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Unlimited

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Cashore

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Jane, Unlimited

KRISTIN
CASHORE



KATHY DAWSON BOOKS

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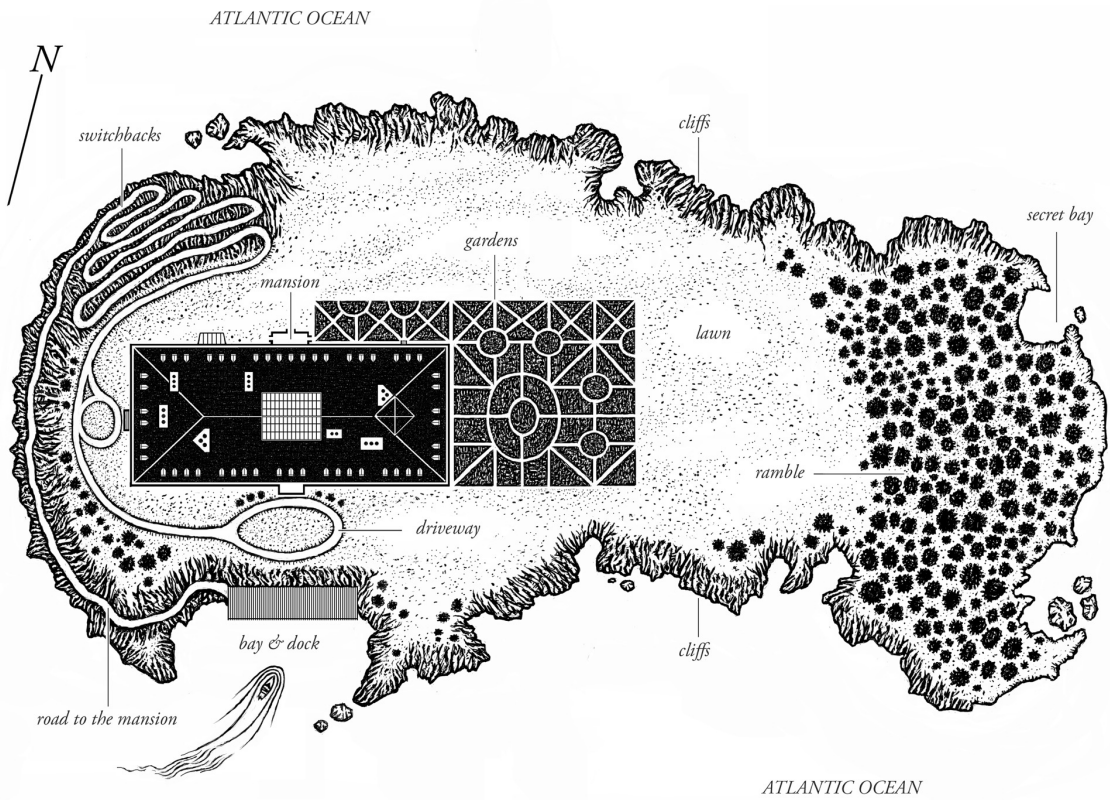
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Version_1

