

The
ICE
Garden

GUY
JONES

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CHAPTER 1

THEY CALLED it the Hat. It was a long white hood that masked the whole of Jess's face and neck, over which she wore something like ski goggles. The rest of her body was covered up with a baggy top, trousers, and thick gloves so that no part of her skin was exposed to the sun.

"I don't like it here," she said, lifting the goggles to get at a maddening itch on her nose.

"No one likes hospitals," replied her mother.

"So, we can go?"

"You're in one of those moods, then."

Jess sighed, releasing a mouthful of sickly air. The numbers on the lift display began ticking up toward the children’s ward. Already, beads of sweat were forming on the back of her neck, sticking fabric to skin. Summer was the absolute worst time of year.

“It’s only a couple of times a month,” said her mother.

“*Only?*” said Jess, her voice rising.

“Must we do this?”

Jess thought they probably must. At least until her mother understood how much she hated this building and everything in it.

The doors opened on the second floor to reveal a woman in a purple dress. She took a step toward them but stopped short at the sight of the Hat. Her mouth gaped like a fish but no words came out.

“Can we help?” asked Jess’s mother.

“Oh . . . ,” she said, recovering herself a little. “Up or down?”

“Going up.”

“Right. Well. Down for me. Thanks.” The woman took a step back, still staring.

“You can close your mouth now,” Jess said as the lift doors closed.

“Darling, that was rude,” her mother scolded.

“She didn’t hear me.”

“Shame.” They both smiled, without looking at each other. Her mother jabbed the fourth-floor button a few times and tapped her foot. The lift clunked and juddered as it started up again.

“I don’t like him,” said Jess.

“He’s perfectly nice.”

“He’s nice to you. He talks to me like I’m an idiot.”

“He talks to you like you’re a child.”

“Exactly.”

“He’s a very good doctor.”

“How do you know? You don’t have medical training.” *Game, set, and match*, Jess thought.

“Put your goggles back on,” said her mother.

“There are windows in the corridor.”

“But, Mum . . . ,” she started.

“Jessica,” her mother replied firmly. *Game, set, and match*.

