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For my mum, Helen, and my children,
Theia, Aubrey and Sasha.

Prologue

There were three sisters, named for Jupiter's moons: Ganymede, Callisto and Io. As they had blood in their veins, so they had magic, fine and strong as a spider's web. They lived in a house of white marble, and the tower stretched to the sky and speared the clouds, searching, they said, for the moon. They filled it with miniature worlds, set whole galaxies spinning, caught within glass spheres. And then they hid in their house while the world changed.

That was their lot.

But lots can change, and change can be chaos.

Callisto was the first to go: she left for love and the laughter of a boy with hair as red as fire.

Io was next: she left for solitude, and found her home in a place none could ever change.

Ganymede was left alone in the house of infinity. She stalked the marble corridors, ruling over everything they had created with a hard eye.

The world never knew of these sisters. Their house went unseen, their stories unheard.

And then came chaos.



1

It's not like it's hurting. Not much. And the lesson is only ten minutes longer – I've been watching the clock – so he'll have to stop soon anyway. I try to ignore it, but it's *prod, prod*, at the base of my spine. *Prod, prod*, like a heartbeat, only not so regular.

It's science, and we're sitting on stools, so it doesn't take much for him to reach back from the bench behind and do it. One, two, *prod, prod*. I find myself counting the seconds between them. Ten, eleven, perhaps he's forgotten – *prod, prod*. Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, *prod*.

I don't know why he took such a dislike to me. It was pretty instant, I remember, on the first day of school. He looked at me; I looked back at him. I tried a smile, but he turned and said something to his friend, and they both began to laugh. It took me a few seconds to

realize the laughter was unkind, and the smile froze on my face, heat rushed to my cheeks and they laughed harder. They laughed at everything then. My clothes, my bag, my hair. He said my eyes were weird; that all of me was weird. I went in every morning trying not to be, hoping it'd be different. New bag, bright smile, same eyes – no difference. What was worse, he turned the laughter on to anyone who sat by me. Nobody sits by me now, except those who are made to in lessons.

It's OK. I read my books, smile at the new kids, hope, hope, it'll change.

It hasn't, so far. Doesn't matter how bright I make my smile; the weirdness shines brighter, I guess.

Mrs Elliott is talking about the homework, and I'm behind already, so I should focus. I try to listen, but *prod, prod* – it's all I can hear now, all I even am. It is *my* heartbeat, *prod, prod*, faltering and mean, *prod*. She's saying something about force, *prod*. And then there's a whisper, and a breath of laughter, and something breaks deep inside me, like a wishbone that's been pulled too tight and shattered into pieces.

'*STOP!*' I howl, whirling from my stool to face him just as he reaches out his arm again. I push it away

and something flashes, bright as lightning. His stool ricochets across the science lab, and he flies with it.

There's a terrible crashing racket as he and the stool land up at the far wall, and then a deafening silence. My ears are ringing; my head feels like it's been pressed in a vice.

'*Clementine Gravett!*' shouts Mrs Elliott. 'Mrs Duke's office, immediately!'

She charges over to Jago, who is in a little heap beside the now-broken stool. He stares at me, like he knows something. Like he's got something on me now. Like he knew all along I was a freak, and here's the evidence: he knows that wasn't ordinary; it wasn't just strength. The whole class is silent, and they watch without a word as I pick up my bag and head out of the room.

It was magic.

My mother's magic.

I've been pretending ever since my first day at secondary, ever since Jago first saw the weird in me, that it isn't real. The roar of my blood, the flashes of static – all just the fantasies of a daydreamer. When I was smaller, that was all it was. But ever since my eleventh birthday, it's been getting stronger, less dream-like.

And the last two minutes have changed everything.

*

'Tell me what happened.'

I can see from Mrs Duke's face that she really wants to know. I'm a quiet girl. I don't hit, or shout, or storm out of classrooms. I don't make a fuss. Sometimes my work is scruffy, sometimes my homework is late, and I don't have the best grades, but I'm not a troublemaker.

'I don't know.'

'Clementine, I can't help you if I don't know what's going on. This seems out of character . . .' She leans forward at the waist, looking at me intently. Her expression is so kind. I've never seen her like this before. Her office is pale with winter sun, and dust motes float around us. I hope I'm not swallowing them; I try to breathe through my nose.

