

RANSOM RIGGS



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THE THIRD NOVEL OF

MISS PEREGRINE'S

PECULIAR CHILDREN



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THE THIRD NOVEL OF  
MISS PEREGRINE'S  
PECULIAR CHILDREN

BY RANSOM RIGGS

  
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FOR MY MOTHER



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The ends of the earth, the depths of  
the sea, the darkness of time,  
you have chosen all three.

—E. M. Forster



## GLOSSARY OF PECULIAR TERMS



**PECULIARS** The hidden branch of any species, human or animal, that is blessed—and cursed—with supernormal traits. Respected in ancient times, feared and persecuted more recently, peculiars are outcasts who live in the shadows.



LOOP A limited area in which a single day is repeated endlessly. Created and maintained by ymbrynes to shelter their peculiar wards from danger, loops delay indefinitely the aging of their inhabitants. But loop dwellers are by no means immortal: each day they “skip” is a debt that’s banked away, to be repaid in gruesome rapid aging should they linger too long outside their loop.



YMBRYNES The shape-shifting matriarchs of peculiardom. They can change into birds at will, manipulate time, and are charged with the protection of peculiar children. In the Old Peculiar language, the word *ymbryne* (pronounced *imm-brinn*) means “revolution” or “circuit.”



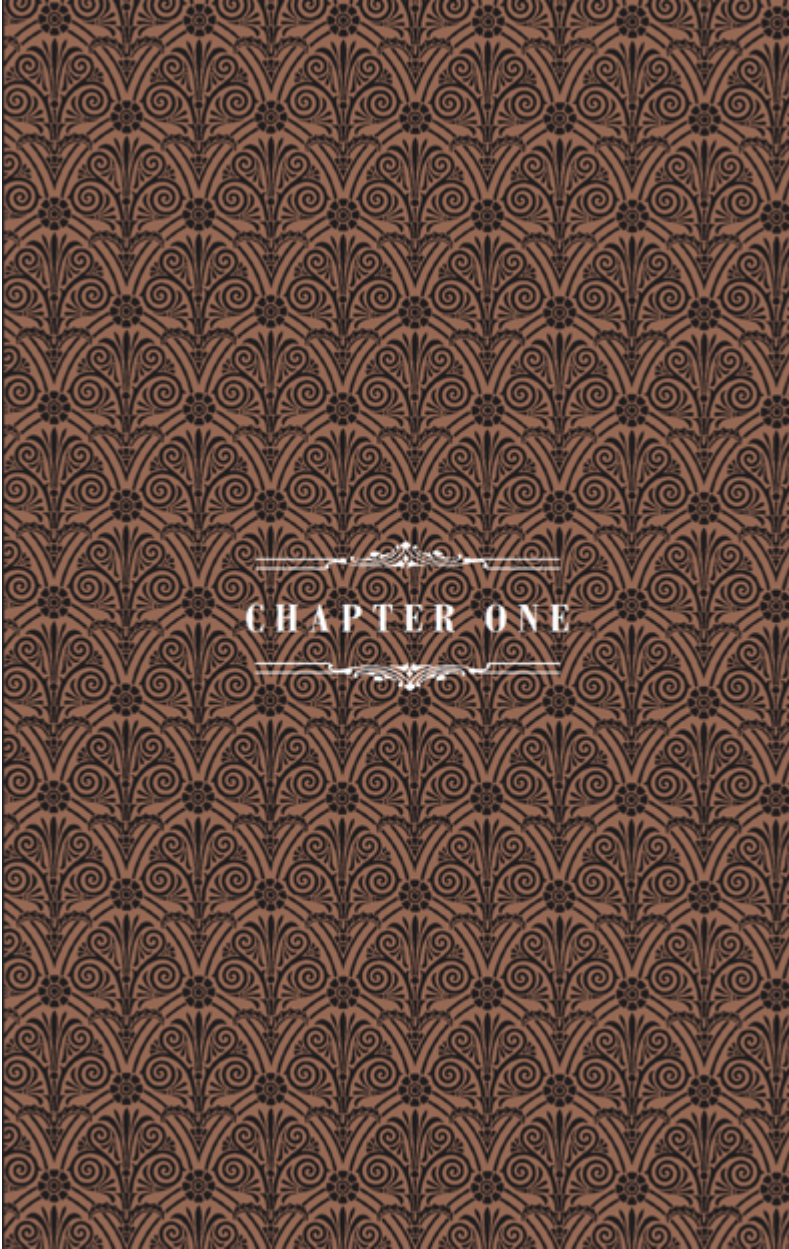


**HOLLOWGAST** Monstrous ex-peculiaris who hunger for the souls of their former brethren. Corpse-like and withered except for their muscular jaws, within which they harbor powerful, tentacle-like tongues. Especially dangerous because they're invisible to all but a few peculiaris, of whom Jacob Portman is the only one known alive. (His late grandfather was another.) Until a recent innovation enhanced their abilities, hollows could not enter loops, which is why loops have been the preferred home of peculiaris.



**WIGHTS** A hollowgast that consumes enough peculiar souls becomes a wight, which are visible to all and resemble normals in every way but one: their pupil-less, perfectly white eyes. Brilliant, manipulative, and skilled at

blending in, wights have spent years infiltrating both normal and peculiar society. They could be anyone: your grocer, your bus driver, your psychiatrist. They've waged a long campaign of murder, fear, and kidnapping against peculiars, using hollowgast as their monstrous assassins. Their ultimate goal is to exact revenge upon, and take control of, peculiardom.



