



BLUE LILY,  
LILY BLUE

Also by Maggie Stiefvater

*The Raven Boys*  
*The Dream Thieves*

*The Scorpio Races*

*Shiver*  
*Linger*  
*Forever*  
*Sinner*

*Lament: The Faerie Queen's Deception*  
*Ballad: A Gathering of Faerie*



# BLUE LILY, LILY BLUE

BOOK III OF  
THE RAVEN CYCLE

MAGGIE STIEFVATER



SCHOLASTIC PRESS • NEW YORK

*to Laura, one of the white knights*

Copyright © 2014 by Maggie Stiefvater

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Press, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*. SCHOLASTIC, SCHOLASTIC PRESS, and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

ISBN 978-0-545-42496-7

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

14 15 16 17 18

Printed in the U.S.A. 23  
First edition, November 2014

The text type was set in Centaur MT.

*Book design by*  
Christopher Stengel

*I'm looking for the face I had  
Before the world was made.*

— WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS,  
“BEFORE THE WORLD  
WAS MADE”

*Let us be grateful to the mirror for revealing to  
us our appearance only.*

— SAMUEL BUTLER,  
*EREWTHON*





# PROLOGUE

## ABOVE

Persephone stood on the bare mountaintop, her ruffled ivory dress whipping around her legs, her masses of white-blond curls streaming behind her. She was gauzy, immaterial, something blown between these boulders and caught upon one of them. The wind was fierce up here with no trees to block it. The world below was gloriously autumnal.

Adam Parrish stood beside her with his hands shoved into the pockets of his grease-stained cargo pants. He looked tired, but his eyes were clear, better than when she'd seen him last. Because Persephone was only interested in important things, she hadn't considered her own age in a long time, but it struck her as she looked at him that he was quite *new*. That raw expression, that youthful hunch of his shoulders, the frantic sprawl of the energy inside him.

*What a good day it is for this*, she thought. It was cool and overcast, with no interference from the sun's force or the lunar schedule or nearby road construction.

"This is the corpse road," she said, aligning her body with the invisible path. As she did, she could feel something inside her begin to hum agreeably, a sensation very much like the satisfaction that came from aligning book spines on a shelf.

“The ley line,” Adam clarified.

She nodded serenely. “Find it for yourself.”

He stepped onto the line immediately, his face turning to gaze along its length as naturally as a flower looking into the sun. It had taken Persephone rather longer to master this skill, but then, unlike her youthful pupil, *she* had not made any bargains with supernatural forests. She was not much for bargains. Group projects, in general, were not her thing.

“What do you see?” she asked.

His eyes fluttered, his dusty lashes resting on his cheeks. Because she was Persephone, and because it was a good day for this, she could see what he was seeing. It was not anything related to the ley line. It was a confusion of shattered figurines on the floor of a lovely mansion. An official letter printed on county stationery. A friend convulsing at his feet.

“Outside of you,” Persephone reminded him mildly. She herself saw so many events and possibilities along the corpse road that no single one stood out. She was a far better psychic when she had her two friends Calla and Maura with her: Calla to sort through her impressions and Maura to put them in context.

Adam seemed to have potential in this department, though he was too new to replace Maura — no, that was a ridiculous way to put it, Persephone told herself, you don’t *replace* friends. She struggled to think of the proper word. Not *replace*.

*Rescue*. Yes, of course, that was what you did with your friends. Did Maura need rescuing?

If Maura had been there on the mountain, Persephone might have been able to say. But if Maura had been there on the mountain, Persephone wouldn’t *need* to say.



She sighed deeply.

She sighed a lot.

“I see things.” Adam’s eyebrows formed either concentration or uncertainty. “More than one thing. It’s like — like the animals at the Barns. I see things . . . sleeping.”

“Dreaming,” Persephone agreed.

As soon as he’d called her attention to the sleepers, they came to the forefront of her consciousness.

“Three,” she added.

“Three what?”

“Three in particular,” she murmured. “To be woken. Oh, no. No. Two. One should not be woken.”

Persephone had never been very handy with the concept of right and wrong. But in this case, the third sleeper was definitely *wrong*.