*for all aunts,
especially mine*

TU REVIENS

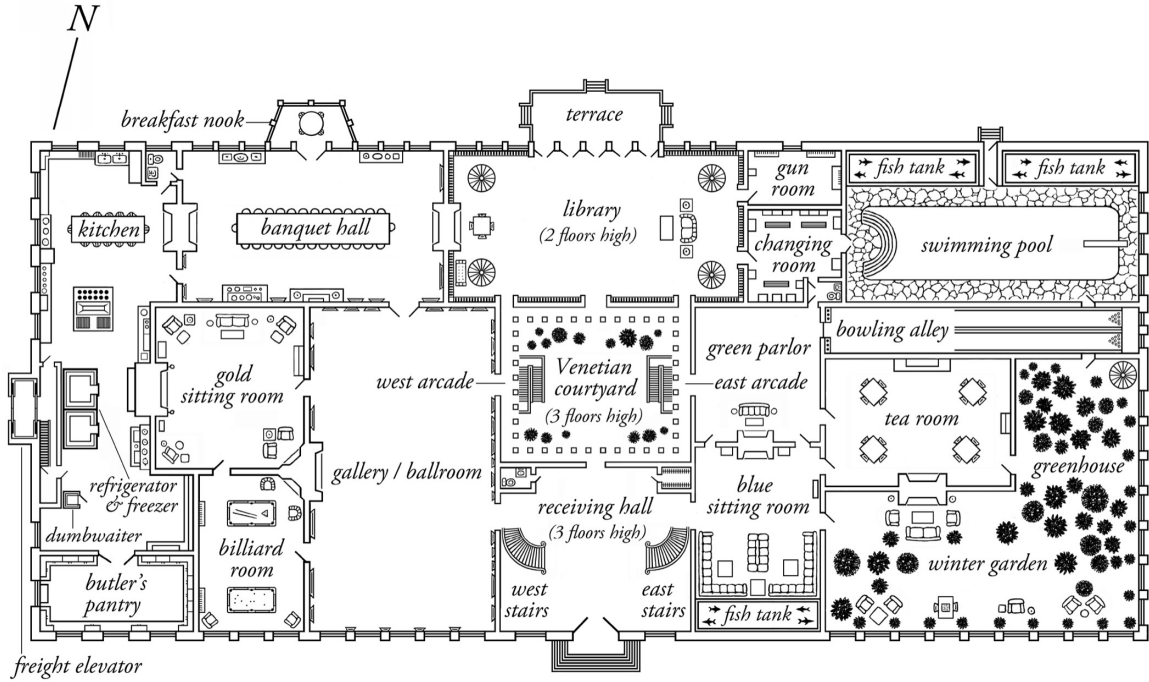
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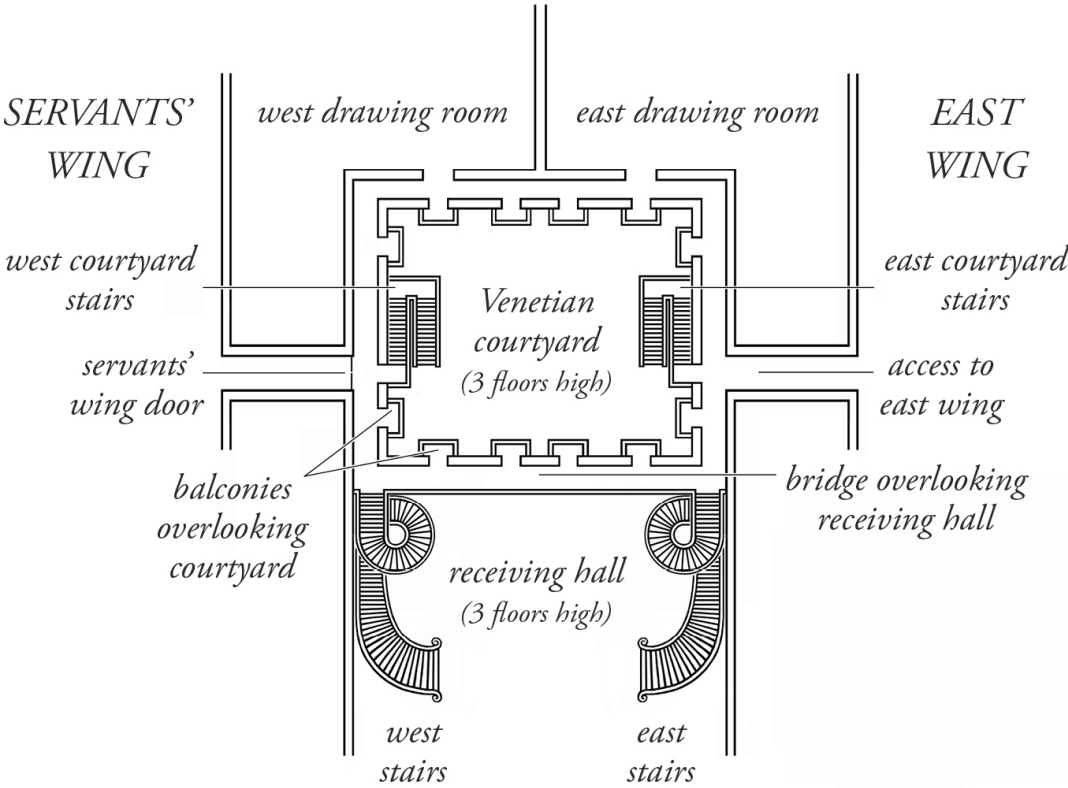
TU REVIENS