The monster stood not a tongue's length away, eyes fixed on our throats, shriveled brain crowded with fantasies of murder. Its hunger for us charged the air. Hollows are born lusting after the souls of peculiars, and here we were arrayed before it like a buffet: bite-sized Addison bravely standing his ground at my feet, tail at attention; Emma moored against me for support, still too dazed from the impact to make more than a match flame; our backs laddered against the wrecked phone booth. Beyond our grim circle, the underground station looked like the aftermath of a nightclub bombing. Steam from burst pipes shrieked forth in ghostly curtains. Splintered monitors swung broken-necked from the ceiling. A sea of shattered glass spread all the way to the tracks, flashing in the hysterical strobe of red emergency lights like an acre-wide disco ball. We were boxed in, a wall hard to one side and glass shin-deep on the other, two strides from a creature whose only natural instinct was to disassemble us—and yet it made no move to close the gap. It seemed rooted to the floor, swaying on its heels like a drunk or a sleepwalker, death's head drooping, its tongues a nest of snakes I'd charmed to sleep.

Me. I'd done that. Jacob Portman, boy nothing from Nowhere, Florida. It was not currently murdering us—this horror made of gathered dark and nightmares harvested from sleeping children—because I had asked it not to. Told it in no uncertain terms to unwrap its tongue from around my neck. *Back off*, I'd said. *Stand*, I'd said—in a language made of sounds I hadn't known a human mouth could make—and miraculously it had, eyes challenging me while its body obeyed. Somehow I had tamed the nightmare, cast a spell over it. But sleeping things wake and spells wear off, especially those cast by accident, and beneath its placid surface I could feel the hollow boiling.

Addison nudged my calf with his nose. “More wights will be coming. Will the beast let us pass?”

“Talk to it again,” Emma said, her voice woozy and vague. “Tell it to sod off.”

I searched for the words, but they'd gotten shy. “I don't know how.”

“You did a minute ago,” Addison said. “It sounded like there was a demon inside you.”

A minute ago, before I’d known I could do it, the words had been right there on my tongue, just waiting to be spoken. Now that I wanted them back, it was like trying to catch fish with bare hands. Every time I touched one, it slipped out of my grasp.

*Go away!* I shouted.

The words came in English. The hollow didn’t move. I stiffened my back, glared into its inkpot eyes, and tried again.

*Get out of here! Leave us alone!*

English again. The hollow tilted its head like a curious dog but was otherwise a statue.

“Is he gone?” Addison asked.

The others couldn’t tell for sure; only I could see it. “Still there,” I said. “I don’t know what’s wrong.”

I felt silly and deflated. Had my gift vanished so quickly?

“Never mind,” Emma said. “Hollows aren’t meant to be reasoned with, anyway.” She stuck out a hand and tried to light a flame, but it fizzled. The effort seemed to sap her. I tightened my grip around her waist lest she topple over.

“Save your strength, matchstick,” said Addison. “I’m sure we’ll need it.”

“I’ll fight it with cold hands if I have to,” said Emma. “All that matters is we find the others before it’s too late.”

