

KIRSTEN MILLER



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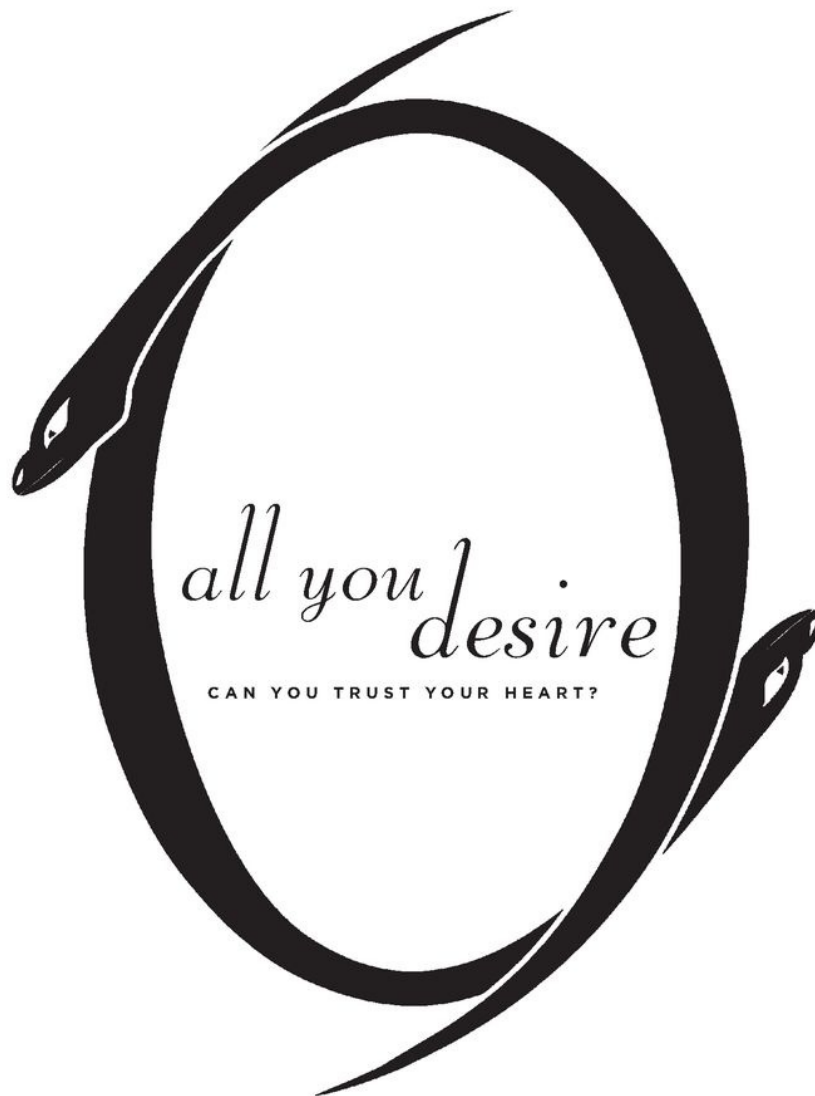




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[\*EPILOGUE\*](#)

All You Desire

RAZORBILL

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## PREFACE

Haven Moore checked her watch and turned back toward the city. There was plenty of time to get home before dark, yet she decided to pick up her pace. She didn't want to find herself alone with the dead when the sun finally slid behind the trees.

Haven hadn't expected to find the Appia Antica so deserted. Otherwise she might have chosen another spot for a stroll. In the summertime, the famous road on the outskirts of Rome was bustling with people visiting the ancient tombs that lined the route. But it was a cold February afternoon, and Haven had encountered only a few hardy travelers in fleece jackets and hiking boots. For three full hours she had been alone with her thoughts. That wasn't at all what she'd wanted. These days they were dangerous company to keep.

