup of tea with him and he'll run me home. He didn't even ask why. Just said he loves sitting in graveyards too, and that he thinks they can be the most peaceful places in the world." Then she said, "Can I hug you?"

"Do you want to?" said Bod.

"Yes."

"Well then." He thought for a moment. "I don't mind if you do."

"My hands won't go through you or anything? You're really there?"

"You won't go through me," he told her, and she threw her arms around him and squeezed him so tightly he could hardly breathe. He said, "That hurts."

Scarlett let go. "Sorry."

"No. It was nice. I mean. You just squeezed more than I was expecting."

"I just wanted to know if you were real. All these years I thought you were just something in my head. And then I sort of forgot about you. But I *didn't* make you up, and you're back, you're in my head, and you're in the world too."

Bod smiled. He said, "You used to wear a sort of a coat, it was orange, and whenever I saw that particular color orange, I'd think of you. I don't suppose you still have the coat."

"No," she said. "Not for a long time. It would be a wee bit too small for me now."

"Yes," said Bod. "Of course."

"I should go home," said Scarlett. "I thought I could come up on the weekend, though." And then, seeing the expression on Bod's face, she said, "Today's Wednesday."

"I'd like that."

She turned to go. Then she said, "How will I find you, next time?"

Bod said, "I'll find you. Don't worry. Just be on your own and I'll find you."

She nodded, and was gone.

Bod walked back into the graveyard and up the hill, until he reached the Frobisher mausoleum. He did not enter it. He climbed up the side of the building, using the thick ivy root as a foothold, and he pulled himself up onto the stone roof, where he sat and thought looking out at the world of moving things beyond the graveyard, and he remembered the way that Scarlett had held him and how safe he had felt, if only for a moment, and how fine it would be to walk safely in the lands beyond the graveyard, and how good it was to be master of his own small world.

Scarlett said that she didn't want a cup of tea, thank you. Or a chocolate biscuit. Mr. Frost was concerned.

"Honestly," he told her, "you look like you've seen a ghost. Well, a graveyard, not a bad place to see one, if you were going to, um, I had an aunt once who claimed her parrot was haunted. She was a scarlet macaw. The parrot. The aunt was an architect. Never knew the details."

"I'm fine," said Scarlett. "It was just a long day."

"I'll give you a lift home then. Any idea what this says? Been puzzling over it for half an hour." He indicated a grave-rubbing on the little table, held flat by a jam jar in each corner. "Is that name Gladstone, do you think? Could be a relative of the prime minister. But I can't make out anything else."

"Fraid not," said Scarlett. "But I'll take another look when I come out on Saturday."

"Is your mother likely to put in an appearance?"

"She said she'd drop me off here in the morning. Then she has to go and get groceries for our dinner. She's cooking a roast chicken."

"Do you think," asked Mr. Frost, hopefully, "there are likely to be roast potatoes?"

"I expect so, yes."

Mr. Frost looked delighted. Then he said, "I wouldn't want to put her out of her way, I mean."

"She's loving it," said Scarlett, truthfully. "Thank you for giving me a lift home."

"More than welcome," said Mr. Frost. They walked together down the steps in Mr. Frost's high narrow house, to the little entrance hall at the bottom of the stairs.

In Krakow, on Wawel Hill, there are caves called the Dragon's Den, named after a long dead dragon. These are the caves that the tourists know about. There are caves beneath those caves that the tourists do not know and do

not ever get to visit. They go down a long way, and they are inhabited.

Silas went first, followed by the grey hugeness of Miss Lupescu, padding quietly on four feet just behind him. Behind them was Kandar, a bandage-wrapped Assyrian mummy with powerful eagle-wings and eyes like rubies, who was carrying a small pig.

There had originally been four of them, but they had lost Haroun in a cave far above, when the Ifrit, as naturally overconfident as are all of its race, had stepped into a space bounded by three polished bronze mirrors and had been swallowed up in a blaze of bronze light. In moments the Ifrit could only be seen in the mirrors, and no longer in reality. In the mirrors his fiery eyes were wide open, and his mouth was moving as if he was shouting at them to leave and beware, and then he faded and was lost to them.

Silas, who had no problems with mirrors, had covered one of them with his coat, rendering the trap useless.

"So," said Silas. "Now there are only three of us."

"And a pig," said Kandar.

"Why?" asked Miss Lupescu, with a wolf-tongue, through wolf teeth. "Why the pig?"

"It's lucky," said Kandar.

Miss Lupescu growled, unconvinced.

"Did Haroun have a pig?" asked Kandar, simply.

"Hush," said Silas. "They are coming. From the sound of it, there are many of them."

"Let them come," whispered Kandar.

Miss Lupescu's hackles were rising. She said nothing, but she was ready for them, and it was only by an effort of will that she did not throw back her head and howl.

"It's beautiful up this way," said Scarlett.

"Yes," said Bod.

"So, your family were all killed?" said Scarlett. "Does anyone know who did it?"

"No. Not that I know. My guardian only says that the man who did it is still alive, and that he'll tell me the rest of what he knows one day."

"One day?"

"When I'm ready."

"What's he scared of? That you'd strap on your gun and ride out to wreak vengeance on the man who killed your family?"

Bod looked at her seriously. "Well, obviously," he said. "Not a gun, though. But yes. Something like that."

"You're joking."

Bod said nothing. His lips were tight-pressed together. He shook his head. Then he said, "I'm not joking."

It was a bright and sunny Saturday morning. They were just past the entrance to the Egyptian Walk, out of the direct sunlight, under the pines and the sprawling monkey puzzle tree.

"Your guardian. Is he a dead person too?"

Bod said, "I don't talk about him."

Scarlett looked hurt. "Not even to me?"

"Not even to you."

"Well," she said. "Be like that."

Bod said, "Look, I'm sorry, I didn't mean—" just as Scarlett said, "I promised Mr. Frost I wouldn't be too long. I'd better be getting back."

"Right," said Bod, worried he had offended her, unsure what he should say to make anything better.

He watched Scarlett head off on the winding path back to the chapel. A familiar female voice said, with derision, "Look at her! Miss high and mighty!" but there was no one to be seen.

Bod, feeling awkward, walked back to the Egyptian Walk. Miss Lilibet and Miss Violet had let him store a cardboard box filled with old paperback books in their vault, and he wanted to find something to read.

Scarlett helped Mr. Frost with his grave-rubbings until midday, when they stopped for lunch. He offered to buy her fish and chips as a thank-you, and they walked down to the fish and chip shop at the bottom of the road, and as they walked back up the hill they ate their steaming fish and chips, drenched in vinegar and glittering with salt, out of paper bags.

Scarlett said, "If you wanted to find out about a murder, where would you look? I already tried the Internet."

"Um. Depends. What kind of murder are we talking about?"

"Something local, I think. About thirteen or fourteen years ago. A family was killed around here."

"Crikey," said Mr. Frost. "This really happened?"

"Oh yes. Are you all right?"

"Not really. Bit too, well, bit of a wimp, really. Things like that, I mean, local true crime, you don't like to think about it. Things like that, happening here. Not something I'd expect a girl of your age to be interested in."

"It's not actually for me," admitted Scarlett. "It's for a friend."

Mr. Frost finished off the last of his fried cod. "The library, I suppose. If it's not on the Internet, it'll be in their newspaper files. What set you off after this?"

"Oh." Scarlett wanted to lie as little as possible. She said, "A boy I know. He was asking about it."

"Definitely the library," said Mr. Frost. "Murder. Brr. Gives me the shivers."

"Me too," said Scarlett. "A bit." Then, hopefully, "Could you maybe, possibly, drop me off at the library, this afternoon?"

Mr. Frost bit a large chip in half, chewed it, and looked at the rest of the chip, disappointed. "They get cold so fast, don't they, chips. One minute, you're burning your mouth on them, the next you're wondering how they cool off so quickly."

"I'm sorry," said Scarlett. "I shouldn't be asking for rides everywhere—"

"Not at all," said Mr. Frost. "Just wondering how best to

organize this afternoon, and whether or not your mother likes chocolates. Bottle of wine or chocolates? Not really sure. Both maybe?"

"I can make my own way home from the library," said Scarlett. "And she loves chocolates. So do I."