Mansion Interior

Ground Floor



Third Floor Detail



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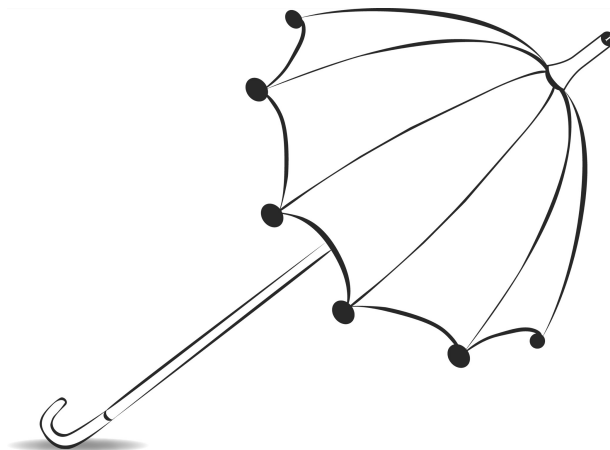
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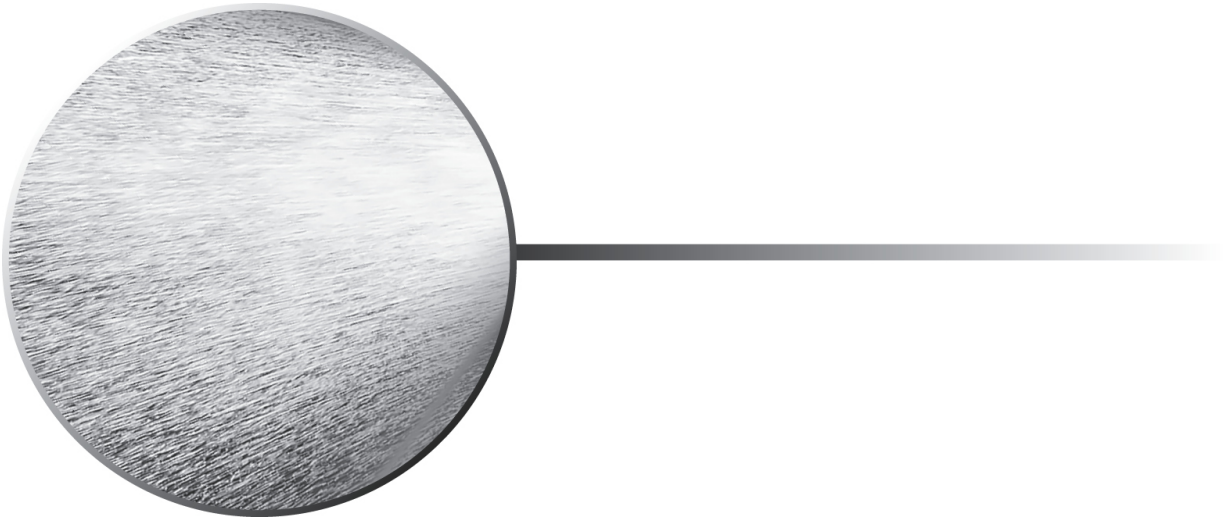
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Tu Reviens

The house on the cliff looks like a ship disappearing into fog. The spire a mast, the trees whipping against its base, the waves of a ravaging sea.

Or maybe Jane just has ships on the brain, seeing as she's inside one that's doing all it can to consume her attention. A wave rolls the yacht, catches her off balance, and she sits down, triumphantly landing in the general vicinity of where she aimed. Another wave propels her, in slow motion, against the yacht's lounge window.

"I haven't spent a lot of time in boats. I guess you get used to it," she says.

Jane's traveling companion, Kiran, lies on her back in the lounge's long window seat, her eyes closed. Kiran isn't seasick. She's bored. She gives no indication of having heard.