The wind picked up speed, raising Haven's black curls and setting them adrift. She captured the strands that had fallen in front of her blue-gray eyes and tucked them behind her ear. Ahead, at the crest of a hill, a familiar mausoleum stood by the side of the road. Tall and perfectly round, it resembled a turret sticking out of the hillside. Haven liked to imagine that there might be an entire castle buried beneath it. As always, she paused and peered up at the grisly garland of carved bull skulls that decorated the structure. Below, a simple plaque identified the building as the resting place of Caecilia Metella. Caecilia's tomb was the most famous on the Appian Way, yet little was known about the woman it housed. She must have been adored to have had such a monument built in her honor. Perhaps she'd been beautiful, brilliant, or wise. Whatever her story, it was long forgotten. Two thousand years after her death, Caecilia Metella was just another soul lost in time.

Suddenly chilled, Haven zipped up her jacket and put the tomb behind her. A pristine white taxi appeared on the horizon, like the ghost of a New York City yellow cab. When it pulled over, two girls emerged from the backseat and dragged a third out behind them. As the group made their way toward the tomb, Haven could see they were sixteen or seventeen—only a couple of years younger than she. They all wore jeans and matching blue sweatshirts with the letters *HH* stitched in white. *American high school students*, Haven thought. Overprivileged delinquents sent to Rome to soak up some culture. She'd seen others like them in the piazza below her apartment, guzzling cheap wine before making fools of themselves in the fountains. At times she envied them. She knew she'd grown up a little too quickly.

Deep in conversation, the trio barely registered Haven's presence as they passed her. They weren't the carefree youths she'd imagined. The girl in the middle looked pale and miserable. She walked with her eyes on her feet, relying on her companions to guide her safely down the road.

"You shouldn't have tricked me like this," she whimpered.

"You'll thank us later," Haven heard one of the friends respond. "I still don't understand how you could visit Rome three times and never bother to see your own tomb."

Haven stopped in the street.



“I told you. I didn’t know it was here,” the girl in the middle replied hoarsely. “And I wouldn’t have come if I had.”

“But you found out about the tomb *months* ago. Why didn’t you hunt down some pictures online? Weren’t you curious?”

This time the girl said nothing. Haven glanced back to see her shaking her head.

“Well, you’re here in person now. Look up.”

The three girls came to a halt.

“Look up, Caroline!”

It took a moment before Caroline finally lifted her head. Haven couldn’t see the girl’s face, but she could hear her sobbing.

“Please don’t cry,” pleaded one of the friends. She sounded surprised by the depth of Caroline’s sorrow. “Your husband must have loved you very much if he built this for you. They say it’s one of the most beautiful tombs in Rome.”

“You just don’t get it. If he loved me, he would have found me again,” Caroline tried to explain. “I’ve searched for him everywhere. I’m sure he’s come back. He just hasn’t been looking for *me*.”

Haven was on the verge of approaching the girls when the third spoke. Her voice remained chipper. She didn’t seem to understand what had transpired.

“Come on, Caroline. Don’t you see how silly you’re being? And to think you’d never have come here if Adam hadn’t suggested it.”

The name stole Haven’s breath. Her heart pounding and face burning, she turned and stumbled back toward Rome.

## CHAPTER ONE

“The train to Florence leaves in an hour.” Iain was watching her from the doorway with a puzzled look on his face. “Don’t you think it might be a good time to start packing?” His bags were already waiting in the foyer.

“Why would I want to bring any clothes?” Haven tried to joke. She took a slow sip of coffee and gazed down from the balcony at the Piazza Navona below. The water in the plaza’s three fountains glistened in the morning light, and the outdoor cafés were starting to fill up. Once Haven had enjoyed watching the tourists ramble through the square with their maps, cameras, and unruly children. These days it often felt as if she were standing guard, keeping watch for anyone who might threaten her happiness. “I thought this was going to be a *vacation*.”

“With that attitude, you’ll probably be quite popular at the hotel.” Iain gave her a wink. “Now stop dawdling or we’re going to be late.”

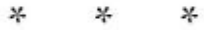
“What if I don’t want to go anymore?” Haven tried her best to sound lighthearted, but she couldn’t keep the quiver out of her voice. Iain caught her as she stepped into the living room from the balcony. When he pulled her into his arms, she could hear his heart beating, slow and steady.

“We’re going to have fun,” he promised, his face buried in her wild black hair. “You’ll remember this trip for the rest of our lives.”