The others. I could see them still, their afterimage fading by the tracks: Horace’s fine clothes a mess; Bronwyn’s strength no match for the wights’ guns; Enoch dizzy from the blast; Hugh using the chaos to pull off Olive’s heavy shoes and float her away; Olive caught by the heel and yanked down before she could rise out of reach. All of them weeping in terror, kicked onto the train at gunpoint, gone. Gone with the ymbryne we’d nearly killed ourselves to find, hurtling now through London’s guts toward a fate worse than death. *It’s already too late*, I thought. It was too late the moment Caul’s soldiers stormed Miss Wren’s frozen hideout. It was too late the night we mistook Miss Peregrine’s wicked brother for our beloved ymbryne. But I swore to myself that we’d find our friends and our ymbryne, no matter the cost, even if there were only bodies to recover—even if it meant adding our own to the pile.

So, then: somewhere in the flashing dark was an escape to the street. A door, a staircase, an escalator, way off against the far wall. But how to reach them?

*Get the hell out of our way!* I shouted at the hollow, giving it one last try.

English, naturally. The hollow grunted like a cow but didn't move. It was no use. The words were gone.

"Plan B," I said. "It won't listen to me, so we go around it, hope it stays put."

"Go around it where?" said Emma.

To give it a wide berth, we'd have to wade through heaps of glass—but the shards would slice Emma's bare calves and Addison's paws to ribbons. I considered alternatives: I could carry the dog, but that still left Emma. I could find a swordlike piece of glass and stab the thing in the eyes—a technique that had served me well in the past—but if I didn't manage to kill it with the first strike, it would surely snap awake and kill us instead. The only other way around it was through a small, glass-free gap between the hollow and the wall. It was narrow, though—a foot, maybe a foot and a half wide. A tight squeeze even if we flattened our backs to the wall. I worried that getting so close to the hollow, or worse, touching it by accident, would break the fragile trance holding it in check. Short of growing wings and flying over its head, though, it seemed like our only option.

"Can you walk a little?" I asked Emma. "Or at least hobble?"

She locked her knees and loosened her grip on my waist, testing her weight. "I can limp."

"Then here's what we're going to do: slide past it, backs to the wall, through that gap there. It's not a lot of space, but if we're careful ..."

Addison saw what I meant and shrank back into the phone booth. "Do you think we should get so close to it?"

"Probably not."

"What if it wakes up while we're ...?"

"It won't," I said, faking confidence. "Just don't make any sudden moves—and whatever you do, don't touch it."

"You're our eyes now," Addison said. "Bird preserve us."

I chose a nice long shard from the floor and slid it into my pocket. Shuffling two steps to the wall, we pressed our backs to the cold tiles and began inching toward the hollow. Its eyes moved as we did, locked on me.

A few creeping sidesteps later and we were enveloped by a pocket of hollow-stink so foul, it made my eyes water. Addison coughed and Emma cupped a hand over her nose.

“Just a little farther,” I said, my voice reedy with forced calm. I took the glass from my pocket, gripping it with the pointed end out, then took another step, and another. We were close enough now that I could’ve touched the hollow with an outstretched arm. I heard its heart knocking inside its ribs, the beat quickening with each step we took. It was straining against me, fighting with every neuron to wrest my clumsy hands from its controls. *Don’t move*, I said, mouthing the words in English. *You’re mine. I control you. Don’t move.*

I sucked in my chest, lined up and laddered each vertebra against the wall, then crab-walked into the tight gap between the wall and the hollow.

*Don’t move, don’t move.*

Slide, shuffle, slide. I held my breath while the hollow’s quickened, wet and wheezing, a vile black mist blooming from its nostrils. The urge to devour us must’ve been excruciating. So was my urge to run, but I ignored it; that would’ve been acting like prey, not master.

*Don’t move. Do not move.*

Another few steps, a few more feet, and we’d be past it. Its shoulder a hairsbreadth from my chest.

*Don’t—*

—and then it did. In one swift motion the hollow swiveled its head and pivoted its body to face me.

I went rigid. “Don’t move,” I said, this time aloud, to the others. Addison buried his face between his paws and Emma froze, her arm squeezing mine like a vise. I steeled myself for what was to come—its tongues, its teeth, the end.

*Get back, get back, get back.*

English, English, English.

Seconds passed during which, astonishingly, we weren’t killed. But for the rising and falling of its chest, the creature seemingly had turned once again to stone.