"I guess my aunt Magnolia must have gotten used to it," says Jane.

"My family makes me want to die," Kiran says. "I hope we drown." This yacht is named *The Kiran*.

Through the lounge window, Jane can see Patrick, who captains the yacht, on deck in the rain, drenched, trying to catch a cleat with a rope. He's young, maybe early twenties, a white guy with short dark hair, a deep winter tan, and blue eyes so bright that Jane had noticed them immediately. Someone was apparently supposed to be waiting on the dock to help him but didn't show up.

"Kiran?" says Jane. "Should we maybe help Patrick?"

"Help him with what?"

"I don't know. Docking the boat?"

"Are you kidding?" says Kiran. "Patrick can do everything by himself."

"Everything?"

"Patrick doesn't need anybody," Kiran says. "Ever."

"Okay," Jane says, wondering if this is an expression of Kiran's general, equal-opportunity sarcasm, or if she's got some specific problem with Patrick. It can be hard to tell with someone like Kiran.

Outside, Patrick catches the cleat successfully, then, his body taut, pulls on the rope, arm over arm, bringing the yacht up against the dock. It's kind of impressive. Maybe he *can* do everything.

"Who is Patrick, anyway?"

“Patrick Yellan,” Kiran says. “Ravi and I grew up with him. He works for my father. So does his little sister, Ivy. So did his parents, until a couple years ago. They died in a car accident, in France. Sorry,” she adds, with a glance at Jane. “I don’t mean to remind you of travel accidents.”

“It’s okay,” Jane says automatically, filing these names and facts away with the other information she’s collected. Kiran is British American on her father’s side and British Indian on her mother’s, though her parents are divorced and her father’s now remarried. Also, she’s revoltingly wealthy. Jane’s never had a friend before who grew up with her own servants. *Is Kiran my friend?* thinks Jane. *Acquaintance? Maybe my mentor?* Not now, maybe, but in the past. Kiran, four years older than Jane, went to college in Jane’s hometown and tutored Jane in writing while she was in high school.

Ravi is Kiran’s twin brother, Jane remembers. Jane’s never met Ravi, but he visited Kiran sometimes in college. Her tutoring sessions had been different when Ravi was in town. Kiran would arrive late, her face alight, her manner less strict, less intense.

“Is Patrick in charge of transportation to and from the island?” asks Jane.

“I guess,” Kiran says. “Partly, anyway. A couple other people chip in too.”

“Do Patrick and his sister live at the house?”

“*Everyone* lives at the house.”

“So, is it nice to come home?” asks Jane. “Because you get to see the friends you grew up with?”

Jane is fishing, because she’s trying to figure out how these servant relationships work, when one person is so rich.

Kiran doesn’t answer right away, just stares straight ahead, her mouth tight, until Jane begins to wonder if her question was rude.

Then Kiran says, “I guess there was a time when seeing Patrick again, after a long absence, made me feel like I was coming home.”

“Oh,” says Jane. “But . . . not anymore?”

“Eh, it’s complicated,” Kiran says, with a short sigh. “Let’s not talk about it now. He could hear us.”

Patrick would have to have superpowers to hear a word of this conversation, but Jane recognizes a dismissal when she hears one. Peering through the window, she can make out the shapes of other boats, big ones, little ones, vaguely, through the downpour, docked in this tiny bay. Kiran’s father, Octavian Thrash IV, owns those boats, this bay, this island off the eastern seaboard, those waving trees, that massive house far above. “How

will we get to the house?" she asks. She can see no road. "Will we ascend through the rain, like scuba divers?"

Kiran snorts, then surprises Jane by shooting her a small, approving smile. "By car," she says, not elaborating. "I've missed the funny way you talk. Your clothes too."

Jane's gold zigzag shirt and wine-colored corduroys make her look like one of Aunt Magnolia's sea creatures. A maroon clownfish, a coral grouper. Jane supposes she never dresses without thinking of Aunt Magnolia.

"Okay," she says. "And when's the spring gala?"

"I don't remember," Kiran says. "The day after tomorrow? The day after that? It's probably on the weekend."

There's a gala for every season at Octavian Thrash IV's house on the sea. That's the reason for Kiran's trip. She's come home for the spring gala.