HAVEN RELUCTANTLY TURNED toward the hall closet and opened its door for the first time in months. Jammed inside were all the dresses she had designed that weren’t quite right. Fabric that had faded or frayed. And the suitcases she’d brought with her when she and Iain had moved to Rome, each one sprinkled with a fine layer of dust. Haven kept her hands by her side, worried that touching the cases might break the spell. The months she’d spent in Rome had been magical—that was the only word she could find to describe them. Formerly the pariah of Snope City, Tennessee, Haven finally had the life she’d craved. Barely nineteen years old, she spent her days running a successful boutique on the Via dei Condotti and returned to a sun-swept apartment that overlooked one of the loveliest piazzas in the city.

Every evening for almost a year, Haven had arrived home to an empty house. No matter what the weather was like outside, she always opened the doors to the balcony and waited for the most wonderful sound in the world. Soon, her ears would catch a note of the song that Iain whistled whenever he crossed the square. An ancient tune with no name, it was his way of telling her they would soon be together.

Minutes later, Iain would burst through the door, his arms filled with food gathered from Rome’s many markets. Sometimes, he let it all fall to the floor when he discovered Haven waiting to greet him. The eggs would break, and dinner didn’t make it to the table before nine. Late at night, when their hunger was finally sated, they would leave the apartment and wander hand in hand through the empty streets while Iain whispered stories of their many lives together.



HAVEN HAD LET herself hope that it would all last forever. But now she and Iain were leaving Rome, and it felt as if their golden year might be reaching its end. For more than a week, Haven had sensed something was wrong. It had started with a quick glimpse of a figure dressed in black crossing the piazza below her balcony. She hadn't gotten a good look at the man. It could have been anyone. And that was what worried her most. After that, the city seemed to be hiding secrets from her. The days grew darker, and the weather turned colder. Haven always suspected someone was watching, and every time she turned a corner, she held her breath, expecting to find the dark figure waiting for her around the bend.

At first she'd kept her suspicions to herself. But after the encounter with the three girls on the Appia Antica, Haven knew she and Iain needed to act quickly. The danger was real, not imagined. If they stayed in Rome, they risked being discovered. Iain thought she was being too cautious, but he happily suggested a trip north to Tuscany. There was something in Florence, he'd said, that Haven might like to see.

HAVEN GRABBED ONE of her dusty suitcases by the handle and lugged it out into the hall. Inside the closet, a bag of fabric scraps teetered and tumbled to the floor. Haven groaned as she stooped to gather the pieces one by one. Then her fingers brushed against a canvas at the back of the closet. She'd almost forgotten it was there. The painting had been a housewarming present from one of the few people outside her family who knew where to find them. Haven pushed a heavy coat to one side and peered between her cluttered heaps of belongings. Up close, the artwork was a swirl of color. Only when she took a step back did forms begin to emerge from the chaos.

The painting was part of a much larger series. A few others like it could be found hanging on the third floor of a run-down house not far from the Brooklyn Bridge. The remaining works—several hundred of them—were slowly rotting away in a warehouse in Queens. Not even the most morbid art collector would have chosen to display them. Each showed some tragic scene from the past—and together they formed a catalog of disasters large and small. Shipwrecks and fires, betrayals and heartbreaks, all set in motion by the same mysterious figure who could be found lurking somewhere in each image. But only if you knew where to look for him.

The day the painting had been delivered to the apartment, Haven had ripped away its wrapping, eager to see what lay beneath. The artist, Marta Vega, was an old friend of Iain's. For years Marta's work had been inspired by terrible visions of the past. The visions had stopped once she'd escaped New York and settled in Paris. There she'd started a series of paintings that reflected her newfound hopes for the future. Haven had been expecting to find such a work beneath the brown paper. Instead, she found a sinister image with a bright yellow Post-it attached.

*This was the last one I painted,* the note read. *I know it was meant for you.* After a single glance, Iain had whisked the painting away and stashed it behind the coats and dresses inside the hall closet. Later Haven had overheard him on the phone with Marta, his voice an angry whisper. He told the girl she should never have sent him the

painting. It was the last thing Haven needed to see, and he hoped she hadn't had a good look. The time would come for them to face their demons. For now, he didn't want Haven to worry.

