

## I.

# FINN

When she was twelve years old, Finn Robinson summoned a demon.

She didn't summon the demon *well*. She played a bit fast and loose with the instructions from the old grimoire, although in her defense, the instructions were absurdly and impossibly specific. How on earth was Finn supposed to acquire "a girdle of lion's skin three inches broad"? Or "the blood of a white cockerel that never trode hen"? The Pendleton farm on the edge of town kept chickens, but there was only one rooster in the coop, and its feathers were brown. Finn wasn't quite sure what "trode hen" meant, and she didn't much want to find out.

It didn't matter. She wouldn't have had the stomach to slit the poor creature's throat anyway.

She made substitutions for the materials where she could. The spell book told her to hold a sword during the ritual, so Finn brought an old, iron fire poker from the house where she worked as a maid. The book told her to wear a "miter or cap"; her thread-bare knit hat would have to do. For the "annointing oil to annoint thy temples and thine eyes with," she stole a scoop of lard from the kitchen, which turned sticky as it melted and made her hands smell like bacon.

She bundled all the materials into a sack. Then, a little before

midnight, she broke into the old feed barn on the Pendleton farm. The barn was rarely used anymore, and its floor had plenty of space for Finn to draw the summoning circle, copying out the shapes from the spell book by dragging a stick through the dirt. This would be the main circle, here. She sketched a snake around the outer edge of it, though her snake was a wobbly, clumsy thing compared to the one in the book. Here, two feet beyond the circle's easternmost point, would be the demon's triangle. Supposedly, the triangle would force the demon to take a human form, and keep the demon contained. Finn was careful not to scuff the lines after she'd drawn them.

If she was being honest with herself, she didn't really expect a demon to appear that night. Even as she lit the stubby candles and placed them at the edges, it all felt like a game. An unholy play. The actions of a desperate, terrible girl, with terrible things in her heart. It wasn't that she was a skeptic, exactly; it wasn't that Finn didn't believe in demons. She'd been raised on stories of both Catholic miracles and Irish fairy folk. Though she hadn't yet witnessed anything supernatural with her own eyes, the existence of demons seemed plausible enough.

But she knew, deep down, that a demon wouldn't appear for *her*. The rituals in this old grimoire were meant for other people—the same sorts of powerful men who'd written such books in the first place. Men with influence and wealth that Finn couldn't even imagine. Men who could obtain their girdle of lion's skin by paying a butler to pay a merchant to slay a lion abroad and have its skin shipped back home.

These rituals weren't meant for girls like Finn, who had to steal supplies from the servants' quarters and break into other people's barns.

Even the spell book itself was stolen. Finn had nabbed it from her employer's study six days ago, after her brother had become too weak to get out of bed anymore. Kieran's sleep was fitful and feverish, and he was still coughing that terrible cough that made Finn's own chest ache in commiseration. Doctor Gregory told Finn in solemn tones that the consumption had progressed too far. The end was near. All the doctor could do for Kieran now was try to keep him comfortable.

Doctor Gregory was a useless man.

Still, Finn had called him back to Kieran's bedside that day, mere hours before she planned to attempt the ritual. The grimoire she'd stolen contained a list of seventy-two demons, along with the various gifts and abilities each might offer to those who summoned them. Each demon had a specific seal that was to be cast in a specific metal.

Finn had scoured the list three times over before she'd settled on the demon who would best suit her need: Marbas. He was a President of Hell, which meant that his seal should be cast in pure mercury.

That afternoon, Finn paced circles around Kieran's little apartment while the doctor did his examination. The prognosis hadn't changed. If anything, Kieran's condition was worse. Doctor Gregory patted Finn on the head and told her that he knew this was difficult, but he couldn't work miracles. Finn nodded and thanked him and said she understood.

When he was packing up, she stole the thermometer from his bag. Doctor Gregory was useful for one thing after all.