Experimentally, moving by millimeters, I slid along the wall. The hollow followed me with slight turns of its head—locked onto me like a compass needle, its body in perfect sympathy with mine—but it didn’t follow, didn’t

open its jaws. If whatever spell I'd cast had been broken, we'd already be dead.

The hollow was only watching me. Awaiting instructions I didn't know how to give. "False alarm," I said, and Emma breathed an audible sigh of relief.

We slid out of the gap, peeled ourselves from the wall, and hurried away as fast as Emma could limp. When we'd put a little distance between us and the hollow, I looked back. It had turned all the way around to face me.

*Stay*, I muttered in English. *Good*.

\* \* \*

We passed through a veil of steam and the escalator came into view, frozen into stairs, its power cut. Around it glowed a halo of weak daylight, a tantalizing envoy from the world above. World of the living, world of now. A world where I had parents. They were here, both of them, in London, breathing this air. A stroll away.

*Oh, hi there!*

Unthinkable. Still more unthinkable: not five minutes ago, I'd told my father everything. The Cliff's Notes version, anyway: *I'm like Grandpa Portman was. I'm peculiar*. They wouldn't understand, but at least now they knew. It would make my absence feel less like a betrayal. I could still hear my father's voice, begging me to come home, and as we limped toward the light I had to fight a sudden, shameful urge to shake off Emma's arm and run for it—to escape this suffocating dark, to find my parents and beg forgiveness, and then to crawl into their posh hotel bed and sleep.

That was most unthinkable of all. I could never: I loved Emma, and I'd told her so, and I wouldn't leave her behind for anything. And not because I was noble or brave or chivalrous. I'm not any of those things. I was afraid that leaving her behind would rip me in half.

And the others, the others. Our poor, doomed friends. We had to go after them—but how? A train hadn't entered the station since the one that spirited them away, and after the blast and gunshots that had rocked the place, I was sure there'd be no more coming. That left us two options, each one terrible: go after them on foot through the tunnels and hope we didn't meet any more hollows, or climb the escalator and face whatever was



waiting for us up there—most likely a wight mop-up crew—then regroup, reassess.

I knew which option I preferred. I'd had enough of the dark, and more than enough of hollows.

“Let's go up,” I said, urging Emma toward the stalled escalator. “We'll find somewhere safe to plan our next move while you get your strength back.”

“Absolutely not!” she said. “We can't just abandon the others. Never mind how I feel.”

“We aren't. But we need to be realistic. We're hurt and defenseless, and the others are probably miles away by now, out of the underground and halfway to somewhere else. How will we even find them?”

“The same way I found you,” said Addison. “With my nose. Peculiar folk have an aroma all their own, you see—one which only dogs of my persuasion can sniff out. And you happen to be one powerfully odoriferous group of peculiars. Fear enhances it, I think, and skipping baths ...”

“Then we go after them!” Emma said.

She pulled me toward the tracks with a surprising burst of strength. I resisted, tug-of-warring our linked arms. “No, no—there's no way the trains are still running, and if we go in there on foot ...”

“I don't care if it's dangerous. I won't leave them.”

“It isn't just dangerous, it's pointless. They're already gone, Emma.”

She took back her arm and started hobbling toward the tracks. Stumbled, caught herself. *Say something*, I mouthed to Addison, and he circled around to block her.

“I'm afraid he's right. If we follow on foot, our friends' scent trail will have dissipated long before we're able to find them. Even my profound abilities have limits.”

Emma gazed into the tunnel, then back at me, her expression tortured. I held out my hand. “Please, let's go. It doesn't mean we're giving up.”

“All right,” she said heavily. “All right.”

But just as we were starting toward the escalator, someone called out from the dark, back along the tracks.

“Over here!”

The voice was weak but familiar, the accent Russian. It was the folding man. Peering into the dark, I could just make out his crumpled form by the

tracks, one arm raised. He'd been shot during the melee, and I assumed the wights had shoved him onto the train with the others. But there he lay, waving to us.

"Sergei!" cried Emma.

"You know him?" Addison said suspiciously.

"He was one of Miss Wren's peculiar refugees," I said, my ears pricking at the wail of distant sirens echoing down from the surface. Trouble was coming—maybe trouble disguised as help—and I worried that our best chance at a clean exit was slipping away. Then again, we couldn't just leave him.

