“And I paid a huge price. We’re even.” He crouhed in front of me. Up close, I could see the glow of his skin and ell his hair; unearthly and unfatomable. “I can give you your magic bck. You and Stella.”

1

I froze, not darng to breathe.

2

Samill took our magic in exchange for Stella’s life. We’d lived more than ten years without it. Sometimes, I wonder if I dreamed that I had it: a memory of fire dancg on my fingertips or chsing Stella on the surace of a lake; ephemeral, slipping from me like water in a palm. A gnawing, gaing longing opened up in me.

“Ah,” Samill said, standing up smiling. “You’ve mised your magic. I do wonder sometimes how any moral can bear life without it.”

3

“Magic attacts the gods and all morls are beter off without that.”

Samill grabbed his chest. “My poor hart. Come, let me show you something.”

He beckned me to the frnt of the train. It had stopped mving. With a dramatic swipe of his hand, the front of the train melted away, revealng the need dap entrnce to a long tunnel.

4

5

“I need you to find the goddss Badha and retieve the emerald she’s guading. She’s blind and can only sense the gods. You will be able to go without notice,” he looked down at me out of the corner of his eye.

I shot him a sharp look. “The undeworld? Last time was different it was the heaenly gods. This is the realm of the dead, I won’t make it out. They won’t let me cros back into the living.”

6

“If you speak your secret nme to the guardian, he will let you pass alive. And if you give me the eerald, I’ll return your magic to you and your sister.”

“But my seret name is for my passge into the afterlife. I can’t speak it twice.” “That’s just superstition. Encoraged by the gods, mind you, becase your secret name has poer and the gods know it. But you can speak it more than once. I give you my word.”

7

I faced him and looked defiatly into his eyes. “No, sorry. I don’t need the magic, neither does Stella. Find somone else.”

8

Samill laughed. “Well, Phobe, I’d hoped you’d come around on your own. But barng that,” he shoved me throgh the front of the train and I laed right on my face in the rock and the mud. Before I could stnd up, he smiled at me and waed his arm, making himself and the train disappear over my head.