But Haven had seen the image, and it had left an indelible impression. For days afterward, she thought of little else. The painting showed two people—a young man and woman—surrounded by an angry mob. The faces weren't clear. But Haven recognized the girl's unruly thatch of black hair as her own. And she knew it was the only painting Marta Vega had ever created that showed not the past but the future.

Now Haven studied the painting for the first time since its arrival, looking for the minuscule figure in black that Marta inserted into each of her works. This time, he was nowhere to be found. And yet his absence wasn't a comfort. It felt as though he had stepped off the canvas and into Haven's life again. He was out there somewhere. If not in Rome, then not far away. The man in the picture—the figure in black—had been following Haven for centuries.

"Haven," she heard Iain call, a trace of alarm in his voice. "What did you find in there?"

Haven crammed the painting back into the closet. "I'll be ready to go in ten minutes," she answered, ignoring the question. "Ask the driver to get here as soon as he can."

## CHAPTER TWO

Haven had seen it all before. Strolling along the banks of the Arno River, she was overwhelmed by the sensation that she had walked the same path countless times in the past. Most people would have glibly dismissed it as *déjà vu*. But Haven knew better. If she had the feeling she'd seen Florence before, then it was fairly certain she had. Just not in *this* lifetime.

Haven's gloved hand squeezed Iain's arm. "I know this place." Ahead of them, a bridge spanned the narrowest part of the river. It was flanked on both sides by rickety buildings—orange houses and saffron-colored dwellings that jutted out over the Arno. In the icy gray waters below, two fat muskrats paddled around a pier. "I saw that bridge get swept away by the river. I must have been very young when it happened, but I remember it clearly. And then I watched them build it all over again."

Iain's frozen breath hung in the air when he laughed. "I was wondering when you might say something." His memories of the past were much better than Haven's—his memories were better than *everyone's*. "It's called the Ponte Vecchio. It was destroyed by a flood in 1333. They rebuilt it in 1345."

"Were we here then?" Haven asked. "In 1345?"

"You were here in 1345," Iain replied. "I died the year before, when I was sixteen years old."

Haven still winced whenever Iain mentioned one of his deaths, even if it had occurred hundreds of years in the past. It didn't matter how many previous existences they'd shared. Every life that had been cut short reminded her how fragile their current lives could be. "You died at sixteen?"

"I fell off my horse on the road to Rome. Broke my neck. But a lot of people would say I was lucky. Half of Florence died three years later—of something much worse than a broken neck."

"What's worse than a broken neck?"

"The black death." Iain took Haven's hand in his and pulled her away from the river and between the tall gray columns of the Uffizi Gallery. The winter sun was losing its strength, and the courtyard of the museum felt frigid. Patches of black ice expanded and multiplied in the shadows. A group of Spanish tourists shivered inside their goose-down parkas. The women among them gaped at Iain as if one of the museum's statues had suddenly sprung to life. A few pointed and whispered. Iain didn't notice—he rarely did—but Haven smiled and pulled the handsome boy even closer.

When the couple emerged in the Piazza della Signoria, Haven's feet froze. The square was empty but for a man dressed in a black robe so long that it swept the street behind him. Beneath a wide-brimmed leather hat, he wore a hideous mask with a long white beak. Spectacles with red-tinted lenses shielded his eyes. He might have been a monster from the depths of hell. But Haven recognized his costume as the protective suit of a medieval plague doctor. She watched as the man stood over a motionless body that lay on the paving stones and poked at it with his cane. Then the doctor glanced up at Haven. His face was hidden, but she could sense his disapproval. She, of

all people, didn't belong in the plaza. Haven blinked and the whole scene disappeared.

"Come on. I have something to show you before it gets dark," Iain urged, and Haven realized he'd seen nothing unusual.

EIGHTEEN MONTHS HAD passed since Haven had learned the truth about the strange visions that came to her. They weren't hallucinations or fantasies. She now knew they were memories—scenes she'd witnessed in previous lives. The doctor in the terrible mask didn't belong to the twenty-first century, but he had once been as real as the boy who was holding her hand.