For a few minutes, she and the boy — *Adam*, she reminded herself; it was so difficult to find birth-given names important — both stood there, feeling the ley line course beneath their feet. Persephone gently and unsuccessfully attempted to find the bright strand of Maura’s existence in the tangled threads of energy.

Beside her, Adam was once again retreating inside himself, most interested, as always, in the thing that remained unknowable to him: his own mind.

“Outside,” Persephone reminded him.

Adam didn’t open his eyes. His words were so soft that the wind nearly destroyed them. “I don’t mean to be rude, ma’am, but I don’t know why this is worth learning.”

Persephone wasn’t sure how he thought such a reasonable question could be impolite. “When you were a baby, what made learning to talk worth it?”

“Who am I learning to communicate with?”

She was pleased that he immediately grasped the concept.

She replied, “Everything.”

## BETWEEN

Calla was overwhelmed by how much shit Maura had in her room at 300 Fox Way, and she told Blue this.

Blue didn't answer. She sorted through papers by the window, head tilted in consideration. From this angle, she looked exactly like her mother, compact and athletic and hard to tip over. She was weirdly lovely, even though she had unevenly clipped her dark hair all over her head and wore a shirt she'd attacked with a roto-tiller. Or perhaps *because* of these things. When had she gotten so pretty and so grown-up? Without getting any taller? This was probably what happened to girls when they lived on only yogurt.

Blue asked, “Have you seen these? They're really good.”

Calla wasn't sure what Blue was looking at, but she believed her. Blue wasn't the sort of girl to hand out false compliments, even to her mother. Although she was kind, she wasn't *nice*. Good thing, too, because nice people made Calla irritable.

“Your mother is a woman of many talents,” she growled. The mess was taking years from her life. Calla liked things you could rely on: filing systems, months with thirty-one days, purple lipstick. Maura liked chaos. “Such as aggravating me.”

Calla picked up Maura's pillow. Sensations assaulted her. She *felt* all at once where the pillow had been procured, how Maura balled it up under her neck, the number of tears applied to the pillowcase, and the contents of five years of dreams.

The psychic hotline rang in the room next door. Calla's concentration fluttered away.

"Damn it," she said.

She was psychometric — just her touch could often reveal both an object's origin and the owner's feelings. But this pillow had been handled so often that it contained too many memories to sort through. If Maura had been there, Calla would have been able to easily isolate the useful ones.

But if Maura had been there, she wouldn't have needed to.

"Blue, get over here."

Blue theatrically clapped a hand on Calla's shoulder. Immediately, her natural amplifying talent sharpened Calla's ability. She saw Maura's hopefulness keeping her awake. Felt the impression of Mr. Gray's shadowed jaw on the pillowcase. Saw the contents of Maura's final dream: a mirrored lake and a distantly familiar man.

Calla sneered.

Artemus. Maura's long-gone ex-lover.

"Anything?" Blue asked.

"Nothing *useful*."

Blue snatched away her hand then, aware that Calla was able to pick up as many feelings from girls as from pillows. But Calla didn't need psychic powers to guess that Blue's sensible, pleasant expression was at odds with the fire that burned furiously inside. School was imminent, love was in the air, and Blue's mother had vanished on some mysterious personal quest more than a month before, leaving behind her newly acquired assassin beau. Blue was a hurricane lurking just offshore.

*Ab, Maura!* Calla's stomach twisted. *I told you not to go.*

“Touch that.” Blue pointed to a large black scrying bowl. It sat askew on the rug, untouched since Maura had used it.

Calla didn't think much of scrying, or mirror magic, or anything that had to do with plumbing the mysterious ether of space and time in order to actually muck about on the other side of it. Technically, scrying was not dangerous; it was just meditating into a mirrored surface. But practically, it often involved freeing the soul from the body. And the soul was a fragile traveler.

The last time Calla, Persephone, and Maura had messed with mirror magic, they had accidentally made Maura's half sister, Neeve, disappear.

At least Calla had never liked Neeve.

But Blue was right. The scrying bowl probably held the most answers.

Calla said, “Fine. But don't touch me. I don't want you to make this any stronger than it already is.”

Blue held her hands up as if proving she had no weapon.

Reluctantly, Calla touched the bowl's rim and darkness immediately billowed through her vision. She was sleeping, dreaming. Falling through endless black water. A mirrored version of her soared upward toward the stars. Metal bit into her cheek. Hair stuck to the corner of her mouth.