Addison scuttled toward the man, dodging the deepest reefs of glass. Emma let me take her arm again and we shuffled after. Sergei was lying on his side, covered in glass and streaked with blood. The bullet had hit him somewhere vital. His wire-framed spectacles were cracked and he was adjusting them, trying to get a good look at me. "Is miracle, is miracle," he rasped, his voice thin as twice-strained tea. "I heard you speak with monster's tongue. Is miracle."

"It's not," I said, kneeling beside him. "It's gone, I've already lost it."

"If gift inside you, is forever."

Footsteps and voices echoed from the escalator passage. I cleared away glass so I could get my hands under the folding man. "We're taking you with us," I said.

"Leave me," he croaked. "I'll be gone soon enough ..."

Ignoring him, I slipped my hands beneath his body and lifted. He was ladder-long but light as a feather, and I held him in my arms like a big baby, his skinny legs dangling over my elbow while his head lolled against my shoulder.

Two figures banged down the last few escalator steps and then stood at the bottom, rimmed by pale daylight and peering into the new dark. Emma pointed at the floor and we sank quietly to our knees, hoping they'd miss us—hoping they were just civilians come to catch a train—but then I heard the squelch of a walkie-talkie and they each fired up a flashlight, the beams shining against their bright reflective jackets.

They might've been emergency responders, or wights disguised as such. I wasn't sure until, in synchrony, they peeled off wraparound sunglasses.

*Of course.*

Our options had just narrowed by half. Now there were only the tracks, the tunnels. We could never outrun them, damaged as we were, but escape was still possible if they didn't see us—and they hadn't yet, amidst the chaos of the ruined station. Their searchlights dueled across the floor. Emma and I backed toward the tracks. If we could just slip into the tunnels unnoticed ... but Addison, damn him, wasn't moving.

"Come on," I hissed.

"They are ambulance drivers and this man needs help," he said too loudly, and right away the beams of light bounced up from the floor and whipped toward us.

"Stay where you are!" one of the men boomed, unholstering a gun while the other fumbled for his walkie-talkie.

Then two unexpected things happened in quick succession. The first was that, just as I was about to drop the folding man onto the tracks and dive after him with Emma, a thunderous horn blew from inside the tunnel and a single brilliant headlight flashed into view. The rush of stale wind belonged, of course, to a train—running again, somehow, despite the blast. The second thing, announced by a painful twinge in my gut, was that the hollow had come unstuck and was loping in our direction. The instant after I felt it, I saw it, too, plowing at us through a billow of steam, black lips peeled wide, tongues thrashing the air.

We were trapped. If we ran for the stairs we'd be shot and mauled. If we jumped onto the tracks we'd be crushed by the train. And we couldn't escape onto the train because it would be ten seconds at least before it stopped and twelve before the doors opened and ten more before they shut again, and by then we'd be dead three ways. And so I did as I often do when I'm out of ideas—I looked to Emma. I could read in the desperation on her face that she understood the hopelessness of our situation and in the stony set of her jaw that she meant to act anyway. I remembered only as she began to stagger forward, palms out, that she couldn't see the hollow, and I tried to tell her, reach for her, stop her, but I couldn't get the words out and couldn't grab her without dropping the folding man, and then Addison was alongside her, barking at the wight while Emma tried uselessly to make a flame—spark, spark, nothing, like a lighter low on juice.

The wight broke out laughing, pulled back the hammer of his gun, and aimed it at her. The hollowast ran at me, howling in counterpoint to the

squeal of train brakes behind me. That's when I knew the end had come and there was nothing I could do to stop it. At that moment something inside me relaxed, and as it did, the pain I felt whenever a hollow was near faded, too. That pain was like a high-pitched whine, and as it hushed, I discovered hidden beneath it another sound, a murmur at the edge of consciousness.

*A word.*

I dove for it. Wrapped both arms around it. Wound up and shouted it with all the force of a major league pitcher. *Him*, I said, in a language not my own. It was only one syllable but held volumes of meaning, and the moment it rattled from my throat, the result was instant. The hollow stopped running at me—stopped dead, skidding on its feet—then turned sharply to one side and lashed out a tongue that whipped across the platform and wrapped three times around the wight's leg. Knocked off balance, he fired a shot that caromed off the ceiling, and then he was flipped upside down and hauled thrashing and screaming into the air.