"Chocolates it is, then," said Mr. Frost, relieved. They had reached the middle of the row of high, terraced houses on the hill, and the little green Mini parked outside. "Get in. I'll run you over to the library."

The library was a square building, all brick and stone, dating back to the beginning of the last century. Scarlett looked around, and then went up to the desk.

The woman said, "Yes?"

Scarlett said, "I wanted to see some old newspaper clippings."

"Is it for school?" said the woman.

"It's local history," said Scarlett, nodding, proud that she hadn't actually lied.

"We've got the local paper on microfiche," said the woman. She was large, and had silver hoops in her ears. Scarlett could feel her heart pounding in her chest; she was certain she looked guilty or suspicious, but the woman led her into a room with boxes that looked like computer screens, and showed her how to use them, to project a page of the newspaper at a time onto the screen. "One day we'll have it all digitized," said the woman. "Now, what dates are you after?"

"About thirteen or fourteen years ago," said Scarlett. "I can't be more specific than that. I'll know it when I see it."

The woman gave Scarlett a small box with five years' worth of newspapers on microfilm in it. "Go wild," she said.

Scarlett assumed that the murder of a family would have been front page news but instead, when she eventually found it, it was almost buried on page five. It had happened in October, thirteen years earlier. There was no color in the article, no description, just an understated list of events: *Architect Ronald Dorian, 36, his wife, Carlotta, 34, a publisher, and their daughter, Misty, 7, were found dead at 33 Dunstan Road. Foul play is suspected. A police spokesman said that it was too early to comment at this stage in their investigations, but that significant leads are being followed.*

There was no mention of how the family died, and nothing said about a missing baby. In the weeks that followed, there was no follow-up, and the police did not ever comment, not that Scarlett could see.

But that was it. She was certain: 33 Dunstan Road. She knew the house. She had been in there.

She returned the box of microfilm to the front desk, thanked the librarian, and walked home in the April sunshine. Her mother was in the kitchen cooking—not entirely successfully, judging from the smell of burnt-bottom-of-the-saucepan that filled most of the flat. Scarlett retreated to her bedroom and opened the windows wide to let the burnt smell out, then she sat on her bed and made a phone call.

"Hello? Mr. Frost?"

"Scarlett. Everything still all right for this evening? How's your mother?"

"Oh, it's all under control," said Scarlett, which was what her mother had said when she had asked. "Um, Mr. Frost, how long have you lived at your house?"

"How long? About, well, four months now."

"How did you find it?"

"Estate agents' window. It was empty and I could afford it. Well, more or less. Well, I wanted something within walking distance of the graveyard, and this was perfect."

"Mister Frost." Scarlett wondered how to say it, and then just said it. "About thirteen years ago, three people were murdered in your house. The Dorian family."

There was a silence at the other end of the phone.

"Mister Frost? Are you there?"

"Um. Still here, Scarlett. Sorry. Not the sort of thing you expect to hear. It's an old house, I mean, you expect things to happen a long time ago. But not . . . well, what happened?"

Scarlett wondered how much she could tell him. She said, "There was a little piece on it in an old newspaper, it only gave the address and nothing else. I don't know how they died or anything."

"Well. Good lord." Mr. Frost sounded more intrigued by the news than Scarlett could have expected. "This, young Scarlett, is where we local historians come into our own. Leave it with me. I'll find out everything I can and report back."

"Thank you," said Scarlett, relieved.

"Um. I assume this phone call is because if Noona thought there were murders going on in my home, even thirteen-year-old ones, you'd never be allowed to see me or the graveyard again. So, um, suppose I won't mention it unless you do."

"Thank you, Mr. Frost!"

"See you at seven. With chocolates."

Dinner was remarkably pleasant. The burnt smell had gone from the kitchen. The chicken was good, the salad was better, the roast potatoes were too crispy, but a delighted Mr. Frost had proclaimed that this was precisely the way he liked them, and had taken a second helping.

The flowers were popular, the chocolates, which they had for dessert, were perfect, and Mr. Frost sat and talked then watched television with them until about 10 P.M., when he said that he needed to get home.

"Time, tide, and historical research wait for no man," he said. He shook Noona's hand with enthusiasm, winked at Scarlett conspiratorially, and was out the door.

Scarlett tried to find Bod in her dreams that night; she thought of him as she went to sleep, imagined herself walking the graveyard looking for him, but when she did dream it was of wandering around Glasgow city center with her friends from her old school. They were hunting for a specific street, but all they found was a succession of dead ends, one after another.

* * *

Deep beneath the hill in Krakow, in the deepest vault beneath the caves they call the Dragon's Den, Miss Lupescu stumbled and fell.

Silas crouched beside her and cradled Miss Lupescu's head in his hands. There was blood on her face, and some of it was hers.

"You must leave me," she said. "Save the boy." She was halfway now, halfway between grey wolf and woman, but her face was a woman's face.

"No," said Silas. "I won't leave you."

Behind him, Kandar cradled its piglet like a child might hold a doll. The mummy's left wing was shattered, and it would never fly again, but its bearded face was implacable.

"They will come back, Silas," Miss Lupescu whispered. "Too soon, the sun will rise."

"Then," said Silas, "we must deal with them before they are ready to attack. Can you stand?"

"*Da*, I am one of the Hounds of God," said Miss Lupescu. "I will stand." She lowered her face into the shadows, flexed her fingers. When she raised her head again, it was a wolf's head. She put her front paws down on the rock, and, laboriously, pushed herself up into a standing position: a grey wolf bigger than a bear, her coat and muzzle flecked with blood.

She threw back her head and howled a howl of fury and of challenge. Her lips curled back from her teeth and she lowered her head once more. "Now," growled Miss Lupescu. "We end this."

* * *

Late on Sunday afternoon the telephone rang. Scarlett was sitting downstairs, laboriously copying faces from the manga she had been reading onto scrap paper. Her mother picked up the phone.

"Funny, we were just talking about you," said her mother, although they hadn't been. "It was wonderful," her mother continued. "I had the best time. Honestly, it was no trouble. The chocolates? They were perfect. Just perfect. I told Scarlett to tell you, any time you want a good dinner, you just let me know." And then, "Scarlett? Yes, she's here. I'll put her on. *Scarlett?*"

"I'm just here, Mum," said Scarlett. "You don't have to shout." She took the phone. "Mister Frost?"

"Scarlett?" He sounded excited. "The. Um. The thing we were talking about. The thing that happened in my house. You can tell this friend of yours that I found out—um, listen, when you said 'a friend of yours' did you mean it in the sense of 'we're actually talking about you,' or is there a real person, if it's not a personal question—"

"I've got a real friend who wants to know," said Scarlett, amused.

Her mother shot her a puzzled look.

"Tell your friend that I did some digging—not literally, more like rummaging, well, a fair amount of actual looking around—and I think I might have unearthed some very real information. Stumbled over something hidden. Well, not something I think we should spread around . . . I, um.

I found things out."

"Like what?" asked Scarlett.

"Look . . . don't think I'm mad. But, well, as far as I can tell, three people were killed. One of them—the baby, I think—wasn't. It wasn't a family of three, it was a family of four. Only three of them died. Tell him to come and see me, your friend. I'll fill him in."

"I'll tell him," said Scarlett. She put down the phone, her heart beating like a snare.

Bod walked down the narrow stone stairs for the first time in six years. His footsteps echoed in the chamber inside the hill.

He reached the bottom of the steps and waited for the Sleer to manifest. And he waited, and waited, but nothing appeared, nothing whispered, nothing moved.

He looked around the chamber, untroubled by the deep darkness, seeing it as the dead see. He walked over to the altar stone set in the floor, where the cup and the brooch and the stone knife sat.

He reached down and touched the edge of the knife. It was sharper than he had expected, and it nicked the skin of his finger.

IT IS THE TREASURE OF THE SLEER, whispered a triple voice, but it sounded smaller than he remembered, more hesitant.

Bod said, "You're the oldest thing here. I came to talk to you. I want advice."

A pause. NOTHING COMES TO THE SLEER FOR ADVICE. THE SLEER GUARDS. THE SLEER WAITS.

"I know. But Silas isn't here. And I don't know who else to talk to."

Nothing was said. Just a silence in reply, that echoed of dust and loneliness.