Where was Maura in all this?

An unfamiliar voice chanted in her head, strident and wry and sing-song:

*“Queens and kings*

*Kings and queens*

*Blue lily, lily blue  
Crowns and birds  
Swords and things  
Blue lily, lily blue*

Suddenly, she focused.

She was Calla again.

Now she saw what Maura had seen: three sleepers — light, dark, and in between. The knowledge that Artemus was underground. The certainty that no one was coming out of those caverns unless fetched. The realization that Blue and her friends were part of something huger, something vast and stretching and slowly waking —

“BLUE!” roared Calla, because she realized why her efforts had suddenly become so successful.

Sure enough, Blue was touching her shoulder, amplifying everything. “Hi.”

“I *told* you not to touch me.”

Blue didn’t look sorry. “What did you see?”

Calla was still mired in that *other* awareness. She couldn’t shake the idea that she was getting ready for a fight that, somehow, she’d already fought.

She couldn’t remember if she’d won the last time.

BELOW

Maura Sargent had the nagging feeling that time had stopped working. Not that it had stopped functioning, exactly. Just that

it had ceased to run forward in the manner she'd come to think of as "the usual way." Minutes stacking upon minutes to make hours and then days and weeks.

She was beginning to suspect that she might just be using the same minute over and over.

This might have troubled some people. Some people might not have noticed at all. But Maura was not *some people*. She had begun to dream the future when she was fourteen. She had spoken to her first spirit when she was sixteen. She had used remote viewing to see the other side of the world when she was nineteen. Time and space were bathtubs that Maura splashed in.

So she knew there were impossible things in the world, but she didn't believe that a cavern where time stood still was one of them. Had she been here for an hour? Two? A day? Four days? Twenty years? Her flashlight batteries hadn't died.

*But if time's not moving forward here, they never will, will they?*

She striped her flashlight from floor to ceiling as she crept through the tunnel. She didn't want to smash her head, but she didn't want to fall into a bottomless crevice, either. She'd already stepped into several deep puddles, and her scuffed boots were soaked and cold.

The worst part was the boredom. A poor childhood in West Virginia had left Maura with a strong sense of self-reliance, a high tolerance for discomfort, and a black sense of humor.

But this *monotony*.

It was impossible to tell a joke when you were alone.

The only indication Maura had that time might be moving *somewhere* was that sometimes she forgot who she was looking for down here.

*Artemus is the goal*, she reminded herself. Seventeen years before, she'd let Calla convince her that he'd merely run off. Maybe she had wanted to be convinced. Deep down, she'd known he was part of something bigger. She'd known that *she* was part of something bigger.

Probably.

So far, the only thing she had found in this tunnel was doubt. This was not the sort of place sun-loving Artemus would have ever chosen. She had half an idea that this was the kind of place someone like Artemus would die in. She was beginning to feel bad about the note she'd left behind. In its entirety, it read:

*Glendower is underground. So am I.*

At the time, she'd felt quite smug; the note was meant to enrage and inspire, depending on who read it. Of course, she had written it thinking she would be back by the next day.

She revised it now in her head:

*Going into timeless caverns to search for ex-boyfriend. If it looks like I will miss Blue's graduation, send help.*

*P.S. Pie is not a meal.*

She kept walking. It was inky black ahead and inky black behind. The sweep of her flashlight illuminated details: stubbled stalactites on the uneven ceiling. Water sheened on the walls.

But she was not lost, because there had only ever been one option: deeper and deeper.

She wasn't afraid yet. It took a lot to terrify someone who played in time and space like a bathtub.

Using a mud-slick stalagmite as a handhold, Maura hauled herself through a narrow opening. The scene on the opposite side was confusing. The ceiling was spiked; the floor was spiked; it was endless; it was impossible.

Then a tiny drip of water unspooled ripples through the image, momentarily ruining the illusion. It was an underground lake. The dark surface mirrored the golden stalactites on the ceiling, making it seem as if an equal number of stalagmites jabbed up from the lake floor.

The real bottom of the lake was hidden. The water could be two inches, two feet, depthless.

Ah. So here it was, finally. She had dreamt of this. She was still not quite afraid, but her heart skipped uneasily.