And this time, for some inexplicable reason, she's invited Jane along, even though, until last week, Jane hadn't seen Kiran since Kiran's graduation almost a year ago. Kiran had stumbled upon Jane at her job in the campus bookshop, because, like many visiting alumni, Kiran had remembered it had a public restroom. Trapped behind the information desk, Jane had seen her coming, an enormous handbag on her arm and a harassed expression on her face. With any other ghost from her past, Jane's first instinct would have been to turn her shoulder, hide behind her dark curls, and make herself into a statue. But the sight of Kiran Thrash brought Jane instantly to the strange promise Aunt Magnolia had extracted from her before she'd gone away on that last photography expedition.

Aunt Magnolia had made Jane promise never to turn down an invitation to Kiran's family estate.

"Hey," Kiran had said that day, stopping at the desk. "Janie. It's you." She'd glanced at Jane's arm, where tattooed jellyfish tentacles peeked out from under her shirtsleeve.

"Kiran," said Jane, instinctively touching her arm. The tattoo was new. "Hi."

"Do you go to school here now?"

"No," Jane said. "I dropped out. I'm taking some time. I work here. In the bookstore," she added, which was obvious, and not something she wanted to talk about. But she'd learned to chat, to fill the silence with false enthusiasm, and to offer her failures as conversational bait, because sometimes it enabled her to head off the very next question Kiran asked.

"How's your aunt?"

It was like muscle memory now, this steeling herself. "She died."

"Oh," Kiran said, narrowing her eyes. "No wonder you dropped out."

It was less friendly, but easier to bear up against, than the usual reaction, because it brought a flare of annoyance into Jane's throat. "I might have dropped out anyway. I hated it. The other students were snobs and I was failing biology."

"Professor Greenhut?" Kiran asked, ignoring the dig about snobs.

"Yeah."

"Known school-wide as a pretentious douche," said Kiran.

Against her better instincts, Jane smiled. Greenhut assumed his students already knew a lot about biology, and maybe the assumption was just, because no one else in the class had seemed to struggle like Jane had. Aunt Magnolia, who'd been an adjunct marine biology teacher, had spluttered over the syllabus. "Greenhut's a superior, self-righteous donkey," she'd said in disgust, then added, "No offense to Eeyore. Greenhut is trying to weed out students who didn't go to fancy high schools."

"It's working," Jane had said.

"Maybe you'll go to school somewhere else," Kiran said. "Somewhere far away. It's healthy to get away from home."

"Yeah. Maybe." Jane had always lived in that small, upstate university town, surrounded by students whenever she'd stepped outside. Tuition was free for faculty kids. But maybe Kiran was right, maybe Jane should have chosen a different school. A state school, where the other students wouldn't have made her feel so . . . provincial. These students came from all over the world and they had so much money. Jane's roommate had spent her summer in the French countryside and, once she'd learned that Jane had taken high school French, wanted to have conversations in French about towns Jane had never heard of and cheeses she'd never eaten.

How disorienting it had been to attend the classes she'd watched enviously through the windows her whole life, and wind up miserable. In the end, she'd spent most nights with Aunt Magnolia instead of in her dorm room, feeling like she was living a parallel version of her own life, one that didn't fit her skin. Like she was a puzzle piece from the wrong puzzle.

"You could be an art major somewhere," Kiran said then. "Didn't you used to make cool umbrellas?"

"They're not art," said Jane. "They're umbrellas. Messy ones."

"Okay," said Kiran, "whatever. Where do you live now?"

"In an apartment in town."

"The same apartment you lived in with your aunt?"

"No," Jane said, injecting it with a touch of sarcasm that was probably wasted on Kiran. Of course she hadn't been able to afford that same apartment. "I live with three grad students."

"How do you like it?"

“It’s fine,” Jane lied. Her apartment-mates were a lot older than she and too pompously focused on their abstruse intellectual pursuits to bother with cooking, or cleaning, or showering. It was like living with self-important Owl from *Winnie-the-Pooh*, except that their hygiene was worse and there were three of them. Jane was hardly ever alone there. Her bedroom was a glorified closet, not conducive to umbrella-making, which required space. It was hard to move around without poking herself on ribs. Sometimes she slept with a work in progress at the end of her bed.