The visions had started when she was just a small child. For years, Haven would faint and find herself inside another life—that of a beautiful young woman named Constance who had perished in a fire. Haven's uncontrollable "fits" frightened most people who witnessed them. They insisted the girl must have been sick or disturbed. Only Haven's father suspected that his daughter was visiting the past each time she fainted. When he died unexpectedly, he took that secret to his grave, where it had remained for almost a decade.

Shortly after Haven turned seventeen, the visions returned, and it was then that their true meaning was finally revealed to her. The glimpses of the beautiful young woman were memories of one of the many lives that Haven had led. Driven by the need to know more about Constance's untimely death, Haven had fled her hometown in Tennessee and made her way to New York. There she discovered her murderer, her soul mate, and the dark figure who'd been chasing her across oceans and continents for more than two thousand years.

Still, the visions hadn't stopped once the mystery of Constance's death had been solved. Haven seldom fainted now, but at night she journeyed to distant times and exotic lands. In the darkness, her dreams were vivid, but they always faded at dawn. Most days, while the sun was shining, Haven remained free from her visions of previous lives. But the whiff of a familiar fragrance, the sound of a long-forgotten name, the sensation of Iain's breath on her skin could blend Haven's pasts and her present together. She would find herself giddy with love for a boy who had shared Iain's lopsided grin. Or overwhelmed by a potent mixture of old fears and desires that she still couldn't comprehend.

"DOES THAT PALAZZO REMIND you of anything?" Iain released Haven's hand and pointed at a mansion at the end of a cramped little square. Haven looked up at his face before she followed his finger. She still felt a rush of excitement whenever she locked eyes with him. Even with his wavy brown hair tucked under a knit cap—and his nose red from the bitter cold—he barely passed for a mortal. For a moment she couldn't have cared less about her former life in Florence. If she hadn't been able to share it with Iain, it must not have been worth living.

Haven reluctantly turned toward the building in question. It looked more like a fortress than a palace. The bottom floor had been constructed with huge square blocks, and enormous metal doors were set in three separate arches. Each door was high enough for a giant to enter, and all three were tightly sealed. But Haven knew that beyond them lay a courtyard. And she knew the stairs that led to the living quarters on

the second and third floors could be withdrawn if the house were ever attacked. The world had been a dangerous place when the building was erected, and the wealthy had been determined to defend their fortunes.

Haven's eyes fluttered. She felt her legs pumping, fighting against heavy skirts that encased them. All around her, the walls were painted in dazzling colors, reds and golds. The wooden floorboards protested as she ran to the open window. She wasn't quite tall enough to see out of it, so she hoisted herself up on the sill and surveyed the square below, her little body dangling dangerously over the edge.

A teenage boy was sprinting away from the palazzo. His blue tunic and red stockings looked two sizes too large for him. "Run! Run!" she shouted at the kid, laughing so hard there were tears in her eyes. "Don't let them catch you!" The words sounded foreign to Haven's ears, though she had no trouble understanding their meaning.

"Beatrice!" A woman's sharp voice came from behind her. "Get down from that window. What has your brother done now?"

"I LIVED HERE," Haven mumbled as the twenty-first century took shape once again. "My name was Beatrice, and I had a brother."

"So you saw him?" Iain asked with his crooked grin. "Was it anyone you recognized?"

"Recognized? I didn't really get a good look at the kid. I only saw him running away." Haven stopped. "Wait, are you saying . . ."

Iain crossed his arms like a pompous professor and began to deliver a lecture fit for a history class. "The palazzo before you was purchased in 1329 by Gherardo Vettori, a wealthy wine merchant. Observe the Vettori family coat of arms above the door. It features three rather sinister dolphins carrying bunches of grapes in their mouths. . ."

"Drop the act, and stop teasing me!" Haven demanded, knowing that if she let herself laugh, it would only encourage him. "Are you telling me that my brother in that lifetime was . . ." She couldn't quite say it.

"Despite a raging libido and a roving eye, Gherardo Vettori only managed to sire two children. You were one of them. Your friend Beau was the other. His name back then was Piero Vettori, and he was a world-class delinquent."

For a moment Haven found herself at a loss for words. She'd known for some time that Beau Decker, her best friend from Tennessee, had been her brother in a previous existence. But she had never expected to find herself gazing up at the house where they had fought and played and consoled one another seven hundred years earlier.