*I could just go home. I know the way.*

But if Mr. Gray had been willing to risk his life for what he wanted, surely she could be as brave. She wondered if he was alive. She was surprised by how much she desperately hoped that he was.

She revised the note in her head.

*Going into timeless caverns to search for ex-boyfriend. If it looks like I will miss Blue's graduation, send help.*

*P.S. Pie is still not a meal.*

*P.P.S. Don't forget to take the car in for the oil change.*

*P.P.P.S. Look for me at the bottom of a mirrored lake.*



A voice whispered in her ear. Someone from the future, or the past. Someone dead or alive or sleeping. It wasn't really a whisper, Maura realized. It was just hoarse. The voice of someone who had been calling for a long time without an answer.

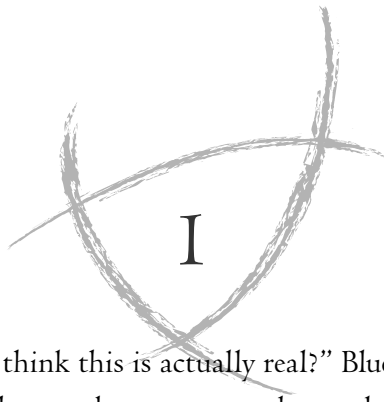
Maura was a good listener.

"What did you say?" she asked.

It whispered again: *"Find me."*

It wasn't Artemus. It was someone else who'd gotten lost, or was in the process of getting lost, or was going to get lost. In these caverns, time wasn't a line; it was a mirrored lake.

*P.P.P.S. Don't wake the third sleeper.*



**D**o you think this is actually real?" Blue asked.

They sat between ascendant oaks under a stolen summer sky. Roots and rocks buckled up through the moist ground around them. The hazy air was nothing like the overcast fall chill they'd just left behind. They had longed for summer, and so Cableswater had given them summer.

Richard Gansey III lay on his back, gazing up at the muzzy warm blue above the branches. Sprawled in his khakis and citrus-yellow V-neck sweater, he looked indolent, tossed, a sensuous heir to the forest around him. "What is real?"

Blue said, "Maybe we all come here and fall asleep and have the same dream."

She knew it was not true, but it was both comforting and thrilling to imagine they were so connected, that Cableswater represented something they all thought of when they closed their eyes.

"I know when I'm awake and when I'm asleep," Ronan Lynch said. If everything around Gansey was soft-edged and organic, faded and homogenous, Ronan was sharp and dark and dissonant, standing out in stark relief from the woods.

Adam Parrish, curled over himself in a pair of battered, greasy coveralls, asked, "Do you?"

Ronan made an ugly sound of scorn or mirth. He was like Cabeswater: a maker of dreams. If he didn't know the difference between waking and sleeping, it was because the difference didn't matter to him.

"Maybe I dreamt *you*," he said.

"Thanks for the straight teeth, then," Adam replied.

Around them, Cabeswater hummed and muttered with life. Birds that didn't exist outside the forest flapped overhead. Somewhere close by, water ran over rocks. The trees were grand and old, furred with moss and lichen. Perhaps it was because she knew the forest was sentient, but Blue thought it *looked* wise. If she let her mind wander far enough, she could almost feel the sensation of the forest listening to her. It was hard to explain; it was sort of like the feeling of someone hovering a hand just over your skin, not quite touching.

Adam had said, "We have to earn Cabeswater's trust before we go into the cave."

Blue didn't understand what it meant for Adam to be so connected to the forest, to have promised to be its hands and eyes. She suspected that sometimes, Adam didn't, either. But under his advice, the group had returned again and again to the forest, walking between the trees, exploring carefully, taking nothing. Walking around the cave that might hold both Glendower — and Maura.

*Mom.*

The note she'd left more than a month before had not indicated when she intended to return. It hadn't indicated whether or not she intended to return *at all*. So it was impossible to tell if she

was still gone because she was in trouble or because she didn't want to come home. Did other people's mothers vanish into holes in the ground during their midlife crises?

"I don't dream," Noah Czerny said. He was dead, so he probably didn't sleep, either. "So I think it must be real."

Real, but theirs, just theirs.

For a few more minutes, or hours, or days — what was time, here? — they lazed.