'Clementine?'

I can't look her in the eye. I concentrate on the biscuit-coloured carpet and my black boots. They're scuffed, and the yellow laces are unravelling.

'Mrs Elliott was quite shocked,' she continues, resting back into the comfy chair again. We're in the informal bit of the office, away from her desk. The chairs are navy blue and scratchy. Her short silver hair shines in the sunlight coming through the window. 'She says you

pushed him clear across the classroom. We were lucky he wasn't injured. *You* were lucky, Clementine.'

'I didn't mean to,' I say.

She sighs. 'But you did. And there are consequences.' She looks up at the clock. 'Your father is on his way. Perhaps we'd better not continue until he arrives.'

'He's coming?'

'We called him.' She nods, watching me closely. 'Is that OK?'

'Yes.'

I don't tell her I'm surprised he's coming; it might not sound right. I love my pa, but he's very absent-minded, and he tends not to do things other parents would do. Like come to school. He hasn't been here in so long I wonder if he'll find it. I wonder what he'll say.

'Mr Gravett, the stool *broke*,' she says some time later, her voice close to despair. 'Clementine is a good student,' her eyes flick over me again, as if to reassure herself that I really am. 'But we can't tolerate violence of any kind, and she has made no explanation.'

'Clem?'

His eyes are sorrowful as ever, his unbrushed hair standing up on end, like a burning match. He doesn't look like he belongs here. I guess neither do I. Maybe

that's what Jago saw that first day, a year ago.

'I didn't mean to,' I say.

Mrs Duke sighs, tapping her fingers on the folder she has on her lap.

'I just wanted to stop him.'

'From doing what?'

They both lean in to me. And my mouth dries up. What am I going to say, he poked me in the back? It sounds ridiculous, like I'm five. I suppose I could talk about all the other things that have happened over the last year, but they're all so small, so silly.

He says I'm a freak.

He says it might be catching.

He shoves his chair out and tries to trip me, just as I'm passing with my lunch tray.

No.

I don't know how to explain it. I was different from the start, and it's lonely, even in the moments he's not there to taunt me. Surrounded by hundreds of people every day, and alone all the same. I overhear conversations, and in my head I join in sometimes, smile at a funny bit, and then I realize I'm just staring at people, smiling to myself. Or I have thoughts that want to be out there, and they just wedge in my head because there's nobody

to tell them to. Maybe I whisper to myself when I walk along the bustling corridors. Maybe I stare too much at other people. Maybe I drop books, miss balls, stumble on steps, maybe I just don't quite fit. Maybe that's why I bother him so much.

But I don't say any of that.

I don't say anything at all.

Mrs Duke raises her hands at my silence. 'I have no choice, Mr Gravett,' she says. 'Even if Clementine *had* some sort of justification, it wouldn't be enough. We have a zero-tolerance policy, and there is no question that she pushed Jago, hard enough to break his stool and throw him to the floor. She will have to be suspended.'

'Suspended?' Pa asks.

I blush. He probably doesn't even know what that means. He probably thinks they're going to hang me upside down on the nearest tree.

'She is not allowed on to the grounds of this school for two days,' she says, her voice crisp with frustration. 'We will expect her back next Wednesday, and not before. She may access the online portal to get her homework and any study notes.'

Pa blinks, and stares at her.

'I fail to see how that is going to resolve the issue between them.'

'We will have to pick that up on Clementine's return,' she says smoothly. 'I hope that over the intervening period, Clementine will have a chance to work out what *did* happen here today, and be able to articulate it so that we can work with her on a solution.'

Pa mutters something under his breath before springing to his feet. Mrs Duke flinches back into the chair – he doesn't look like he'd be so nimble.

'Come on, Clem,' he says. 'Let's go.'

He doesn't exactly smile at me, but there's a twinkle in his eye as he picks up my bag and swings it over his shoulder.

Mrs Duke stands and follows us out, frowning from the door as we leave – two little matches against a grey sky. We don't look like we fit because, sometimes, we don't. Pa may not have it in his blood, but he's known about magic for longer than I've been alive. And me?

I guess there's not much use in denying it now.