As the distant church bells began to chime for midnight, Finn knelt in the center of her summoning circle. She'd etched Marbas's seal into a small plate, scratching the lines to form deep

grooves in the clay. Now, she snapped the glass thermometer in half and poured its contents into the mold, careful not to spill a single drop of the precious mercury. Slowly, the metal flowed to fill the shape.

She rubbed the lard on her temples. She held her fire poker. She opened her stolen spell book, and she began the recitation in Latin.

And she knew, all the while, that no demon would appear. Perhaps this was why Finn hadn't fussed too much over finding the proper materials. Perhaps, after this, when she staggered home crying like the wretched thing she was, it would soothe her to be able to blame her own substitutions. To know that she'd done something wrong. This was *her* fault. *Her* failure. If she'd only followed the instructions correctly, if she'd only performed the spell better, if she'd *been* better, then perhaps Kieran would live. She was pathetic. The Latin words sounded ridiculous in her mouth. Why was she even bothering? You didn't change every ingredient in a recipe and still expect it to turn out a decent cake.

She knew the summoning ritual wouldn't work, but she tried it anyway. And this, apparently, was the key.

"Do you really think I care about lions' skins or rooster blood?" the demon asked when he did, in fact, appear. He was standing inside the triangle in the dirt, just as the book had promised. "I've seen far too many pampered men of fortune follow a spell book to the letter. But they don't put any real *fire* behind it. So what's even the damn point?"

The demon had arrived as a column of smoke at first, then formed into the shape of a lion, then formed into something like a man. Finn couldn't look directly at the man's eyes, though she could feel his burning gaze as he studied her.

“But you have fire aplenty, don’t you?” the demon said after a moment. “You’re desperate.”

In the end, it wasn’t the lard on her temples, or the botched Latin recitations, or the seal cast in mercury that had persuaded Marbas to answer her call. It was her desperation.

“Are you frightened?” the demon asked her.

“Not of you,” Finn said. It wasn’t even a lie. However frightening this demon might be, it was nothing compared to the future she was facing otherwise: Kieran in an early grave and Finn somehow expected to live the rest of her life without him. Kieran, who was her last remaining family. Kieran, who was four years her elder but gentler, softer. Kieran, who Finn was meant to protect.

“Tell me what you seek,” the demon said.

The grimoire had described several abilities of the demon Marbas, including this: *He causeth Diseases, and he cureth them.* This was why Finn had chosen this particular demon from the list of seventy-two. There was a Disease she needed cureth-ed.

After she’d laid out her cause in a shaking voice, the demon said, “All right. Easy.”

Finn wasn’t sure how to reply to this. “Is it?”

“Of course. I can remove the illness from your brother and allow him to live a long, happy life. But it will cost you. Dearly.”

“I thought you said it was easy,” Finn said.

“It *is* easy. It isn’t free.”

Finn thought the demon would take her that night, at the moment she signed the contract. He didn’t. When the deal was finished, Marbas only smiled, though the smile didn’t touch those burning eyes.

“We’ll see you again soon,” he said, and he was gone.

After Finn had hastily cleaned up all the evidence of her deed

and closed up the Pendletons' barn, she raced across town. She let herself into Kieran's apartment. Kieran was sitting up in bed, breathing deeply for the first time in weeks. His cheeks were pink, but this wasn't the flush of fever. This was the flush of *life*.

The next morning, Doctor Gregory called his recovery a miracle. Perhaps it was, but not one from God. Only Finn knew how her brother had really been cured.

And for six years now, she's been waiting to pay the price for it. Biding her time. Drifting through her life. Trying not to form attachments, trying not to care too much, because what was the point when the demon might drag her off to hell at any moment? But the days stretched on, and the years stretched on, and she's still drifting, still waiting for the end.

It's almost funny, Finn thinks, that she, Remy, and Cas have found themselves aboard a ship called the *Memento Mori*. All humans should remember they will die, but Finn is more acutely aware than most. And Cas Sterling—with his prophetic visions of deaths that are to come—can surely never forget it.