A little away from the group, Ronan's younger brother, Matthew, nattered away to their mother, Aurora, happy for this visit. The two of them were golden-haired and angelic, both of them looking like inventions of this place. Blue longed to hate Aurora because of her origin — literally dreamt up by her husband — and because she had the attention span and intellectual prowess of a puppy. But the truth was that she was endlessly kind and upbeat, as compulsively lovable as her youngest son.

*She* wouldn't abandon her daughter right before senior year.

The most infuriating part about Maura's disappearance was that Blue didn't know if she was supposed to be consumed by worry or anger. She vacillated wildly between the two, occasionally burning herself out and feeling nothing at all.

*How could she do this to me now?*

Blue lay her cheek against a boulder covered with warm moss, trying to keep her thoughts even and pleasant. The same ability that amplified clairvoyance also heightened Cabeswater's strange magic, and she didn't want to cause another earthquake or start a stampede.

Instead, she began a conversation with the trees.

She thought about birds singing — *thought* or *wished* or *longed* or *dreamt*. It was a thought turned on its side, a door left cracked in her mind. She was getting better at telling when she was doing it right.

A strange bird trilled high and off-key above her.

She thought-wished-longed-dreamt of leaves rustling.

Overhead, the trees shushed their leaves, forming vague, whispered words. *Avide audimus*.

She thought of a spring flower. A lily, blue, like her name.

A blue petal fell aimlessly into her hair. Another dropped onto the back of her hand, slipping down her wrist like a kiss.

Gansey's eyes opened as petals landed lightly on his cheeks. As his lips parted, ever-wondering, a petal landed directly on his mouth. Adam craned his head back to watch the floral, fragrant rain drift down around them, slow-motion butterflies of blue.

Blue's heart exploded with furious joy.

*It's real, it's real, it's real* —

Ronan looked at Blue, eyes narrowed. She didn't look away.

This was a game she sometimes played with Ronan Lynch: Who would look away first?

It was always a draw.

He had changed over the summer, and now Blue felt less unequal in the group. Not because she knew Ronan any better — but because she felt as if maybe Gansey and Adam now knew him less. He challenged them all to learn him again.

Gansey pushed himself up onto his elbows; petals tumbled from him as if he had been awoken from a long sleep. "Okay. I think it's time. Lynch?"

Rising, Ronan went to stand starkly beside his mother and brother; Matthew, who had been waving his arms like a performing bear, stilled. Aurora petted Ronan's hand, which Ronan permitted.

"Up," he said to Matthew. "Time to go."

Aurora smiled gently at her sons. She would stay here, in Cabeswater, doing whatever dreams did when no one was there to see them. It was unsurprising to Blue that she would fall into an instant sleep if she left the forest; it was impossible to imagine Aurora existing in the real world. More impossible still to imagine growing up with a mother like her.

*My mother wouldn't just leave forever. Right?*

Ronan put his hands on either side of Matthew's head, crushing the blond curls down, locking his brother's gaze on his.

"Go wait in the car," he said. "If we aren't back by nine, call Blue's house."

Matthew's expression was pleasant and unafraid. His eyes were the same color blue as Ronan's but infinitely more innocent. "How will I know the number?"

Ronan continued to clasp his brother's head. "Matthew. Focus. We talked about this. I want you to think. You tell me: How will you know the number?"

His younger brother laughed a little and patted his pocket. "Oh, right. It's programmed in your phone. I remember now."

"I'll stay with him," Noah offered at once.

"Chicken," said Ronan ungratefully.

"Lynch," said Gansey. "That's a good idea, Noah, if you're feeling up for it."

Noah, as a ghost, required outside energy to stay visible.

Both Blue and the ley line were powerful spiritual batteries; waiting in the car parked nearby should have been more than enough. But sometimes it wasn't the energy that failed Noah — it was his courage.

“He'll be a champ,” Blue said, punching Noah's arm lightly.

“I'll be a champ,” repeated Noah.

The forest waited, listening, rustling. The edge of the sky was grayer than the blue directly overhead, like Cabeswater's attention was so tightly focused on them that the real world was now able to intrude.

At the cave mouth, Gansey said, “*De fumo in flammam.*”

“From the smoke into the fire,” Adam translated for Blue.

The cave. The *cave*.