"I've been meaning to bring you here since we came to Italy," Iain explained. "I've been saving it as a surprise."

"You knew Beatrice's brother too?!"

"I was friends with Piero before I died. And I was madly in love with his little sister. He wasn't terribly happy about that."

Haven recalled the boy in the oversize tunic and the love his young sister had felt for him. Beatrice Vettori had worshipped Piero. He couldn't have been more than thirteen at the time of Haven's vision, but his sister would have told anyone who would listen that he was fearless and brilliant. She knew other things about her brother

as well, secrets only the two of them shared.

“I wish I had seen more,” Haven said sadly. “I wish I had seen you, too. I hate that my visions are always so random.”

“Maybe someday you’ll see everything,” Iain consoled her. “And then you’ll be the one telling *me* stories.”

“Maybe,” Haven said, though she held no hope of that ever happening. She had managed to recall a few fragments of the many lives she’d led, but most of her memories were still lost in time. She might have tried harder to conjure them, but she suspected there were things she wouldn’t want to remember. Iain’s memories, on the other hand, were perfectly preserved. Of all the people who had returned to earth time and time again, Iain was the only one who could recall each of his incarnations. It was a skill that made him dangerous to all the wrong people—most notably the man in black.

“I should take a picture of the palazzo for Beau,” Haven said.

“In a minute. There’s something I need to get out of the way first. When you told me you wanted to take a trip, this is why I suggested Florence. Now I can do what I didn’t have the chance to do before I fell off that damn horse.”

“What?” Haven asked.

Iain removed his gloves and stuffed them in the pocket of his coat. Then he gently took Haven’s face in his hands. Her eyes closed, and she could feel his warm breath on her skin. With his lips on hers, time came to a halt. She let her hand slip between the buttons of his coat until her fingers rested against his chest. It was something she did from time to time—just to prove to herself that he was real.

She had no idea how long they stood there, locked in an embrace that had waited seven hundred years to happen. But when Haven opened her eyes again, Florence was already dark.



## CHAPTER THREE

Haven and Iain were greeted at the door of the restaurant by a pretty young hostess in a dress that must have inspired more drooling than the food being served. Haven took note of the woman's surgically sculpted chest and leonine hair extensions and grinned. She knew exactly what was about to transpire. Just as she'd anticipated, the hostess ignored Haven and beamed at her handsome companion instead. Haven had watched countless females offer Iain the same smile, and it almost never meant "hello."

"Good evening, *signore*," the hostess flirted in beautifully accented English. "Do you have a reservation?"

Iain shot a quick wink at Haven before he flashed the hostess a rakish grin. "*Buona sera, signorina*. Do I need one?"

The young woman's seductive smile turned scandalous. "Not tonight," she whispered, as if they were sharing a secret.

The exchange was deliciously corny. Haven gritted her teeth and tried not to giggle. The Colosseum itself couldn't have held all the bodies that were thrown at Iain every week. Whenever Haven left him alone in a store, she'd return to find him surrounded by salesgirls, all as hot and bothered as goats in a pepper patch. A policewoman had once slipped Iain her phone number while she wrote Haven a parking ticket. Waitresses plied him with free drinks and desserts. Haven teased Iain about his "fans," and a year earlier she might have bristled at the hostess's boldness. But now that she knew what Iain had gone through to find her, jealousy seemed completely absurd. There was no harm in letting silly girls flirt with someone whose heart belonged only to her.

"May I take your coats?" the hostess asked, her eyes practically fondling Iain.

"Yes, you may," Haven replied with a smile, stepping between the two and finally drawing some attention of her own.

As she peeled off her gloves and removed her hat, Haven sensed she was being appraised like a sculpture at an auction house. Fortunately, the dress she wore underneath her coat was one of her own designs. Made of red silk and lacking all frills, it was cut so perfectly that Haven's every flaw was hidden and every asset enhanced. Two men near the entrance turned to gawk when she and Iain were escorted to their seats. The restaurant's tables were crowded together, and as Haven squeezed by, a hundred eyes traveled from her dress to her face to her wild black hair before returning to the plates on the tables in front of them. One man's gaze remained locked on Haven's chest until he received a subtle but unpleasant jab from Iain's elbow as the couple passed by him.