Cas has foreseen Finn's death twice now, which means the death is coming soon. Finn tries to convince the others she's made peace with her fate, but they don't believe her. She's not sure she believes it herself. She tries to convince them all anyway.

It's better this way, safer, to keep them at a remove. This is what she tells herself. This is what she wants to be true.

When the time comes for Finn to die, she won't drag her friends down with her.

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All morning, they've waited for the fog to lift, and all morning, it's only grown denser. By noon, the *Memento Mori* is sailing slowly

through a heavy white cloud, a veil blocking out the rest of the world. Nearly the entire crew is on watch. The watches typically alternate, so that only half the sailors are working at any given time. Those on duty will handle any number of shipboard tasks: taking in sails, washing the decks, coiling up loose rigging.

Today, they've been tasked with *only* watching. All hands are stationed aloft or at the ship's rails, peering off into the mist, eyes peeled for . . . something.

Finn doesn't say it, but she doubts they're going to find their mark when they can barely see a dozen yards in any direction. The *Mori* has been sailing slow circles in this region for nearly three days with nothing to show for it. The mood is bleak.

"We're wasting time," Remy mutters, as she's been muttering all day. "Smith had these coordinates for god knows how long before *we* got ahold of them. His men have probably already come and gone. We need to be getting ahead of him—not chasing down leads he discovered weeks ago."

She and Finn are posted near the ship's bow. Finn is squinting out at the fog, just as she's been ordered. But Remy is sitting with her back against the rail, research journal open in her lap, scribbling angry marks in the margins of her own notes. The damp air has left her hair curlier than ever, dark ringlets that seem to escape no matter how tightly Remy tries to tie them out of her face.

"What other leads do we have to chase?" Finn asks her.

"I'm . . . working on some theories," Remy says, which means she doesn't have any leads at all. "But I can't do much when we don't have any new information. And we're not going to *get* new information by drifting around in the middle of nowhere. The coordinates were a fine idea, sure—but I'd say we've hit a dead end."

Seven days ago, when Finn and the others had broken into—and then out of—the Eden Theological Seminary, Finn had copied down the set of coordinates from inside a summoning circle in the Reverend John Smith’s office. She had no idea what they might point to—only that the Order of Lazarus had gone to great lengths to acquire them. When she, Remy, and Cas sat down with the captain afterward and presented him with the numbers, the captain set an immediate course.

But plotting the coordinates on a map is one thing. Sailing to their precise location on the open sea turns out to be a different beast altogether. The coordinates are somewhere over Georges Bank, an area more than a hundred miles east of Cape Cod where the seafloor is only a few dozen fathoms down. There are no other landmarks here. Finn knows very little about nautical navigation, and the process is tedious. It involves a sextant, a chronometer, and a procedure called “shooting the sun.” It involves Captain Hobbes and his first mate, Kit, arguing over a dog-eared copy of Nathaniel Bowditch’s *New American Practical Navigator*. It involves a lot of complicated math that seems to baffle even Remy, which means Finn doesn’t have a hope in hell of following it.

Kit insists they’re narrowing in on their target. But she can’t “shoot the sun” if she can’t *see* the sun, so the impermeable fog has tipped her navigation into guesswork. And it doesn’t help that they still don’t even know what they’re out here looking for.

“We ought to be heading back toward shore,” Remy is saying. “At this point, we’re only putting off the inevitable. I don’t see why the captain won’t give this up.”

Finn startles as a figure swings down from the ladder of rigging beside her.

“You’re going to get strung up for mutiny, talking like that,”

Immortal Gabe says as he balances on the rail. With his stocky build and long, windswept hair, he might cut an imposing figure, but Finn knows he's a sentimental sap at heart.

Remy frowns up at him. "Has the captain really strung people up for mutiny before?"