Everything in Cabeswater was magical, but the cave was unusual because it hadn't existed when they had first discovered the forest. Or maybe it *had* existed, but in a different place.

Gansey said, “Equipment check.”

Blue dumped out the contents of her ragged backpack. A helmet (bicycle, used), knee pads (roller skating, used), and flashlight (miniature, used) rolled out, along with a pink switchblade. As she began to apply all of these things to her body, Gansey emptied his messenger bag beside her. His contained a helmet (caving, used), knee pads (caving, used), and a flashlight (Maglite, used), along with several lengths of new rope, a harness, and a selection of bolt anchors and metal carabiners.

Both Blue and Adam stared at the used equipment. It seemed impossible that Richard Campbell Gansey III would have thought to buy anything less than brand-new.

Unaware of their attention, Gansey effortlessly tied a carabiner to a rope by way of an accomplished knot.

Blue got it a moment before Adam did. The equipment was used because *Gansey* had used it.

It was hard to remember, sometimes, that he'd lived a life before they'd met him.

Gansey began to unwind a longer safety cable. "What we talked about. We're tied together, three tugs if you are alarmed *in the slightest*. Time check?"

Adam checked his battered watch. "My watch isn't working."

Ronan checked his expensive black one and shook his head.

Although this was not unexpected, Blue was still disconcerted, a kite cut free.

Gansey frowned as if he shared her thoughts. "Nor is my phone. Okay, Ronan."

As Ronan shouted some Latin into the air, Adam whispered the translation to Blue: "Is it safe for us to go in?"

*And is my mother still in there?*

The reply came in the form of hissing leaves and guttural scraping, wilder than the voices Blue had heard earlier. "*Greywaren semper est incorruptus.*"

"Always safe," Gansey translated quickly, eager to prove that he wasn't entirely useless when it came to Latin. "The Greywaren is always safe."

The Greywaren was Ronan. Whatever they were to this forest, Ronan was more to it.

Adam mused, "*Incorruptus*. I never thought anyone would use *that* word to describe Lynch."



Ronan looked as pleased as a pit viper ever could.

*What do you want from us?* Blue wondered as they stepped inside.  
*How do you see us? Just four teens sneaking into an ancient forest.*

An oddly quiet earth-room lay just inside the cave entrance. The walls were dust and rock, roots and chalk, everything the color of Adam's hair and skin. Blue touched a reluctantly curled fern, the last foliage before the sunlight faded. Adam turned his head, listening, but there was only the muffled, ordinary sound of their footsteps.

Gansey turned on his headlamp. It barely penetrated the darkness of the narrowing tunnel.

One of the boys was shivering a little. Blue didn't know if it was Adam or Ronan, but she felt the cable trembling at her belt.

"I wish we'd brought Noah after all," Gansey said abruptly. "In we go. Ronan, don't forget to set the directional markers as we go. We're counting on you. Don't just stare at me. Nod like you understand. Good. You know what? Give them to Jane."

*"What?"* Ronan sounded betrayed.

Blue accepted the markers — round, plastic disks with arrows drawn on them. She hadn't realized how nervous she was until she had them in her hands; it felt good to have something concrete to do.

"I want you to whistle or hum or sing, Ronan, and keep track of time," Gansey said.

"You have got to be shitting me," Ronan replied. "Me."

Gansey peered down the tunnel. "I know you know a lot of

songs all the way through, and can do them the same speed and length every time. Because you had to memorize all of those tunes for the Irish music competitions.”

Blue and Adam exchanged a delighted look. The only thing more pleasing than seeing Ronan singled out was seeing him singled out *and* forced to repeatedly sing an Irish jig.

“Piss up a rope,” Ronan said.

Gansey, unoffended, waited.

Ronan shook his head, but then, with a wicked smile, he began to sing, “Squash one, squash two, s—”

“*Not that one,*” both Adam and Gansey said.

“I’m not listening to that for three hours,” Adam said.

Gansey pointed at Ronan until he began to breathily whistle a jaunty reel.

And they went in deeper.

*Deeper.*

The sun vanished. Roots gave way to stalactites. The air smelled damp and familiar. The walls shimmered like something living. From time to time, Blue and the others had to shuffle through pools and streams — the narrow, uneven path had been carved by water, and the water was still doing that work.