"I don't know what to do," Bod said, honestly. "I think I can find out about who killed my family. Who wanted to kill me. It means leaving the graveyard, though."

The Sleer said nothing. Smoke-tendrils twined slowly around the inside of the chamber.

"I'm not frightened of dying," said Bod. "It's just, so many people I care for have spent so much time keeping me safe, teaching me, protecting me."

Again, silence.

Then he said, "I have to do this on my own."

YES.

"That's all, then. Sorry I bothered you."

It whispered into Bod's head, then, in a voice that was a sleek insinuating glide, THE SLEER WAS SET TO GUARD THE TREASURE UNTIL OUR MASTER RETURNED. ARE YOU OUR MASTER?

"No," said Bod.

And then, with a hopeful whine, WILL YOU BE OUR MASTER?

"I'm afraid not."

IF YOU WERE OUR MASTER, WE COULD HOLD YOU IN OUR COILS FOREVER. IF YOU WERE OUR MASTER, WE WOULD KEEP

YOU SAFE AND PROTECT YOU UNTIL THE END OF TIME AND NEVER LET YOU ENDURE THE DANGERS OF THE WORLD.

"I am not your master."

NO.

Bod felt the Sleer writhing through his mind. It said, THEN FIND YOUR NAME. And his mind was empty, and the room was empty, and Bod was alone.

Bod walked back up the stairs carefully yet quickly. He had come to a decision and needed to act fast, while the decision still burned in his mind.

Scarlett was waiting for him on the bench by the chapel. "Well?" she said.

"I'll do it. Come on," he said, and side by side they walked the path down to the graveyard gates.

Number 33 was a tall house, spindly-thin, in the middle of a terraced row. It was red-brick and unmemorable. Bod looked at it uncertainly, wondering why it did not seem familiar, or special. It was only a house, like any other. There was a small concreted space in front of it that wasn't a garden, a green Mini parked on the street. The front door had once been painted a bright blue, but had been dimmed by time and the sun.

"Well?" said Scarlett.

Bod knocked on the door. There was nothing, then a clatter of feet on the stairs from inside, and the door opened to reveal an entryway and stairs. Framed in the doorway was a bespectacled man with receding grey hair,

who blinked at them, then stuck out his hand at Bod, and smiled nervously, and said, "You must be Miss Perkins's mysterious friend. Good to meet you."

"This is Bod," said Scarlett.

"Bob?"

"Bod. With a D," she said. "Bod, this is Mr. Frost."

Bod and Frost shook hands. "Kettle's on," said Mr. Frost. "What say we swap information over a cuppa?"

They followed him up the steps to a kitchen, where he poured three mugs of tea, then led them into a small sitting room. "The house just keeps going up," he said. "The toilet's on the next floor up, and my office, then bedrooms above that. Keeps you fit, all the stairs."

They sat on a large, extremely purple sofa ("It was already here when I came"), and they sipped their tea.

Scarlett had worried that Mr. Frost would ask Bod lots of questions, but he didn't. He just seemed excited, as if he had identified the lost gravestone of someone famous and desperately wanted to tell the world. He kept moving impatiently in his chair, as if he had something enormous to impart to them and not blurting it out immediately was a physical strain.

Scarlett said, "So what did you find out?"

Mr. Frost said, "Well, you were right. I mean, this was the house where those people were killed. And it . . . I think the crime was . . . well, not exactly hushed up, but forgotten about, let go . . . by the authorities."

"I don't understand," said Scarlett. "Murders don't get swept under the carpet."

"This one was," said Frost. He drained his tea. "There are people out there who have influence. It's the only explanation for that, and for what happened to the youngest child . . ."

"And what was that?" asked Bod.

"He lived," said Frost. "I'm sure of it. But there wasn't a manhunt. A missing toddler normally would be national news. But they, um, they must have squashed it somehow."

"Who *are* they?" asked Bod.

"The same people who had the family killed."

"Do you know any more than that?"

"Yes. Well, a little . . ." Frost trailed off. "I'm sorry. I'm. Look. Given what I found. It's all too incredible."

Scarlett was starting to feel frustrated. "What was? What did you find?"

Frost looked shamefaced. "You're right. I'm sorry. Getting into keeping secrets. Not a good idea. Historians don't bury things. We dig them up. Show people. Yes." He stopped, hesitated, then he said, "I found a letter. Upstairs. It was hidden under a loose floorboard." He turned to Bod. "Young man, would I be correct in assuming your, well, your interest in this business, this dreadful business, is personal?"

Bod nodded.

"I won't ask any more," said Mr. Frost, and he stood up.

"Come on," he said to Bod. "Not you, though," to Scarlett, "not yet. I'll show *him*. And if he says it's all right, I'll show you as well. Deal?"

"Deal," said Scarlett.

"We won't be long," said Mr. Frost. "Come on, lad."

Bod stood up, darted a concerned look at Scarlett. "It's okay," she said, and smiled at him as reassuringly as she could. "I'll wait here for you."

She watched their shadows as they walked out of the room and up the stairs. She felt nervous, but expectant. She wondered what Bod would learn, and was happy that he would learn it first. It was his story, after all. It was his right.

Out on the stairs, Mr. Frost led the way.

Bod looked around as he walked up toward the top of the house, but nothing seemed familiar. It all seemed strange.

"All the way to the very top," said Mr. Frost. They went up another flight of stairs. He said, "I don't—well, you don't have to answer if you don't want to, but—um, you're the boy, aren't you?"

Bod said nothing.

"Here we are," said Mr. Frost. He turned the key in the door at the top of the house, pushed it open, and they went inside.

The room was small, an attic room with a sloping ceiling. Thirteen years before, it had held a crib. It barely held the man and the boy.

"Stroke of luck, really," said Mr. Frost. "Under my own nose, so to speak." He crouched down, pulled back the threadbare carpet.

"So you know why my family were murdered?" asked Bod.

Mr. Frost said, "It's all in here." He reached down to a short length of floorboard and pushed at it until he was able to lever it out. "This would have been the baby's room," said Mr. Frost. "I'll show you the . . . you know, the only thing we don't know is just who did it. Nothing at all. We don't have the tiniest clue."

"We know he has dark hair," said Bod, in the room that had once been his bedroom. "And we know that his name is Jack."

Mr. Frost put his hand down into the empty space where the floorboard had been. "It's been almost thirteen years," he said. "And hair gets thin and goes gray, in thirteen years. But yes, that's right. It's Jack."

He straightened up. The hand that had been in the hole in the floor was holding a large, sharp knife.

"Now," said the man Jack. "Now, boy. Time to finish this."

Bod stared at him. It was as if Mr. Frost had been a coat or a hat the man had been wearing, that he had now discarded. The affable exterior had gone.

The light glinted on the man's spectacles, and on the blade of the knife.

A voice called up to them from further down the stairs—Scarlett's. "Mr. Frost? There's someone knocking at

the front door. Should I get it?"

The man Jack only glanced away for a moment, but Bod knew that the moment was all he had, and he faded, as completely, as utterly as he could. The man Jack looked back to where Bod had been, then stared around the room, puzzlement and rage competing on his face. He took a step further into the room, his head swinging from side to side like an old tiger scenting prey.

"You're here somewhere," growled the man Jack. "I can smell you!"

Behind him, the little door to the attic bedroom slammed closed, and as he swung around he heard the key turn in the lock.

The man Jack raised his voice. "It buys you moments, but it won't stop me, boy," he called through the locked door. Then added, simply, "We have unfinished business, you and I."

Bod threw himself down the stairs, bouncing into the walls, almost tumbling headlong in his rush to reach Scarlett.

"Scarlett!" he said, when he saw her. "It's him! Come on!"

"It's who? What are you talking about?"

"Him! Frost. He's Jack. He tried to kill me!"

A *bang!* from above as the man Jack kicked at the door.

"But." Scarlett tried to make sense of what she was hearing, "But he's *nice*."

"No," said Bod, grabbing her hand and pulling her down the stairs, into the hallway. "No, he's not."

Scarlett pulled open the front door.

"Ah. Good evening, young lady," said the man at the door, looking down at her. "We are looking for Mr. Frost. I believe this is his neck of the woods." He had silver-white hair, and he smelled of cologne.

"Are you friends of his?" she asked.

"Oh yes," said a smaller man, standing just behind. He had a small black mustache and was the only one of the men to wear a hat.