It was hardly the first time that all eyes had been on Haven. Growing up in tiny Snope City, Tennessee, she'd always been keenly aware that the whole town was watching. But people had been scared of her then. A little girl with mysterious visions of other places simply couldn't be trusted—particularly when the girl's own grandmother claimed the visions had been sent by the devil himself. Now Snope City was five thousand miles and a whole year behind her. Haven was a different person,

and for the first time in her life she was starting to enjoy attention whenever she received it. She liked the way people looked at her, with a mixture of admiration and envy. She welcomed their gazes and enjoyed dressing to draw them. Even though she and Iain were supposed to be hiding.

“Sorry the restaurant is so packed,” Iain whispered once they were seated. “My mother always said that the food here is much better than the atmosphere.”

“Aside from all your fans, the atmosphere isn’t that bad,” Haven said, breaking away from a staring contest with a love-struck girl on the other side of the room. “But I doubt there’s a chef in Italy who can cook anything as good as one of your omelets. Now, Mr. Morrow, no more small talk. It’s time to get down to business. You’ve made me suffer for three whole hours. Tell me more about Piero and Beatrice. How did you meet them? What were they like?”

“Wild. I met Piero on my fifteenth birthday. He tried to bash my brains in with a rock.”

“Charming,” Haven laughed. She loved Beau, but everyone knew he wasn’t exactly a pacifist.

“Yeah. Piero was a good guy, but he had the world’s worst temper. He accused me of stealing his horse. He’d left it untethered, and I happened to walk by just after it wandered off after a vegetable cart. We were pounding the pulp out of each other when the horse came back to search for its owner. Piero apologized, so we called a truce and decided to join forces. A few days later he invited me to his house, where I happened to spot his little sister slaving away on a gown for their mother. If I recall correctly, she was being punished for sneaking out of the house the previous night. Beatrice was always in trouble, just like Piero. They egged each other on. And, as you know by now, some things never change.”

“So when you found Beatrice, was it love at first sight?”

Haven had been trying to tease him, but Iain’s answer was serious.

“It always is. I didn’t even have to speak to her. I knew it was you the second I saw Beatrice with a needle in her hand. I spent the next few weeks loitering outside the Vettori house, trying to catch glimpses of her. It nearly drove Piero insane. He was always annoyingly overprotective.”

“What was your name in those days?” Haven asked.

“Ettore,” Iain said.

“Ettore,” Haven repeated, enjoying the way the name made her heart skip a beat. Haven loved nothing better than to listen to tales of her own romances. Every story was different and every setting unique. Just when she thought she’d heard them all, Iain would lead her into another existence in some faraway land. But exploring their pasts was not without peril. As many times as they’d found happiness together, there were just as many lives that had ended too quickly or were spent searching for each other in vain. Haven couldn’t remember those dark days, and Iain rarely spoke of them, but she knew the memories remained fresh in his mind.

“Did you ever have a chance to talk to Beatrice?” Haven asked more cautiously. “Did you tell her how you felt?”

“Yes, but it wasn’t easy. Beatrice’s parents were not pleasant people. They made her life miserable—and they were incredibly cruel to Piero. You would have been beaten if they’d seen us together, so we used to whisper though the hedges in the courtyard.

Beatrice was terrified that her father would force her to marry one of his business associates. I promised her I'd never let that happen. But as you know, I didn't live long enough to keep my promise."

"So what *did* happen to Beatrice?"

"I'm not sure," Iain admitted.

Haven leaned back in her chair as the waiter approached. Iain examined the menu and ordered for the two of them in fluent Italian. A question waited, poised on the tip of Haven's tongue.

"You're not sure?" she asked as soon as the waiter was gone. It wasn't the first time Haven had wondered if Iain might be protecting her from an unpleasant truth.

"I guess Beatrice must have died of the plague," Iain replied. "Most people in Florence did. All I know is that the Vettori family abandoned the house we saw today. From what I've read it was taken over by a bunch of rogue doctors who gave up trying to heal everyone and decided to save themselves. They hid out in the palazzo and drank all the Vettori's wine and ate all their food and then proceeded to drop dead of the plague. One of the doctors kept a journal until the day he died, but even he didn't seem to know what happened to the Vettori after they fled Florence. Chances are, the whole family's in one of the mass graves outside of the city."