Every ten times around Ronan’s reel, Blue deposited a marker. As the stack in her hand diminished, she wondered how far they would go, how they would know if they were even getting close. It seemed difficult to believe that a king might be hidden away down here. Harder still to imagine that her mother might be. This was not a place to *inhabit*.

She calmed her thoughts. No earthquakes. No stampedes.

She tried not to long or hope or think of or call for Maura. The last thing she wanted was for Cabeswater to produce a copy of her mother for her. She only wanted the real thing. The truth.

It became steeper. The blackness itself was fatiguing; Blue longed for the light, for space, for the sky. She felt buried alive.

Adam slipped and caught himself, hand outstretched.

“Hey!” Blue ordered. “Don’t touch the walls.”

Ronan broke off whistling to ask, “Cave germs?”

“It’s bad for stalactite growth.”

“Oh, *honestly* —”

“Ronan!” ordered Gansey from the front of the line, not turning, his canary sweater rendered light gray by the headlamps. “Get back to work.”

Ronan had only just begun to whistle once more when Gansey disappeared.

“What?” said Adam.

Then he was snatched from his feet. He slammed the ground and skidded away on his side, fingers trailing.

Blue didn’t have time to realize what this meant when she felt Ronan grab her from behind. Then the rope at her waist snagged tight, threatening to pull her off her feet as well. But he was well planted. His fingers were rooted into her arms so tightly they hurt.

Adam was still on the ground, but he’d stopped sliding.

“Gansey?” he called, the word doleful in the vast space beyond. “Are you okay down there?”

Because Gansey had not just *vanished* — he’d fallen into a hole.

*Thank goodness we were tied together,* Blue thought.

Ronan's arms were still locked around her; she felt them quivering. She didn't know if it was from muscle strain or worry. He had not even hesitated before grabbing her.

*I can't let myself forget that.*

"Gansey?" Adam repeated, and there was just an edge of something terrible behind it. He had spackled confidence too heavily over his anxiety for it to be invisible.

Three tugs. Blue felt them shiver through Adam to her.

Adam laid his face down on the mud in visible relief.

"What's going on?" Ronan asked. "Where is he?"

"He must be hanging," Adam replied, uncertainty letting his Henrietta accent snatch the last *g* from *hanging*. "The rope's cutting me in half it's pulling so hard. I can't get closer to help. It's slimy — his weight would just pull me in."

Freeing herself from Ronan's arms, Blue took an experimental step closer to where Gansey had disappeared. The rope between her and Adam slackened, but he slid no closer to the hole. Slowly, she said, "I think you can be a counterweight if you don't move, Adam. Ronan, stay up here — if anything happens and I start slipping, can you anchor yourself?"

Ronan's headlamp pointed at a muddy column. He nodded.

"Okay," she said. "I'm going to go over and take a look."

She crept slowly past Adam. His fingers were hooked uselessly into the sloppy ground by his cheek.

She nearly fell into the hole.

No wonder Gansey hadn't seen it. There was a rock ledge and then, just — nothing. She swept her headlamp back and

forth and saw only inky black. The chasm was too wide to see the other side. Too deep to see the bottom.

The safety rope was visible, though, dark with mud, leading into the pit. Blue shone her flashlight into the black.

“Gansey?”

“I’m here.” Gansey’s voice was closer than she expected. Quieter than she expected, too. “I just — I believe I’m having a panic attack.”

“*You’re* having a panic attack? New rule: Everyone should give four tugs before suddenly disappearing. Have you broken anything?”

A long pause. “No.”

Something about the tone of the single syllable conveyed, all at once, that he had not been kidding about his fear.

Blue wasn’t sure that reassurance was her strong point, especially when she was the one who wanted it, but she tried. “It’ll be okay. We’re anchored up here. All you need to do is climb out. You’re not going to fall.”

“It’s not that.” His voice was a sliver. “There is something on my skin and it is reminding me of . . .”

He trailed off.

“Water,” Blue suggested. “Or mud. It’s everywhere. Say something again so I can point the flashlight at you.”

There was nothing but the sound of his breathing, jagged and afraid. She swept the flashlight beam again.

“Or mosquitoes. Mosquitoes are everywhere,” she said, voice bright.