“I liked your aunt,” Kiran said. “I liked you too,” she added, which was when Jane stopped thinking about herself and began to study Kiran, who had changed somehow since she’d last seen her. Kiran had used to move as if she were being pushed by at least four different urgent purposes at once.

“What’s brought you to town?” Jane asked Kiran.

Kiran shrugged, listless. “I was out driving.”

“Where are you living?”

“In the city apartment.”

The Thrashes’ city apartment was the top two floors of a Manhattan mansion overlooking Central Park, quite a distance away for someone who was just “out driving.”

“Though I’ve been called home to the island for the spring gala,” Kiran added. “And I may stay awhile. Octavian is probably in a mood.”

“Okay,” said Jane, trying to imagine having a gazillionaire father, on a private island, in a mood. “I hope you have a nice time.”

“What is that tattoo?” asked Kiran. “Is it a squid?”

“It’s a jellyfish.”

“Can I see it?”

The jellyfish sat on Jane’s upper arm, blue and gold, with thin blue tentacles and spiral arms in white and black reaching all the way down below her elbow. Jane often wore her shirtsleeves rolled up to show a glimpse of the tentacles because, secretly, she liked people to ask to see it. She pushed her sleeve up to the shoulder for Kiran.

Kiran gazed at the jellyfish with an unchanging expression. “Huh,” she said. “Did it hurt?”

“Yes,” said Jane. And she’d taken on an extra job as a waitress at a diner in town for three months to pay for it.

“It’s delicate,” said Kiran. “It’s beautiful, actually. Who designed it?”

“It’s based on a photo my aunt took,” said Jane through a flush of pleasure, “of a Pacific sea nettle jellyfish.”

“Did your aunt ever get to see your tattoo?”

“No.”

“Timing can be an asshole,” Kiran said. “Come get drinks.”

“What?” said Jane, startled. “Me?”
“After you get off work.”
“I’m underage.”
“So I’ll buy you a milkshake.”

* * *

That night, at the bar, Jane had explained to Kiran what it was like to budget for rent, food, and health insurance on a part-time bookstore salary; how she’d sometimes believe in absentminded moments that Aunt Magnolia was just away on another of her photography trips; about the detours she found herself taking to avoid the apartment building where they’d lived together. Jane didn’t mean to explain it all, but Kiran was from the time when life had made sense. Her presence was confusing. It just came out.

“Quit your job,” Kiran said.

“And live how?” Jane said, irritated. “Not everyone has Daddy’s bottomless credit card, you know.”

Kiran absorbed the dig with disinterest. “You just don’t seem very happy.”

“Happy!” said Jane, incredulous, then, as Kiran continued to sip her whiskey, seriously annoyed. “What’s your job, anyway?” she snapped.

“I don’t have a job.”

“Well, you don’t exactly seem happy either.”

Kiran surprised Jane by shouting a laugh. “I’ll drink to that,” she said, then threw back her drink, leaned over the bar, reached into a container of paper umbrellas, and selected one, blue and black to match Jane’s shirt and her tattoo tentacles. Opening it carefully, she twirled it between her fingers, then presented it to Jane.

“Protection,” Kiran announced.

“From what?” Jane asked, examining the umbrella’s delicate working interior.

“From bullshit,” said Kiran.

“Wow,” Jane said. “All this time, I could’ve been stopping bullshit with a cocktail umbrella?”

“It might only work for really small bullshit.”

“Thanks,” said Jane, starting to smile.

“Yeah, so, I don’t have a job,” Kiran said again, holding Jane’s eyes briefly, then looking away. “I apply for things now and then, but it never comes through, and I’ll be honest, I’m always kind of relieved.”

“What’s the problem? You have a degree. You had really good grades, didn’t you? Don’t you speak, like, seven languages?”

“You sound like my mother,” said Kiran, her voice more weary than annoyed. “And my father, and my brother, and my boyfriend, and every damn person I talk to, ever.”

“I was only asking.”

“It’s okay,” she said. “I’m a spoiled rich girl who has the privilege to mope around, feeling sorry for herself for being unemployed. I get it.”