It took my friends a moment to realize what had happened. While they stood gaping and the other wight shouted into his walkie-talkie, I heard train doors whoosh open behind me.

Here was our moment.

“COME ON!” I shouted, and they did, Emma stumble-running and Addison tangling her feet and me trying to wedge the gangly and blood-slick folding man through the narrow doors until we all crashed together across the threshold into the train car.

More gunshots rang out, the wight firing blindly at the hollow.

The doors closed halfway, then popped back open. “Clear the doors, please,” came a cheerful prerecorded announcement.

“His feet!” Emma said, pointing at the shoes at the end of the folding man's long legs, the toes of which were poking through the doors. I scrambled to kick his feet clear, and in the interminable seconds before the doors closed again, the dangling wight fired more wild shots until the hollow grew tired of him and flung him against the wall, where he slid to the floor in an unmoving heap.

The other wight scurried for the exit. *Him, too*, I tried to say, but it was too little too late. The doors were closing, and with an awkward jolt the train began to move.

I looked around, grateful that the car we'd tumbled into was empty. What would regular people make of us?

"Are you okay?" I asked Emma. She was sitting up, breathing hard, studying me intensely.

"Thanks to you," she said. "Did you really make the hollow do all that?"

"I think so," I said, not quite believing it myself.

"That's amazing," she said quietly. I couldn't tell if she was frightened or impressed, or both.

"We owe you our lives," said Addison, nuzzling his head sweetly against my arm. "You're a very special boy."

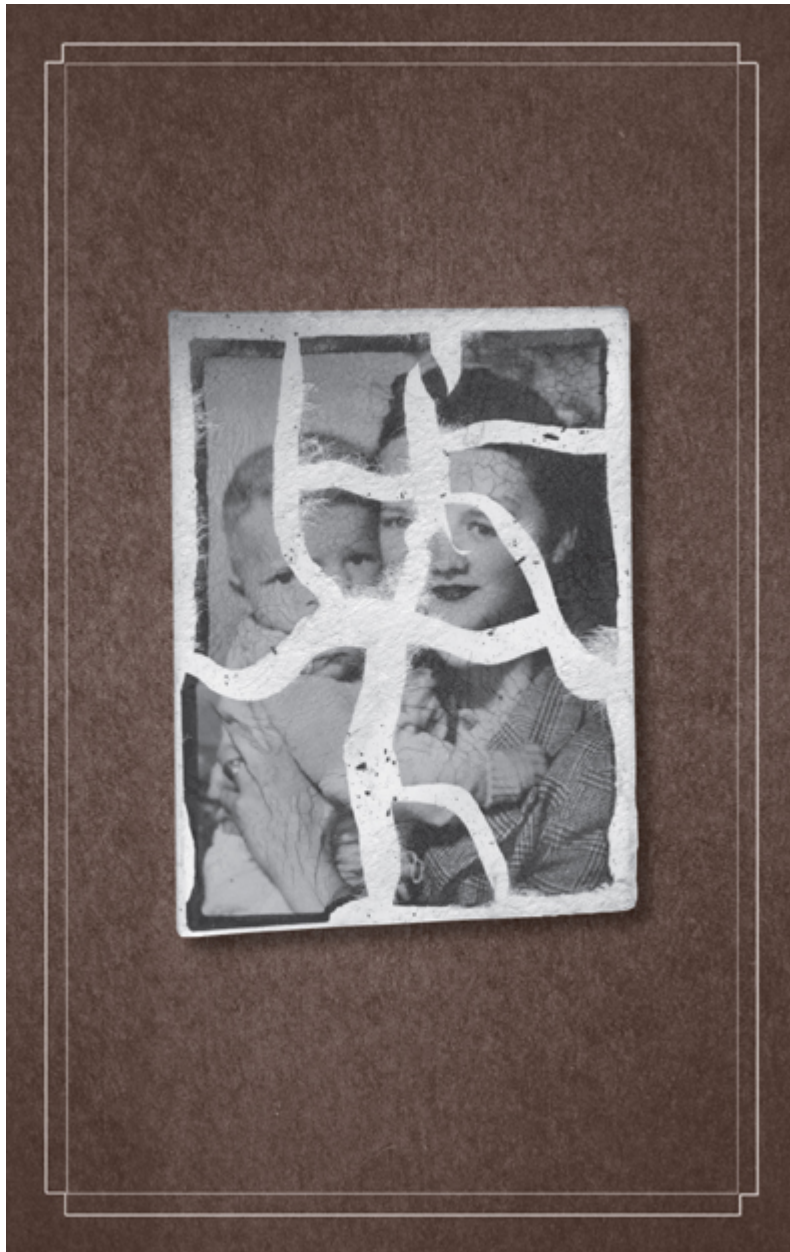
The folding man laughed, and I looked down to see him grinning at me through a mask of pain. "You see?" he said. "I told you. Is miracle." Then his face turned serious. He grabbed my hand and pressed a small square of paper into it. A photograph. "My wife, my child," he said. "Taken by our enemy long ago. If you find others, perhaps ..."