"Certainly are," said a third, a younger man, huge and Nordic blond.

"Every man Jack of us," said the last of the men, wide and bull-like, with a massive head. His skin was brown.

"He. Mr. Frost. He had to go out," she said.

"But his car's here," said the white-haired man, as the blond one said, "Who are you, anyway?"

"He's a friend of my mum's," said Scarlett.

She could see Bod, now, on the other side of the group of men, gesturing frantically to her to leave the men and follow him.

She said, as breezily as she could, "He just popped out. Popped out for a newspaper. From the corner shop down there." And she closed the door behind her, stepped around the men and began to walk away.

"Where are you going?" asked the man with the mustache.

"I've got a bus to catch," she said. Scarlett walked up the hill towards the bus-stop and the graveyard, and did not,

resolutely did not, look back.

Bod walked beside her. Even to Scarlett he seemed shadowy in the deepening dusk, like something that was almost not there, a shimmer of heat haze, a skittery leaf that for a moment had seemed to be a boy.

"Walk faster," said Bod. "They're all looking at you. But don't run."

"Who are they?" asked Scarlett, quietly.

"I don't know," said Bod. "But they all felt weird. Like they weren't properly people. I want to go back and listen to them."

"Of course they're people," said Scarlett, and she walked up the hill as fast as she could without actually running, no longer certain that Bod was by her side.

The four men stood at the door to number 33. "I don't like this," said the big man with the bull-neck.

"You don't like this, Mr. Tar?" said the white-haired man. "None of us like it. All wrong. Everything's going wrong."

"Krakow's gone. They aren't answering. And after Melbourne and Vancouver . . ." said the man with the mustache. "For all we know, we four are all that's left."

"Quiet, please, Mr. Ketch," said the white-haired man. "I'm thinking."

"Sorry, sir," said Mr. Ketch, and he patted his mustache with one gloved finger, looked up the hill and down again, and whistled through his teeth.

"I think . . . we should go after her," said the bull-necked man, Mr. Tar.

"I think you people should listen to me," said the white-haired man. "I said quiet. And what I meant was, *quiet*."

"Sorry, Mr. Dandy," said the blond man.

They were quiet.

In the silence, they could hear thumping sounds coming from high inside the house.

"I'm going in," said Mr. Dandy. "Mr. Tar, you're with me. Nimble and Ketch, get that girl. Bring her back."

"Dead or alive?" asked Mr. Ketch, with a smug smile.

"Alive, you moron," said Mr. Dandy. "I want to know what she knows."

"Maybe she's one of them," said Mr. Tar. "The ones who done for us in Vancouver and Melbourne and—"

"Get her," said Mr. Dandy. "Get her *now*." The blond man and the hat-and-mustache hurried up the hill.

Mr. Dandy and Mr. Tar stood outside the door to number 33.

"Force it," said Mr. Dandy.

Mr. Tar put his shoulder against the door and began to lean his weight on it. "It's reinforced," he said. "Protected."

Mr. Dandy said, "Nothing one Jack can do that another can't fix." He pulled off his glove, put his hand against the door, muttered something in a language older than English. "Now try it," he said.

Tar leaned against the door, grunted and pushed. This time the lock gave and the door swung open.

"Nicely done," said Mr. Dandy.

There was a crashing noise from far above them, up at

the top of the house.

The man Jack met them halfway down the stairs. Mr. Dandy grinned at him, without any humor but with perfect teeth. "Hello, Jack Frost," he said. "I thought you had the boy."

"I did," said the man Jack. "He got away."

"Again?" Jack Dandy's smile grew wider and chillier and even more perfect. "Once is a mistake, Jack. Twice is a disaster."

"We'll get him," said the man Jack. "This ends tonight."

"It had better," said Mr. Dandy.

"He'll be in the graveyard," said the man Jack. The three men hurried down the stairs.

The man Jack sniffed the air. He had the scent of the boy in his nostrils, a prickle at the nape of his neck. He felt like all this had happened years before. He paused, pulled on his long black coat, which had hung in the front hall, incongruous beside Mr. Frost's tweed jacket and fawn mackintosh.

The front door was open to the street, and the daylight had almost gone. This time the man Jack knew exactly which way to go. He did not pause, but simply walked out of the house, and hurried up the hill towards the graveyard.

The graveyard gates were closed when Scarlett reached them. Scarlett pulled at them desperately, but the gates were padlocked for the night. And then Bod was beside her. "Do you know where the key is?" she asked.

"We don't have time," said Bod. He pushed close to the metal bars. "Put your arms around me."

"You what?"

"Just put your arms around me and close your eyes."

Scarlett stared at Bod, as if daring him to try something, then she held him tightly and screwed her eyes shut. "Okay."

Bod leaned against the bars of the graveyard gates. They counted as part of the graveyard, and he hoped that his Freedom of the Graveyard might just, possibly, just this time, cover other people too. And then, like smoke, Bod slipped through the bars.

"You can open your eyes," he said.

She did.

"How did you do that?"

"This is my home," he said. "I can do things here."

The sound of shoes slapping against the pavement, and two men were on the other side of the gates, rattling them, pulling at them.

"Hul-lo," said Jack Ketch, with a twitch of his mustache, and he smiled at Scarlett through the bars like a rabbit with a secret. He had a black silk cord tied around his left forearm, and now he was tugging at it with his gloved right hand. He pulled it off his arm and into his hand, testing it, running it from hand to hand as if he was about to make a cat's cradle. "Come on out, girlie. It's all right. No one's going to hurt you."

"We just need you to answer some questions," said the

big blond man, Mr. Nimble. "We're on official business." (He lied. There was nothing official about the Jacks of All Trades, although there had been Jacks in governments and in police forces and in other places besides.)

"Run!" said Bod to Scarlett, pulling at her hand. She ran.

"Did you see that?" said the Jack they called Ketch.

"What?"

"I saw somebody with her. A boy."

"*The* boy?" asked the Jack called Nimble.

"How would I know? Here. Give me a hand up." The bigger man put his hands out, linked them to make a step, and Jack Ketch's black-clad foot went into it. Lifted up, he scrambled onto the top of the gates and jumped down to the drive, landing on all fours like a frog. He stood up, said, "Find another way in. I'm going after them." And he sprinted off up the winding path that led into the graveyard.

Scarlett said, "Just tell me what we're doing." Bod was walking fast through the twilight graveyard, but he was not running, not yet.

"How do you mean?"

"I think that man wanted to kill me. Did you see how he was playing with that black cord?"

"I'm sure he does. That man Jack—your Mister Frost—he was going to kill me. He's got a knife."

"He's not *my* Mister Frost. Well, I suppose he is, sort of. Sorry. Where are we going?"

"First we put you somewhere safe. Then I deal with them."

All around Bod, the inhabitants of the graveyard were waking and gathering, worried and alarmed.

"Bod?" said Caius Pompeius. "What is happening?"

"Bad people," said Bod. "Can our lot keep an eye on them? Let me know where they are at all times. We have to hide Scarlett. Any ideas?"

"The chapel crypt?" said Thackeray Porringer.

"First place they'll look."

"Who are you talking to?" asked Scarlett, staring at Bod as if he had gone mad.

Caius Pompeius said, "Inside the hill?"

Bod thought. "Yes. Good call. Scarlett, do you remember the place where we found the Indigo Man?"

"Kind of. A dark place. I remember there wasn't anything to be scared of."

"I'm taking you up there."

They hurried up the path. Scarlett could tell that Bod was talking to people as he went, but could only hear his side of the conversation. It was like hearing someone talk on a phone. Which reminded her . . .

"My mum's going to go spare," she said. "I'm dead."

"No," said Bod. "You're not. Not yet. Not for a long time." Then, to someone else, "Two of them, now. Together? Okay."

They reached the Frobisher mausoleum. "The entrance is behind the bottom coffin on the left," Bod said. "If you

hear anyone coming and it's not me, go straight down to the very bottom . . . do you have anything to make light?"

"Yeah. A little LED thing on my keyring."

"Good."

He pulled open the door to the mausoleum. "And be careful. Don't trip or anything."

"Where are you going?" asked Scarlett.

"This is my home," said Bod. "I'm going to protect it."