It was funny, because those were Jane’s thoughts exactly. But now, because Kiran had said it, she resented it less. “Hello, don’t put bullshit in my mouth. I’m armed,” Jane said, brandishing her cocktail umbrella.

“You know what I liked about your aunt?” Kiran said. “She always seemed like she knew exactly what she was going to do next. She made you feel like that was possible, to know the right choice.”

Yes. Jane tried to respond, but the truth of it caught in her throat. *Aunt Magnolia*, she thought, choking on it.

Kiran observed Jane’s grief with dispassion.

“Quit your job and come home with me to Tu Reviens,” she said. “Stay awhile, as long as you like. Octavian won’t mind. Hell, he’ll buy your umbrella supplies. My boyfriend is there; you can meet him. My brother, Ravi, too. Come on. What’s keeping you here?”

Some people are so rich, they don’t even notice when they shame others. What value was there in all the deliberate, scrabbling care Jane put into her subsistence now, if a near-stranger’s indifferent invitation, born of boredom and a need to pee, made Jane more financially comfortable than she could make herself?

But it wasn’t possible to say no, because of Aunt Magnolia. The promise.

“Janie, sweetheart,” Aunt Magnolia had said when Jane had woken extra early one morning and found her aunt on the stool at the kitchen counter. “You’re awake.”

“You’re awake,” Jane had responded, because Jane was the insomniac in the family.

She’d balanced her hip on the edge of Aunt Magnolia’s stool so she could lean against her aunt’s side, close her eyes, and pretend she was still asleep. Aunt Magnolia had been tall, like Jane, and Jane had always fit well against her. Aunt Magnolia had put her cup of tea into Jane’s hands, closing both of Jane’s palms around its warmth.

“You remember your old writing tutor?” Aunt Magnolia had said. “Kiran Thrash?”

“Of course,” Jane had responded, taking a noisy slurp.

“Did she ever talk about her house?”

“The house with the French name? On the island her dad owns?”

“Tu Reviens,” Aunt Magnolia had said.

Jane had known enough French to translate this. “You return.”

“Exactly, darling,” Aunt Magnolia had said. “I want you to make me a promise.”

“Okay.”

“If anyone ever invites you to Tu Reviens,” she’d said, “promise me that you’ll go.”

“Okay,” Jane had said. “Um, *why?*”

“I’ve heard it’s a place of opportunity.”

“Aunt Magnolia,” Jane had said with a snort, putting her cup down to look into her aunt’s eyes. Her aunt had had a funny blue blotch staining the otherwise brown iris in one of her eyes, like a nebula, or a muddy star, with little spikes, spokes.

“Aunt Magnolia,” Jane had repeated. “What the hell are you talking about?”

Her aunt had chuckled, deep in her throat, then had given Jane a one-armed hug. “You know I get wild ideas sometimes.”

Aunt Magnolia had been one for sudden trips, like camping in some remote part of the Finger Lakes where overnights weren’t exactly permitted and where cell phones didn’t work. They would read books together by lantern light, listen to the moths throw themselves against the canvas of the tiny, glowing tent, then finally fall asleep to the sound of loons. And then a week later Aunt Magnolia might go off to Japan to photograph sharks. The images she brought back amazed Jane. It might be a photo of a shark, but what Jane saw was Aunt Magnolia and her camera, pressed in by water, silence, and cold, breathing compressed air, waiting for a visit from a creature that might as well be an alien, so strange were the inhabitants of the underwater world.

“*You’re wild*, Aunt Magnolia,” Jane had said. “And wonderful.”

“But I don’t ask you for many promises, do I?”

“No.”

“So promise me this one thing. Won’t you?”

“All right,” Jane had said, “fine. For you, I promise I won’t ever turn down an invitation to Tu Reviens. Why are you awake anyway?”

“Strange dreams,” she’d said. Then, a few days later, she’d left on an expedition to Antarctica, gotten caught too far from camp during a polar blizzard, and frozen to death.

Kiran’s invitation brought Aunt Magnolia near in a way that nothing else had in the four months since.

* * *

Tu Reviens. You return.