"Of course not," Gabe says. "Have you met the man? He'd probably invite the mutineers for a stern talking-to and have them begging for forgiveness by the end." He jumps down from the railing, narrowly missing Remy's knee when he lands on the deck. "Aren't you meant to be looking out like the rest of us?"

Remy gives an irritated huff and closes her journal. Her cheeks are flushed pink. "I'm not asking for *mutiny*," she says as she stands and faces the water. "I'm just asking that he recognize the urgency of the situation. His partner may be able to hide out forever while we figure out what to do about the Order. But some of us don't have that time."

"We've only been out here a few days," Gabe points out. "What's so urgent?"

Finn is very, very careful to keep her face blank, though she can feel Remy staring at her. The silence stretches. Finn wishes Cas were here to break it. But he's belowdecks somewhere with Striker, practicing meditation, of all things.

"Remy's just eager to get home to her mother," Finn says.

"Well, damn," Gabe says. "Can't fault you for that, I suppose. First lesson of seafaring life: Never trust the winds to get you home by curfew." He goes on for a few minutes about the whims of nature, and promises Remy they can send a letter to her mother when they next make port.

After Gabe wanders away, Remy rounds on Finn. "We'll have to tell them at some point."

“No,” Finn says. “We won’t.”

“We need their help! *You* need—”

“There is no *help*,” Finn hisses, voice low. She can’t shake the sense of too many ears around them. “Don’t start this again, please.”

“What harm is there in asking?” Remy hisses back.

“What *harm*?”

“Yes! What do you have to lose?”

“Maybe I just don’t want the rest of them looking at me like—*that*”—she sees Remy try to scrub the pity from her own face, but it’s too late—“when they find out I sold my soul to a bloody demon.”

“Ah, the bloody demon. My monthly nemesis,” Cas says, and Remy and Finn both whirl to find him standing just behind them.

“In this case, we’re talking about a literal demon,” Remy says.

“Hmm.” Cas wedges himself between them and props his elbows on the rail. “Could we argue that menstruation *is* a literal demon, though?”

“No,” Remy says. “No, we could not argue that. What are you doing up here, anyway? I thought you were working with Striker.”

“She gave me the afternoon off.”

Remy and Finn exchange a wary look. “Because you’re making such good progress?” Remy asks.

“No, because I asked too many questions, apparently, and she got testy and kicked a box.”

“Jesus,” Finn murmurs.

“Not *at* me,” Cas clarifies. “She just kicked it. Can’t really blame her. I was about ready to kick something as well.”

He says this lightly, as if it’s a joke, but Finn suspects his frustration is perfectly real. She squints at him. Same easy expression,

same emphatically arched eyebrows, but there's something odd about his face that Finn can't place.

"Why were you asking so many questions?" Remy asks.

"I'm just trying to get it right! Striker keeps describing what it's supposed to feel like, and it *doesn't* feel like that, and I don't know what I'm doing wrong."

"I don't know that you can meditate *wrong*," Remy tells him.

"Clearly you can!" Cas throws up his hands; the easy expression was indeed a sham. "And nothing we've tried is working, because I still can't talk to Death, or tap into our *shared spiritual channel*, or whatever Kit called it—"

"You just have to keep practicing," Remy cuts in. She probably thinks she's being encouraging, though Finn can hear the edge to her voice. "No one expects you to be an expert immediately. Do you want me to come sit with you below while you keep working?"

"No. I want to claw my brain out of my own skull and throw it in the ocean."

He sighs and rubs a hand over his face, wincing a little as it brushes the half-healed scar running down one side of it. The wound left by Smith's knife back at Eden stretches from brow to cheekbone. Cas has been styling his cropped chestnut hair in a way that casts the scar mostly in shadow, but it's still conspicuous, a puckered red line against his fair skin.

"Sorry," Cas says. "I'm fine. You're right. I'll keep practicing. I just need a break for a while."