Scarlett squeezed the LED keyring, and went down on her hands and knees. The space behind the coffin was tight, but she went through the hole into the hill and pulled the coffin back as best she could. In the dim LED light she could see stone steps. She stood upright, and, hand on the wall, walked down three steps, then stopped and sat, hoping that Bod knew what he was doing, and she waited.

Bod said, "Where are they now?"

His father said, "One fellow's up by the Egyptian Walk, looking for you. His friend's waiting down by the alley wall. Three others are on their way over, climbing up the alley wall on all the big bins."

"I wish Silas was here. He'd make short work of them. Or Miss Lupescu."

"You don't need them," said Mr. Owens encouragingly.

"Where's Mum?"

"Down by the alley wall."

"Tell her I've hidden Scarlett in the back of the Frobisher's place. Ask her to keep an eye on her if anything happens to me."

Bod ran through the darkened graveyard. The only way into the northwest part of the graveyard was through the Egyptian Walk. And to get there he would have to go past the little man with the black silk rope. A man who was looking for him, and who wanted him dead . . .

He was Nobody Owens, he told himself. He was a part of the graveyard. He would be fine.

He nearly missed the little man—the Jack called Ketch—as he hurried into the Egyptian Walk. The man was almost part of the shadows.

Bod breathed in, Faded as deeply as he could Fade, and moved past the man like dust blown on an evening breeze.

He walked down the green-hung length of the Egyptian Walk, and then, with an effort of will, he became as obvious as he could, and kicked at a pebble.

He saw the shadow by the arch detach itself and come after him, almost as silent as the dead.

Bod pushed through the trailing ivy that blocked the Walk and into the northwest corner of the graveyard. He would have to time this just right, he knew. Too fast and the man would lose him, yet if he moved too slowly a black silk rope would wrap itself around his neck, taking his breath with it and all his tomorrows.

He pushed noisily through the tangle of ivy, disturbing one of the graveyard's many foxes, which sprinted off into the undergrowth. It was a jungle here, of fallen headstones and headless statues, of trees and holly bushes, of slippery piles of half-rotted fallen leaves, but it was a jungle that

Bod had explored since he had been old enough to walk and to wander.

Now he was hurrying carefully, stepping from root-tangle of ivy to stone to earth, confident that this was his graveyard. He could feel the graveyard itself trying to hide him, to protect him, to make him vanish, and he fought it, worked to be seen.

He saw Nehemiah Trot, and hesitated.

"Hola, young Bod!" called the poet. "I hear that excitement is the master of the hour, that you fling yourself through these dominions like a comet across the firmament. What's the word, good Bod?"

"Stand there," said Bod. "Just where you are. Look back the way I came. Tell me when he comes close."

Bod skirted the ivy-covered Carstairs grave, and then he stood, panting as if out of breath, with his back to his pursuer.

And he waited. It was only for a few seconds, but it felt like a small forever.

("He's here, lad," said Nehemiah Trot. "About twenty paces behind you.")

The Jack called Ketch saw the boy in front of him. He pulled his black silk cord tight between his hands. It had been stretched around many necks, over the years, and had been the end of every one of the people it had embraced. It was very soft and very strong and invisible to X-rays.

Ketch's mustache moved, but nothing else. He had his

prey in his sight, and did not want to startle it. He began to advance, silent as a shadow.

The boy straightened up.

Jack Ketch darted forward, his polished black shoes almost soundless on the leaf-mold.

("He comes, lad!" called Nehemiah Trot.)

The boy turned around, and Jack Ketch made a leap towards him—

And Mr. Ketch felt the world tumbling away beneath him. He grabbed at the world with one gloved hand, but tumbled down and down into the old grave, all of twenty feet, before crash-landing on Mr. Carstairs's coffin, splintering the coffin-lid and his ankle at the same time.

"That's one," said Bod, calmly, although he felt anything but calm.

"Elegantly accomplished," said Nehemiah Trot. "I shall compose an Ode. Would you like to stay and listen?"

"No time," said Bod. "Where are the other men?"

Euphemia Horsfall said, "Three of them are on the southwestern path, heading up the hill."

Tom Sands said, "And there's another. Right now he's just walking around the chapel. He's the one who's been all around the graveyard for the last month. But there's something different about him."

Bod said, "Keep an eye on the man in with Mr. Carstairs—and please apologize to Mr. Carstairs for me . . ."

He ducked under a pine-branch and loped around the

hill, on the paths when it suited him, off the paths, jumping from monument to stone, when that was quicker.

He passed the old apple tree. "There's four of them, still," said a tart female voice. "Four of them, and all killers. And the rest of them won't all of them fall into open graves to oblige you."

"Hullo, Liza. I thought you were angry at me."

"I might be and I mightn't," she said, nothing more than a voice. "But I'm not going to let them cut you up, nohow."

"Then trip them for me, trip them and confuse them and slow them down. Can you do that?"

"While you runs away again? Nobody Owens, why don't you just Fade, and hide in your mam's nice tomb, where they'll never find you, and soon enough Silas will be back to take care of them—"

"Maybe he will and maybe he won't," said Bod. "I'll meet you by the lightning tree."

"I am still not talking to you," said Liza Hempstock's voice, proud as a peacock and pert as a sparrow.

"Actually, you are. I mean, we're talking right now."

"Only during this emergency. After that, not a word."

Bod made for the lightning tree, an oak that had been burned by lightning twenty years ago and now was nothing more than a blackened limb clutching at the sky.

He had an idea. It was not fully formed. It depended on whether he could remember Miss Lupescu's lessons, remember everything he had seen and heard as a child.

It was harder to find the grave than he had expected,

even looking for it, but he found it—an ugly grave tipped at an odd angle, its stone topped by a headless, water-stained angel that had the appearance of a gargantuan fungus. It was only when he touched it, and felt the chill, that he knew it for certain.

He sat down on the grave, forced himself to become entirely visible.

"You've not Faded," said Liza's voice. "Anyone could find you."

"Good," said Bod. "I want them to find me."

"More know Jack Fool than Jack Fool knows," said Liza.

The moon was rising. It was huge now and low in the sky. Bod wondered if it would be overdoing it if he began to whistle.

"I can see him!"

A man ran towards him, tripping and stumbling, two other men close behind.

Bod was aware of the dead clustered around them, watching the scene, but he forced himself to ignore them. He made himself more comfortable on the ugly grave. He felt like the bait in a trap, and it was not a good feeling.

The bull-like man was the first to reach the grave, followed closely by the man with the white hair who had done all the talking, and the tall blond man.

Bod stayed where he was.

The man with the white hair said, "Ah. The elusive Dorian boy, I presume. Astonishing. There's our Jack Frost hunting the whole world over, and here you are, just where

he left you, thirteen years ago."

Bod said, "That man killed my family."

"Indeed he did."

"Why?"

"Does it matter? You're never going to tell anyone."

"Then it's no skin off your nose to tell me, is it?"

The white-haired man barked a laugh. "Hah! Funny boy. What *I* want to know is, how have you lived in a graveyard for thirteen years without anyone catching wise?"

"I'll answer your question if you answer mine."

The bull-necked man said, "You don't talk to Mr. Dandy like that, little snot! I split you, I will—"

The white-haired man took another step closer to the grave. "Hush, Jack Tar. All right. An answer for an answer. We—my friends and I—are members of a fraternal organization, known as the Jacks of All Trades, or the Knaves, or by other names. We go back an extremely long way. We know . . . we remember things that most people have forgotten. The Old Knowledge."

Bod said, "Magic. You know a little magic."

The man nodded agreeably. "If you want to call it that. But it is a very specific sort of magic. There's a magic you take from death. Something leaves the world, something else comes into it."

"You killed my family for—for what? For magic powers? That's ridiculous."

"No. We killed you for protection. Long time ago, one of our people—this was back in Egypt, in pyramid days—he

foresaw that one day, there would be a child born who would walk the borderland between the living and the dead. That if this child grew to adulthood it would mean the end of our order and all we stand for. We had people casting nativities before London was a village, we had your family in our sights before New Amsterdam became New York. And we sent what we thought was the best and the sharpest and the most dangerous of all the Jacks to deal with you. To do it properly, so we could take all the bad Jujū and make it work for us instead, and keep everything tickety-boo for another five thousand years. Only he didn't."