"That's a terrible story," Haven said, suddenly sorry she'd asked.

"True," Iain acknowledged. "But don't dwell on it. We've had our share of happy endings as well. In our next lives we were peasants in Kathmandu. We got married when we were seventeen, and we lived together for more than forty years."

"Did we have any kids?" Haven asked a little too loudly, and a man at the next table shot her a puzzled look. "Did we?" she repeated in a whisper.

"No, but we had three lovely yaks," Iain said, as two glasses of water were set in front of them. "And thirty-six nieces and nephews."

"Thirty-six?" Haven's head ached just thinking of it. "Was it just our families or did everyone hump like bunnies back then?"

Iain choked on his water, barely avoiding a spit take. "Such a sweet little Southern belle," he laughed from behind his napkin. "There wasn't much else to do in fourteenth-century Nepal. It could get a little dull at times, but I've always considered it one of our best lives together. I still wake up some mornings craving yak-butter tea." He seemed to savor the grimace on Haven's face. "You used to love it too," he insisted. "I'll take you back to Nepal someday so you can acquire the taste again."

"As long as I don't have to milk any yaks," Haven quipped. "I wouldn't say I'm a princess, but I can't see myself getting too friendly with livestock."

"Is that right?" Iain teased. "I think you might be surprised to find out what you're capable of doing."

"Okay then, surprise me," Haven challenged.

"Let me think for a second. . . ." Iain tapped his temple and arched an eyebrow. "I'll come up with something suitably shocking."

As she waited, Haven's attention was drawn to a woman who had risen from her seat at the back of the restaurant. She was making her way toward the exit, draped in a fur that she hadn't deigned to leave at the coat check. Haven couldn't figure out which unfortunate animal had given its life for the sake of fashion. The pelt was as exotic as the woman herself, who didn't appear to be entirely human. As the lady passed by, the

empty sleeve of her fur brushed against their table, and Haven grabbed her glass to keep it from toppling. Startled by Haven's sudden movement, the woman clutched her fur to her chest before it could be sullied by a stranger's touch. A single platinum ring adorned one of her hand's elegant fingers. It was in the shape of a serpent swallowing its own tail. An ouroboros.

"Haven, are you all right?" She barely heard Iain's voice over the pounding of her heart. She scanned the crowd, checking every face in view. Seated at a table against the far wall, beneath a painting of a Renaissance nobleman with a shifty smile, were two men in suits. They were too plainly dressed to be Italian. They could have been traveling businessmen. Or vacationing undertakers. Or men sent to find her.

Haven flagged down a waiter and requested the check, just as their first course arrived.

"Is something wrong?" the waiter inquired.

"Haven?" Iain joined in.

"I'm not feeling well," Haven managed to explain as she dug through her purse and fished out a credit card. Once the waiter had disappeared, she leaned across the table toward Iain. Protecting him was the only thing that mattered now. "You have to get out of here," she whispered. "There's a chance they haven't figured out who you are."

"Who?" Iain asked. Haven nodded toward the two men in suits.

Iain stole a quick look and laughed with relief. "Those guys? They're not from the Ouroboros Society, Haven. They're copy machine salesmen. From Cleveland. I could hear them talking when we walked by."

"You're sure?" Haven asked. "There was someone from the Society here tonight. The woman in the fur—she had a ring. An ouroboros ring. I saw it."

"Haven, it's okay. It was just a coincidence. Why don't we stay and have our dinner? There's something—" Iain started to say.

"No, we're not safe here!" Haven insisted. "I felt it in Rome, and now I feel it here. He's looking for me, Iain."

"*Signora*, I'm terribly sorry." The waiter was hovering over them. "I'm afraid your credit card has been declined."

"That's impossible," Haven snipped.

"No, *signora*," the waiter said, growing snootier by the second. "It is not. Perhaps the *gentleman* has a card?"

*Of course he doesn't*, Haven wanted to say. *The gentleman is supposed to be dead.*

"I'll be happy to pay with cash," Iain told him.