I glanced at the photo and got a shock. It was a wallet-sized portrait of a woman holding a baby. Sergei had clearly been carrying it with him a long time. Though the people in the photo were pleasant enough, the photo itself—or the negative—had been seriously damaged, perhaps narrowly survived a fire, exposed to such heat that the faces were warped and fragmented. Sergei had never mentioned his family before now; all he'd talked about since we met him was raising an army of peculiars—going loop to loop to recruit able-bodied survivors of the raids and purges. He never told us what he wanted an army *for*: to get them back.

"We'll find them, too," I said.

We both knew this was far-fetched, but it was what he needed to hear.

"Thank you," he said, and relaxed into a spreading pool of blood.



“He doesn’t have long,” Addison said, moving to lick Sergei’s face.

“I might have enough heat to cauterize the wound,” said Emma. Scooting toward him, she began rubbing her hands together.

Addison nosed the folding man’s shirt near his abdomen. “Here. He’s hurt here.” Emma put her hands on either side of the spot, and at the sizzle of flesh I stood up, feeling faint.

I looked out the window. We were still pulling out of the station, slowed perhaps by debris on the tracks. The emergency lights’ SOS flicker picked

details from the dark at random. The body of a dead wight half buried in glass. The crumpled phone booth, scene of my breakthrough. The hollow—I registered its form with a shock—trotting on the platform alongside us, a few cars back, casual as a jogger.

*Stop. Stay away,* I spat at the window, in English. My head wasn't clear, the hurt and the whine getting in the way again.

We picked up speed and passed into the tunnel. I pressed my face to the glass, angling backward for another glimpse. It was dark, dark—and then, in a burst of light like a camera flash, I saw the hollow as a momentary still image—flying, its feet lifting from the platform, tongues lassoing the rail of the last car.

Miracle. Curse. I hadn't quite worked out the difference.

\* \* \*

I took his legs and Emma his arms and gently we lifted Sergei onto a long bench seat, where beneath an advertisement for bake-at-home pizza he lay blacked out and rocking with the motion of the train. If he was going to die, it seemed wrong that he should have to do so on the floor.

Emma pulled up his thin shirt. “The bleeding’s stopped,” she reported, “but he’ll die if he doesn’t see the inside of a hospital soon.”

“He may die anyway,” said Addison. “Especially in a hospital here in the present. Imagine: he wakes up in three days’ time, side healed but everything else failing, aged two hundred and bird-knows-what.”

“That may be,” Emma replied. “Then again, I’ll be surprised if in three days’ time any of us are alive, in any condition whatsoever. I’m not sure what more we can do for him.”

I’d heard them mention this deadline before: two or three days was the longest any peculiar who’d lived in a loop could stay in the present without aging forward. It was long enough for them to visit the present but never to stay; long enough to travel between loops but short enough that they were never tempted to linger. Only daredevils and ymbrynes made excursions into the present longer than a few hours; the consequences of a delay were too grave.

Emma rose, looking sickly in the pale yellow light, then tottered on her feet and grabbed for one of the train’s stanchions. I took her hand and made

her sit next to me, and she slumped against my side, exhausted beyond measure. We both were. I hadn't slept properly in days. Hadn't eaten properly, either, aside from the few opportunities we'd had to gorge ourselves like pigs. I'd been running and terrified and wearing these damned blister-making shoes since I couldn't remember when, but more than that, every time I spoke Hollow it seemed to carve something out of me that I didn't know how to put back. It made me feel tired to a degree that was wholly new, absolutely subterranean. I'd discovered a fresh vein inside me, a new source of power to mine, but it was depletable and finite, and I wondered if by using it up I was using myself up, too.