It's unsettling, to be so far from home—all her usual anxieties lifted, only to be replaced with new ones. Does Kiran's father even know Jane is coming? What if she's just a third wheel once Kiran meets up with her boyfriend? How does a person act around people who own yachts and private islands?

Standing in the lounge of *The Kiran*, the rain falling in sheets outside, Jane tells herself to breathe, slow, deep, and even, the way Aunt Magnolia taught her. "It'll help you when you learn to scuba dive," Aunt Magnolia had used to say when Jane was tiny—five, six, seven—though somehow, those scuba lessons had never materialized.

In, Jane thinks, focusing on her expanding belly. *Out*, feeling her torso flatten. Jane glances at the house, floating above them in the storm. *Aunt Magnolia never worried. She just went.*

Jane suddenly feels like a character in a novel by Edith Wharton or the Brontës. *I'm a young woman of reduced circumstances, with no family and no prospects, invited by a wealthy family to their glamorous estate. Could this be my heroic journey?*

She'll need to choose an umbrella appropriate for a heroic journey. Will Kiran think it's weird? Can she find one that isn't embarrassing? Teetering across the lounge floor, opening one of her crates, Jane lights upon the right choice instantly. The petite umbrella's satin canopy alternates deep brown with a coppery rose. The brass fittings are made of antique parts, but strong. She could impale someone on the ferrule.

Jane opens it. The runners squeak and the curve of the ribs is warped, the fabric unevenly stretched.

It's just a stupid, lopsided umbrella, Jane thinks to herself, suddenly blinking back tears. *Aunt Magnolia? Why am I here?*

Patrick sticks his head into the lounge. His bright eyes flash at Jane, then touch Kiran. "We're docked, Kir," he says, "and the car is here."

Kiran sits up, not looking at him. Then, when he returns to the deck, she watches him through the window as he lifts wooden crates onto his shoulder and carries them onto the dock. His eyes catch hers and she looks away. "Leave your stuff," she says to Jane dismissively. "Patrick will bring it up later."

"Okay," Jane says. Something is definitely up with Patrick and Kiran. "Who's your boyfriend, anyway?"

"His name is Colin. He works with my brother. You'll meet him. Why?"

"Just wondering."

“Did you make that umbrella?” asks Kiran.

“Yes.”

“I thought so. It makes me think of you.”

Of course it does. It’s homemade and funny-looking.

Kiran and Jane step into the rain. Patrick holds a steadying hand out to Jane and she grabs his forearm by accident. He is soaked to the skin.

Patrick Yellan, Jane notices, has beautiful forearms.

“Watch your step,” he says in her ear.

* * *

Once on land, Kiran and Jane scurry toward an enormous black car on the dock. “Patrick’s the one who asked me to come home for the gala,” Kiran shouts through the rain.

“What?” says Jane, flustered. She’s trying to shield Kiran with her umbrella, which sends a rivulet of icy water down the canopy straight into the neck of her own shirt. “Really? Why?”

“Who the hell knows? He told me he has a confession to make. He’s always announcing shit like that, then he has nothing to say.”

“Are you . . . good friends?”

“Stop trying to keep me dry,” Kiran says, reaching for the car door. “It’s only making both of us more wet.”

There is, it turns out, a road that starts at the bay, continues clockwise around the base of the island, then enters a series of hairpin turns that climb the sheer cliffs gradually.

It’s not a soothing drive in a Rolls-Royce in the rain; the car seems too big to take the turns without plummeting off the edge. The driver has the facial expression of a bulldog and she’s driving like she’s got a train to catch. Steel-haired and steel-eyed, pale-skinned with high cheekbones, she’s wearing black yoga clothes and an apron with cooking stains. She stares at Jane in the rearview mirror. Jane shivers, tilting her head so her boisterous curls obscure her face.

“Are we short-staffed again, Mrs. Vanders?” Kiran asks. “You’re wearing an apron.”

“A handful of guests just arrived unannounced,” says Mrs. Vanders. “The spring gala is the day after tomorrow. Cook is having hysterics.”

Kiran throws her head against the back of the seat and closes her eyes. “What guests?”

“Phoebe and Philip Okada,” Mrs. Vanders says. “Lucy St. George—”

“My brother makes me want to die,” Kiran says, interrupting.