Bod looked at the three men.

"So where is he? Why isn't he here?"

The blond man said, "We can take care of you. He's got a good nose on him, has our Jack Frost. He's on the trail of your little girlfriend. Can't leave any witnesses. Not to something like this."

Bod leaned forward, dug his hands into the wild weed-grass that grew on the unkempt grave.

"Come and get me," was all that he said.

The blond man grinned, the bull-necked man lunged, and—yes—even Mr. Dandy took several steps forward.

Bod pushed his fingers as deeply as he could into the grass, and he pulled his lips back from his teeth, and he said three words in a language that was already ancient before the Indigo Man was born.

"Skagh! Thegh! Khavagah!"

He opened the ghoul-gate.

The grave swung up like a trapdoor. In the deep hole below the door Bod could see stars, a darkness filled with glimmering lights.

The bull-man, Mr. Tar, at the edge of the hole, could not stop, and stumbled, surprised, into the darkness.

Mr. Nimble jumped toward Bod, his arms extended, leaping over the hole. Bod watched as the man stopped in the air at the zenith of his spring, and hung there for a moment, before he was sucked through the ghoul-gate, down and down.

Mr. Dandy stood at the edge of the ghoul-gate, on a lip of stone and looked down into the darkness beneath. Then he raised his eyes to Bod, and thin-lipped, he smiled.

"I don't know what you just did," said Mr. Dandy. "But it didn't work." He pulled his gloved hand out of his pocket, holding a gun, pointed directly at Bod. "I should have just done this thirteen years ago," said Mr. Dandy. "You can't trust other people. If it's important, you have to do it yourself."

A desert wind came up from the open ghoul-gate, hot and dry, with grit in it. Bod said, "There's a desert down there. If you look for water, you should find some. There's things to eat if you look hard, but don't antagonize the night-gaunts. Avoid Ghûlheim. The ghouls might wipe your memories and make you into one of them, or they might wait until you've rotted down, and then eat you. Either way, you can do better."

The gun barrel did not waver. Mr. Dandy said, "Why are

you telling me this?"

Bod pointed across the graveyard. "Because of them," he said, and as he said it, as Mr. Dandy glanced away, only for a moment, Bod Faded. Mr. Dandy's eyes flickered away and back, but Bod was no longer by the broken statue. From deep in the hole something called, like the lonely wail of a night bird.

Mr. Dandy looked around, his forehead a slash, his body a mass of indecision and rage. "Where are you?" he growled. "The Deuce take you! Where *are* you?"

He thought he heard a voice say, "Ghoul-gates are made to be opened and then closed again. You can't leave them open. They want to close."

The lip of the hole shuddered and shook. Mr. Dandy had been in an earthquake once, years before, in Bangladesh. It felt like that: the earth juddered, and Mr. Dandy fell, would have fallen into the darkness, but he caught hold of the fallen headstone, threw his arms about it and locked on. He did not know what was beneath him, only that he had no wish to find out.

The earth shook, and he felt the headstone begin to shift, beneath his weight.

He looked up. The boy was there, looking down at him curiously.

"I'm going to let the gate close now," he said. "I think if you keep holding on to that thing, it might close on you, and crush you, or it might just absorb you and make you into part of the gate. Don't know. But I'm giving you a

chance, more than you ever gave my family."

A ragged judder. Mr. Dandy looked up into the boy's grey eyes, and he swore. Then he said, "You can't ever escape us. We're the Jacks of All Trades. We're everywhere. It's not over."

"It is for you," said Bod. "The end of your people and all you stand for. Like your man in Egypt predicted. You didn't kill me. You were everywhere. Now it's all over." Then Bod smiled. "That's what Silas is doing, isn't it? That's where he is."

Mr. Dandy's face confirmed everything that Bod had suspected.

And what Mr. Dandy might have said to that, Bod would never know, because the man let go of the headstone and tumbled slowly down into the open ghoul-gate.

Bod said, "*Wegh Khârados.*"

The ghoul-gate was a grave once again, nothing more.

Something was tugging at his sleeve. Fortinbras Bartleby looked up at him. "Bod! The man by the chapel. He's going up the hill."

The man Jack followed his nose. He had left the others, not least because the stink of Jack Dandy's cologne made finding anything subtler impossible.

He could not find the boy by scent. Not here. The boy smelled like the graveyard. But the girl smelled like her mother's house, like the dab of perfume she had touched to her neck before school that morning. She smelled like a

victim too, like fear-sweat, thought Jack, like his quarry. And wherever she was, the boy would be too, sooner or later.

His hand closed around the handle of his knife and he walked up the hill. He was almost at the top of the hill when it occurred to him—a hunch he knew was a truth—that Jack Dandy and the rest of them were gone. *Good*, he thought. *There's always room at the top.* The man Jack's own rise through the Order had slowed and stopped after he had failed to kill all of the Dorian family. It was as if he had no longer been trusted.

Now, soon, everything would change.

At the top of the hill the man Jack lost the girl's scent. He knew she was near.

He retraced his steps, almost casually, caught her perfume again about fifty feet away, beside a small mausoleum with a closed metal gateway. He pulled on the gate and it swung wide.

Her scent was strong now. He could smell that she was afraid. He pulled down the coffins, one by one, from their shelves, and let them clatter onto the ground, shattering the old wood, spilling their contents onto the mausoleum floor. No, she was not hiding in any of those . . .

Then where?

He examined the wall. Solid. He went down on his hands and knees, pulled the last coffin out and reached back. His hand found an opening . . .

"Scarlett," he called, trying to remember how he would

have called her name when he was Mr. Frost, but he could not even find that part of himself any longer: he was the man Jack now, and that was all he was. On his hands and knees he crawled through the hole in the wall.

When Scarlett heard the crashing noise from above she made her way, carefully, down the steps, her left hand touching the wall, her right hand holding the little LED keyring, which cast just enough light to allow her to see where she was placing her feet. She made it to the bottom of the stone steps and edged back in the open chamber, her heart thumping.

She was scared: scared of nice Mr. Frost and his scarier friends; scared of this room and its memories; even, if she were honest, a little afraid of Bod. He was no longer a quiet boy with a mystery, a link to her childhood. He was something different, something not quite human.

She thought, *I wonder what Mum's thinking right now. She'll be phoning Mr. Frost's house over and over to find out when I'm going to get back. She thought, If I get out of this alive, I'm going to force her to get me a phone. It's ridiculous. I'm the only person in my year who doesn't have her own phone, practically.*

She thought, *I miss my mum.*

She had not thought anyone human could move that silently through the dark, but a gloved hand closed upon her mouth, and a voice that was only barely recognizable as Mr. Frost's said, without emotion, "Do anything clever—

do anything at all—and I will cut your throat. Nod if you understand me."

Scarlett nodded.

Bod saw the chaos on the floor of the Frobisher mausoleum, the fallen coffins with their contents scattered across over the aisle. There were many Frobishers and Frobysbers, and several Pettyfers, all in various states of upset and consternation.

"He is already down there," said Ephraim.

"Thank you," said Bod. He clambered through the hole into the inside of the hill, and he went down the stairs.

Bod saw as the dead see: he saw the steps, and he saw the chamber at the bottom. And when he got halfway down the steps, he saw the man Jack holding Scarlett. He had her arm twisted up behind her back, and a large, wicked, boning-knife at her neck.

The man Jack looked up in the darkness.

"Hello, boy," he said.

Bod said nothing. He concentrated on his Fade, took another step.

"You think I can't see you," said the man Jack. "And you're right. I can't. Not really. But I can smell your fear. And I can hear you move and hear you breathe. And now that I know about your clever vanishing trick, I can *feel* you. Say something now. Say it so I can hear it, or I start to cut little pieces out of the young lady. Do you understand me?"

"Yes," said Bod, his voice echoing in the chamber room. "I understand."

"Good," said Jack. "Now, come here. Let's have a little chat."

Bod began to walk down the steps. He concentrated on the Fear, on raising the level of panic in the room, of making the Terror something tangible. . . .

"Stop that," said the man Jack. "Whatever it is you're doing. Don't do it."

Bod let it go.

"You think," said Jack, "that you can do your little magics on me? Do you know what I am, boy?"

Bod said, "You're a Jack. You killed my family. And you should have killed me."