I'd worry about that another time. For now I tried to savor a rare moment of peace, my arm around Emma and her head on my shoulder, just breathing. Selfishly, perhaps, I didn't mention the hollow that had chased our train. What could any of us do about it? It would either catch us or not. Kill us or not. The next time it found us—and I was sure there would be a next time—I would either find the words to stay its tongues or I wouldn't.

I watched Addison hop onto the seat across from us, unlock a window with his paw, and crack it open. The angry sound of the train and a warm funk of tunnel air came rushing in, and he sat reading it with his nose, eyes bright and snout twitching. The air smelled like stale sweat and dry rot to me, but he seemed to catch something subtler, something that required careful interpretation.

“Can you smell them?” I asked.

The dog heard me but took a long moment to reply, his eyes aimed at the ceiling as if finishing a thought. “I can,” he said. “Their trail is nice and crisp, too.”

Even at this high speed, he could pick up the minutes-old traces of peculiars who'd been enclosed in an earlier train car. I was impressed, and told him so.

“Thank you, but I can't take all the credit,” he said. “Someone must've pushed open a window in their car, too, otherwise the trail would be much fainter. Perhaps Miss Wren did it, knowing I would try to follow.”

“She knew you were here?” I asked.

“How did you find us?” Emma said.

“Just a moment,” Addison said sharply. The train was slowing into a station, the windows flashing from tunnel black to tile white. He stuck his



nose out the window and closed his eyes, lost in concentration. “I don’t think they got off here, but be ready in any case.”

Emma and I stood, doing our best to shield the folding man from view. I saw with some relief that there weren’t many people waiting on the platform. Funny there were any at all, or that trains were still running. It was as if nothing had happened. The wights had made sure of it, I suspected, in hopes we’d take the bait, jump onto a train, and make it simple for them to round us up. We certainly wouldn’t be hard to spot amongst modern London’s workday commuters.

“Look casual,” I said. “Like you belong here.”

This seemed to strike Emma as funny, and she stifled a laugh. It was funny, I guess, inasmuch as we belonged nowhere in particular, least of all here.

The train stopped and the doors slid open. Addison sniffed the air deeply as a bookish woman in a pea coat stepped into our car. Seeing us, her mouth fell open, and then she turned smartly and walked out again. *Nope. No thanks.* I couldn’t blame her. We were filthy, freakish-looking in bizarre old clothes, and splashed with blood. We probably looked like we’d just killed the poor man beside us.

“Look casual,” Emma said, and snorted.

Addison withdrew his nose from the window. “We’re on the right track,” he said. “Miss Wren and the others definitely passed this way.”

“They didn’t get off here?” I asked.

“I don’t think so. But if I don’t smell them in the next station, we’ll know we’ve gone too far.”

The doors smacked closed and with an electric whine we were off again. I was about to suggest we find a change of clothes when Emma jolted beside me, as if she’d just remembered something.

“Addison?” she said. “What happened to Fiona and Claire?”

At the mention of their names, a nauseating new wave of worry shot through me. We’d last seen them at Miss Wren’s menagerie, where the elder girl had stayed behind with Claire, who was too ill to travel. Caul told us he’d raided the menagerie and captured the girls, but he also told us Addison was dead, so clearly his information couldn’t be trusted.

“Ah,” said Addison, nodding gravely. “It’s bad news, I’m afraid. Part of me, I admit, was hoping you wouldn’t ask.”

Emma's face drained of color. "Tell us."

"Of course," he said. "Shortly after your party left, we were raided by a gang of wights. We threw armageddon eggs at them, then scattered and hid. The larger girl, with the unkempt hair—"

"Fiona," I said, heart thudding.

"She used her facility with plants to hide us—in trees and under new-grown brush. We were so well camouflaged that it would've taken days for the wights to root us all out, but they gassed us and drove us into the open."

"Gas!" Emma cried. "The bastards swore they'd never use it again!"

"It appears they lied," said Addison.

I had seen a photo once, in one of Miss Peregrine's albums, of such an attack: wights in ghostly masks with breathing canisters, standing around casually as they launched clouds of poison gas into the air. Although the stuff wasn't fatal, it made your lungs and throat burn, caused terrible pain, and was rumored to trap ymbrynes in their bird form.