No reply.

“There are over two dozen species of cave beetle,” she added. “I read that before we came today.”

Gansey whispered, “Hornets.”

Her heart contracted.

In the wash of adrenaline, she talked herself down: Yes, hornets could kill Gansey with just a sting, but no, there were not hornets in this cave. And today was not the day that Gansey was going to die, because she had *seen* his spirit on the day he died, and that spirit had been wearing an Aglionby sweater spattered with rain. Not a pair of khakis and a cheery yellow V-neck.

Her flashlight beam finally found him. He hung limply in his harness, head tilted down, hands over his ears. Her flashlight beam traced his heaving shoulders. They were spattered with mud and grime, but there were no insects on them.

She could breathe again.

“Look at me,” she ordered. “There are no hornets.”

“I know,” he muttered. “That’s why I said I *think* I’m having a panic attack. I *know* there are no hornets.”

What he wasn’t saying, but what they both knew, was that Cabeswater was a careful listener.

Which meant he needed to stop thinking about hornets.

“Well, you’re making me angry,” Blue said. “Adam is lying on his face in the mud for you. Ronan’s going home.”

Gansey laughed tonelessly. “Keep talking, Jane.”

“I don’t *want* to. I want you to just grab that rope and pull yourself up here like I know you’re perfectly capable of. What good does me *talking* do?”

He looked up at her then, his face streaked and unrecognizable. “It’s just that there’s something rustling down below me, and your voice drowns it out.”

A nasty shiver went down Blue’s spine.

Cabeswater was such a good listener.

“Ronan,” she called quietly over her shoulder. “New plan: Adam and I are going to pull Gansey out very quickly.”

“What! That is a fucking terrible idea,” Ronan said. “Why is that the plan?”

Blue didn’t want to shout it out loud.

Adam had been listening, though, and he said, quietly and clearly, “*Est aliquid in foramen*. I don’t know. *Apis? Apibus? Forsitan.*”

Latin hid nothing from Cabeswater; they only meant to spare Gansey.

“No,” Ronan said. “No, there is not. That is not what is down there.”

Gansey closed his eyes.

*I saw him*, Blue thought. *I saw his spirit when he died, and this was not what he was wearing. This is not how it happens. It’s not now, it’s later, it’s later —*

Ronan kept going, his voice louder. “No. Do you hear me, Cabeswater? You promised to keep me safe. Who are we to you? Nothing? If you let him die, that is *not keeping me safe*. Do you understand? If they die, I die, too.”

Now Blue could hear the humming sound from the pit, too.

Adam spoke up, voice half-muffled from the mud. “I made a deal with you, Cabeswater. I’m your hands and your eyes. What do you think I’ll see if he dies?”

The rustling grew. It sounded *numerous*.

*It is not hornets, Blue thought, wished, longed, dreamt. Who are we to you, Cakeswater? Who am I to you?*

Out loud, she said, “We’ve been making the ley line stronger. We have been making *you* stronger. And we’ll keep helping you, but you’ve got to help us —”

Blackness ate her flashlight beam, rising from the depths. The sound exploded. It was humming; it was wings. They filled the pit, hiding Gansey from view.

“*Gansey!*” Blue shouted, or maybe it was Adam, or maybe it was Ronan.

Then something flapped against her face, and another something. A body careened off the wall. Off the ceiling. The beams of their headlamps were cut into a thousand flickering pieces.

The sound of their wings. The *sound*.

Not hornets.

Bats?

No.

*Ravens.*

This was not where ravens lived, and this was not how ravens behaved. But they burst and burst from the pit below Gansey. It seemed as if the flock would never end. Blue had the disorienting sensation that it had always been this way, ravens coursing all around them, feathers brushing her cheeks, claws scraping over her helmet. Then, suddenly, the ravens began to shout, back and forth, back and forth. It grew more and more sing-song, and then it resolved into words.

*Rex Corvus, parate Regis Corvi.*

*The Raven King, make way for the Raven King.*

Feathers rained down as the birds careened toward the cave



mouth. Blue's heart burst with how *big* it was, this moment, and no other.

Then there was silence, or at least not enough sound to be heard over Blue's thudding heart. Feathers quivered in the mud beside Adam.

"Hold on," Gansey said. "I'm coming out."