He does look exhausted. Finn isn't sure how much he's been sleeping these days—or *if* he's been sleeping. He's rarely in the fo'c'sle when Finn retires for the night, and he's rarely there when she wakes in the morning, either.

She realizes suddenly what's different about his face.

“Your stitches are out,” Finn says.

“Oh. Right.” Cas rubs absently at the wound. “Leo took them out this morning. It wasn’t nearly as bad as getting them put in, but it was still pretty bad. I don’t recommend it. Never get stabbed.”

Finn snorts. “Decent advice.”

“I’ve had a thought,” Cas says, clearly eager to shift subjects. “Maybe a bad thought. But the captain said there’s a whole slew of Deaths out there, right? His Death is only one of them. We think my visions come from a connection with *a* reaper, sure. But how do we know it’s the right reaper?”

This seems to give Remy pause. Her lips purse in a way that brings out the dimples in the centers of her round cheeks. “That . . . is a very good question,” she says in a tone that means she’s annoyed she hadn’t thought of it first.

She isn’t looking at Cas, though. She’s turned to where Captain Hobbes has been making his rounds, shoulders back, eyes keen. Finn hadn’t been certain the captain was listening to their conversation, but he pauses now, considering. The eerie mist has left a sheen on his deep brown skin.

“When you’ve witnessed these deaths in your visions,” Captain Hobbes asks Cas slowly, “where have the deaths taken place?”

Cas has straightened a little. “Near Windover, mostly. Or the towns around it. Except for—”

His gaze flicks to Finn. She presents him with a warning glare before he can tell the captain about his most recent vision, which took place on Mount Desert Island and showed the demon killing Finn. Again.

“That’s it,” Cas amends. “Just around Windover.”

“And where is Windover?” the captain asks.

“Massachusetts, on the North Shore,” Remy says. “Near the Lynn Woods.”

In his usual measured tone, the captain says, “The reaper with whom you’re connected is my partner.”

He states it as fact—like this only confirms something he already suspected was true. He walks away before they can ask how he’s so certain. Finn wonders at the captain’s stoic veneer. This has to be strange for him: His partner of nearly two decades is missing, and the only person who might be able to find him is a jittery youth who stowed away on his ship a week ago and never left. Whatever frustration Remy might be feeling about Cas’s lack of progress in contacting Death, it’s surely nothing compared to the captain’s.

Captain Hobbes’s composure is impressive. If Remy were missing, even for a day, Finn would be losing her mind.

They all watch the captain’s retreating back as he resumes his rounds.

“I guess that settles that,” Cas says. He turns to look out at the sea around them. “Have we found anything yet?”

Remy gives a peevish sigh. “Don’t you think we would’ve said if we had? We can’t see anything in this damned fog.”

“Maybe the fog itself is what the coordinates are supposed to lead to,” Cas says. “Maybe we’ve already found it.”

“Why would Smith want coordinates that lead to a patch of fog?” Remy asks.

The wall of white around them is disorienting; Finn has been staring at it for too long. Her vision has started to go spotty, flecked with red.

“I don’t know,” Cas is saying. “I was hoping *you’d* know. But this weather feels strange, doesn’t it? Not natural. Or maybe the

fog is . . . I don't know . . . hiding whatever it is we're supposed to find."

"It's certainly doing that," Remy says.

That speck of red isn't a trick of Finn's eyes.

"Do you see that?" she breathes.

It's flashing in and out of view, appearing and disappearing as the waves overtake it. But there it is again, right at the surface of the water, barely visible through the white. Finn keeps her eyes fixed on the spot as Remy and Cas both race to tell the captain and the others. She's terrified that if she looks away, the single spot of color will vanish forever.

A tattered flag, dangling limply on its staff. If the mast holding it were two feet shorter, or if the tides were higher, the flag would be hidden completely underwater.

The coordinates have led them to a shipwreck.