Jack raised an eyebrow. He said, "I should have killed you?"

"Oh yes. The old man said that if you let me grow to adulthood your Order would be destroyed. I did. You failed and you lost."

"My order goes back before Babylon. Nothing can harm it."

"They didn't tell you, did they?" Bod was standing five paces from the man Jack. "Those four. They were the last of the Jacks. What was it . . . Krakow and Vancouver and Melbourne. All gone."

Scarlett said, "Please, Bod. Make him let go of me."

"Don't worry," said Bod, with a calm he did not feel. He said to Jack, "There's no point in hurting her. There's no

point in killing me. Don't you understand? There isn't even an order of Jacks of All Trades. Not anymore."

Jack nodded thoughtfully. "If this is true," said Jack, "and if I am now a Jack-all-alone, then I have an excellent reason for killing you both."

Bod said nothing.

"Pride," said the man Jack. "Pride in my work. Pride in finishing what I began." And then he said, "What are you doing?"

Bod's hair prickled. He could feel a smoke-tendrill presence twining through the room. He said, "It's not me. It's the Sleer. It guards the treasure that's buried here."

"Don't lie."

Scarlett said, "He's not lying. It's true."

Jack said, "True? Buried treasure? Don't make me—"

THE SLEER GUARDS THE TREASURE FOR THE MASTER.

"Who said that?" asked the man Jack, looking around.

"You heard it?" asked Bod, puzzled.

"I heard it," said Jack. "Yes."

Scarlett said, "I didn't hear anything."

The man Jack said, "What is this place, boy? Where are we?"

Before Bod could speak, the Sleer's voice spoke, echoing through the chamber, THIS IS THE PLACE OF THE TREASURE. THIS IS THE PLACE OF POWER. THIS IS WHERE THE SLEER GUARDS AND WAITS FOR ITS MASTER TO RETURN.

Bod said, "Jack?"

The man Jack tilted his head on one side. He said, "It's

good to hear my name in your mouth, boy. If you'd used it before, I could have found you sooner."

"Jack. What was my real name? What did my family call me?"

"Why should that matter to you now?"

Bod said, "The Sleer told me to find my name. What was it?"

Jack said, "Let me see. Was it Peter? Or Paul? Or Roderick—you look like a Roderick. Maybe you were a Stephen . . ." He was playing with the boy.

"You might as well tell me. You're going to kill me anyway," said Bod. Jack shrugged and nodded in the darkness, as if to say *obviously*.

"I want you to let the girl go," said Bod. "Let Scarlett go."

Jack peered into the darkness, then said, "That's an altar stone, isn't it?"

"I suppose so."

"And a knife? And a cup? And a brooch?"

He was smiling now, in the darkness. Bod could see it on his face: a strange, delighted smile that seemed out of place on that face, a smile of discovery and of understanding. Scarlett couldn't see anything but a blackness that sometimes erupted in flashes inside her eyeballs, but she could hear the delight in Jack's voice.

The man Jack said, "So the Brotherhood is over and the Convocation is at an end. And yet, if there are no more Jacks of All Trades but me, what does it matter? There can be a new Brotherhood, more powerful than the last."

POWER, echoed the Sleer.

"This is perfect," said the man Jack. "Look at us. We are in a place for which my people have hunted for thousands of years, with everything necessary for the ceremony waiting for us. It makes you believe in Providence, doesn't it? Or in the massed prayers of all the Jacks who have gone before us, that at our lowest ebb, we are given this."

Bod could feel the Sleer listening to Jack's words, could feel a low susurrus of excitement building in the chamber.

The man Jack said, "I am going to put out my hand, boy. Scarlett, my knife is still at your throat—do not try to run when I let go of you. Boy, you will place the cup and the knife and the brooch in my hand."

THE TREASURE OF THE SLEER, whispered the triple voice. IT ALWAYS COMES BACK. WE GUARD IT FOR THE MASTER.

Bod bent down, took the objects from the altar stone, put them in Jack's open gloved hand. Jack grinned.

"Scarlett. I am going to release you. When I take the knife away, I want you to lie, facedown, on the ground, with your hands behind your head. Move or try anything, and I will kill you painfully. Do you understand?"

She gulped. Her mouth was dry, but she took one shaky step forward. Her right arm, which had been twisted up to the small of her back, was now numb, and she felt only pins and needles in her shoulder. She lay down, her cheek resting on the packed earth.

We are dead, she thought, and it was not even tinged with emotion. It felt as if she were watching something

happening to other people, a surreal drama that had turned into a game of Murder in the Dark. She heard the noise of Jack taking hold of Bod . . .

Bod's voice said, "Let her go."

The man Jack's voice: "If you do everything I say, I won't kill her. I won't even hurt her."

"I don't believe you. She can identify you."

"No." The adult voice seemed certain. "She can't." And then it said, "Ten thousand years, and the knife is still sharp . . ." The admiration in the voice was palpable. "Boy. Go and kneel on that altar stone. Hands behind your back. Now."

IT HAS BEEN SO LONG, said the Sleer, but all Scarlett heard was a slithering noise, as if of enormous coils winding around the chamber.

But the man Jack heard. "You want to know your name, boy, before I spill your blood on the stone?"

Bod felt the cold of the knife at his neck. And in that moment, Bod understood. Everything slowed. Everything came into focus. "I know my name," he said. "I'm Nobody Owens. That's who I am." And, kneeling on the cold altar stone, it all seemed very simple.

"Sleer," he said to the chamber. "Do you still want a master?"

THE SLEER GUARDS THE TREASURE UNTIL THE MASTER RETURNS.

"Well," said Bod, "haven't you finally found the master you've been looking for?"

He could sense the Sleer writhing and expanding, hear a noise like the scratching of a thousand dead twigs, as if something huge and muscular were snaking its way around the inside of the chamber. And then, for the first time, Bod saw the Sleer. Afterwards, he was never able to describe what he had seen: something huge, yes; something with the body of an enormous snake, but with the head of a what . . . ? There were three of them: three heads, three necks. The faces were dead, as if someone had constructed dolls from parts of the corpses of humans and of animals. The faces were covered in purple patterns, tattooed in swirls of indigo, turning the dead faces into strange, expressive monstrous things.

The faces of the Sleer nuzzled the air about Jack tentatively, as if they wanted to stroke or caress him.

"What's happening?" said Jack. "What is it? What does it do?"

"It's called the Sleer. It guards the place. It needs a master to tell it what to do," said Bod.

Jack hefted the flint knife in his hand. "Beautiful," he said to himself. And then, "Of course. It's been waiting for me. And yes. Obviously, I *am* its new master."

The Sleer encircled the interior of the chamber. MASTER? it said, like a dog who had waited patiently for too long. It said MASTER? again, as if testing the word to see how it tasted. And it tasted good, so it said one more time, with a sigh of delight and of longing, MASTER . . .

Jack looked down at Bod. "Thirteen years ago I missed

you, and now, now we are reunited. The end of one order. The beginning of another. Good-bye, boy." With one hand he lowered the knife to the boy's throat. The other hand held the goblet.

"Bod," said Bod. "Not Boy. Bod." He raised his voice. "Sleer," he said. "What will you do with your new master?"

The Sleer sighed. WE WILL PROTECT HIM UNTIL THE END OF TIME. THE SLEER WILL HOLD HIM IN ITS COILS FOREVER AND NEVER LET HIM ENDURE THE DANGERS OF THE WORLD.

"Then protect him," said Bod. "Now."

"I am your master. You will obey me," said the man Jack.

THE SLEER HAS WAITED SO LONG, said the triple voice of the Sleer, triumphantly. SO LONG A TIME. It began to loop its huge, lazy coils around the man Jack.

The man Jack dropped the goblet. Now he had a knife in each hand—a flint knife, and a knife with a black bone handle—and he said, "Get back! Keep away from me! Don't get any closer!" He slashed out with the knife, as the Sleer twined about him, and in a huge crushing movement, engulfed the man Jack in its coils.

Bod ran over to Scarlett, and helped her up. "I want to see," she said. "I want to see what's happening." She pulled out her LED light, and turned it on . . .

What Scarlett saw was not what Bod saw. She did not see the Sleer, and that was a mercy. She saw the man Jack, though. She saw the fear on his face, which made him look like Mr. Frost had once looked. In his terror he was once

more the nice man who had driven her home. He was floating in the air, five, then ten feet above the ground, slashing wildly at the air with two knives, trying to stab something she could not see, in a display that was obviously having no effect.

Mr. Frost, the man Jack, whoever he was, was forced away from them, pulled back until he was spread-eagled, arms and legs wide and flailing, against the side of the chamber wall.

It seemed to Scarlett that Mr. Frost was being forced through the wall, pulled into the rock, was being swallowed up by it. Now there was nothing visible but a face. He was shouting wildly, desperately, shouting at Bod to call the thing off, to save him, please, please . . . and then the man's face was pulled through the wall, and the voice was silenced.

Bod walked back to the altar stone. He picked up the stone knife, and the goblet, and the brooch, from the ground and he replaced them where they belonged. He left the black metal knife where it fell.

Scarlett said, "I thought you said the Sleer couldn't hurt people. I thought all it could do was frighten us."

"Yes," said Bod. "But it wanted a master to protect. It told me so."

Scarlett said, "You mean you knew. You *knew* that would happen . . ."

"Yes. I hoped it would."

He helped her up the steps and out into the chaos of the Frobisher mausoleum. "I'll need to clean this all up," said Bod, casually. Scarlett tried not to look at the things on the floor.

They stepped out into the graveyard. Scarlett said, dully, once more, "You knew that would happen."

This time Bod said nothing.

She looked at him as if unsure of what she was looking at. "So you knew. That the Sleer would take him. Was *that* why you hid me down there? Was it? What was I, then, *bait*?"

Bod said, "It wasn't like that." Then he said, "We're still alive, aren't we? And he won't trouble us any longer."

Scarlett could feel the anger and the rage welling up inside her. The fear had gone, and now all she was left with was the need to lash out, to shout. She fought the urge. "And what about those other men? Did you kill them too?"

"I didn't kill anyone."

"Then where are they?"

"One of them's at the bottom of a deep grave, with a broken ankle. The other three are, well, they're a long way away."

"You didn't kill them?"

"Of course not." Bod said, "This is my home. Why would I want them hanging around here for the rest of time?" Then, "Look, it's okay. I dealt with them."

Scarlett took a step away from him. She said, "You aren't a person. People don't behave like you. You're as bad as he was. You're a monster."

Bod felt the blood drain from his face. After everything

he had been through that night, after everything that had happened, this was somehow the hardest thing to take. "No," he said. "It wasn't like that."

Scarlett began to back away from Bod.

She took one step, two steps, and was about to flee, to turn and run madly, desperately away through the moonlit graveyard, when a tall man in black velvet put a hand on her arm, and said, "I am afraid you do Bod an injustice. But you will undoubtedly be happier if you remember none of this. So let us walk together, you and I, and discuss what has happened to you over the last few days, and what it might be wise for you to remember, and what it might be better for you to forget."

Bod said, "Silas. You *can't*. You can't make her forget me."

"It will be safest that way," said Silas, simply. "For her, if not for all of us."

"Don't—don't I get a say in this?" asked Scarlett.

Silas said nothing. Bod took a step towards Scarlett, said, "Look, it's over. I know it was hard. But. We did it. You and me. We beat them."

Her head was shaking gently, as if she was denying everything she saw, everything she was experiencing.

She looked up at Silas, and said only, "I want to go home. Please?"

Silas nodded. He walked, with the girl, down the path that would eventually lead them both out of the graveyard. Bod stared at Scarlett as she walked away, hoping that she would turn and look back, that she would smile or just look

at him without fear in her eyes. But Scarlett did not turn. She simply walked away.

Bod went back into the mausoleum. He had to do something, so he began to pick up the fallen coffins, to remove the debris, and to replace the tangle of tumbled bones into the coffins, disappointed to discover that none of the many Frobishers and Frobyschers and Pettyfers gathered around to watch seemed to be quite certain whose bones belonged in which container.

A man brought Scarlett home. Later, Scarlett's mother could not remember quite what he had told her, although disappointingly, she had learned that that nice Jay Frost had unavoidably been forced to leave town.

The man talked with them, in the kitchen, about their lives and their dreams, and by the end of the conversation Scarlett's mother had somehow decided that they would be returning to Glasgow: Scarlett would be happy to be near her father, and to see her old friends again.

Silas left the girl and her mother talking in the kitchen, discussing the challenges of moving back to Scotland, with Noona promising to buy Scarlett a phone of her own. They barely remembered that Silas had ever been there, which was the way he liked it.

Silas returned to the graveyard and found Bod sitting in the amphitheater by the obelisk, his face set.

"How is she?"

"I took her memories," said Silas. "They will return to

Glasgow. She has friends there."

"How could you make her forget me?"

Silas said, "People want to forget the impossible. It makes their world safer."

Bod said, "I liked her."

"I'm sorry."

Bod tried to smile, but he could not find a smile inside himself. "The men . . . they spoke about trouble they were having in Krakow and Melbourne and Vancouver. That was you, wasn't it?"

"I was not alone," said Silas.

"Miss Lupescu?" said Bod. Then, seeing the expression on his guardian's face, "Is she all right?"

Silas shook his head, and for a moment his face was terrible for Bod to behold. "She fought bravely. She fought for you, Bod."

Bod said, "The Sleer has the man Jack. Three of the others went through the ghoul-gate. There's one injured but still alive at the bottom of the Carstairs grave."

Silas said, "He is the last of the Jacks. I will need to talk to him, then, before sunrise."

The wind that blew across the graveyard was cold, but neither the man nor the boy seemed to feel it.

Bod said, "She was scared of me."

"Yes."

"But why? I saved her life. I'm not a bad person. And I'm just like her. I'm alive too." Then he said, "How did Miss Lupescu fall?"

"Bravely," said Silas. "In battle. Protecting others."

Bod's eyes were dark. "You could have brought her back here. Buried her here. Then I could have talked to her."

Silas said, "That was not an option."

Bod felt his eyes stinging. He said, "She used to call me *Nimeni*. No one will ever call me that again."

Silas said, "Shall we go and get food for you?"

"*We*? You want me to come with you? Out of the graveyard?"

Silas said, "No one is trying to kill you. Not right now. There are a lot of things they are not going to be doing, not any longer. So, yes. What would you like to eat?"

Bod thought about saying that he wasn't hungry, but that simply was not true. He felt a little sick, and a little lightheaded, and he was starving. "Pizza?" he suggested.

They walked through the graveyard, down to the gates. As Bod walked, he saw the inhabitants of the graveyard, but they let the boy and his guardian pass among them without a word. They only watched.

Bod tried to thank them for their help, to call out his gratitude, but the dead said nothing.

The lights of the pizza restaurant were bright, brighter than Bod was comfortable with. He and Silas sat near the back, and Silas showed him how to use a menu, how to order food. (Silas ordered a glass of water and a small salad for himself, which he pushed around the bowl with his fork but never actually put to his lips.)

Bod ate his pizza with his fingers and enthusiasm. He

did not ask questions. Silas would talk in his own time, or he would not.

Silas said, "We had known of them . . . of the Jacks . . . for a long, long time, but we knew of them only from the results of their activities. We suspected there was an organization behind it, but they hid too well. And then they came after you, and they killed your family. And, slowly, I was able to follow their trail."

"Is *we* you and Miss Lupescu?" asked Bod.

"Us and others like us."

"The Honour Guard," said Bod.

"How did you hear about—?" said Silas. Then, "No matter. *Little pitchers have big ears*, as they say. Yes. The Honour Guard." Silas picked up his glass of water. He put the water glass to his lips, moistened them, then put it down on the polished black tabletop.

The surface of the tabletop was almost mirrored, and, had anyone cared to look, they might have observed that the tall man had no reflection.

Bod said, "So. Now you're done . . . done with all this. Are you going to stay?"

"I gave my word," said Silas. "I am here until you are grown."

"I'm grown," said Bod.

"No," said Silas. "Almost. Not yet."

He put a ten-pound note down on the tabletop.

"That girl," said Bod. "Scarlett. Why was she so scared of me, Silas?"

But Silas said nothing, and the question hung in the air as the man and the youth walked out of the bright pizza restaurant into the waiting darkness; and soon enough they were swallowed by the night.

