Harper stared at the boy, wide-eyed. She considered the idea that perhaps she was dreaming, or else the strangeness of the day was causing her to hallucinate.

But I remember him, she thought, looking at the boy.

The tall man sighed and looked at Harper. "Well, Miss Woolfe, I do apologize for the rather abrupt beginning to the evening." He held out his hand. "My name is Morgan Orion Fletcher. Elected Chief Spectacular, Showrunner of the Wondria, Hidden Peaks Council member. Trained barista, as it happens, but no one ever asks about that."

Fletcher. Something in the back of Harper's mind registered a dim recognition. She shook his hand. "Nice to meet you," she said. "Now please tell me what's going on, or I'm going to have to jump out of this canoe and start screaming."

Fletcher motioned for her to sit. Harper hesitated, then did so: these figures had mentioned her dad, so surely they wouldn't mean her any harm?

"Do you have any idea who we are?" Fletcher asked.

Harper swallowed, looking between them. She remembered their conversation about magic at the parade, the way they'd talked about the old theatres. "You're – the people from the old Theatre Borough…" she said haltingly.

Fletcher nodded. "Indeed. We – and by *we,* I mean yourself and your dear old dad, as well as me and Trick over there…"

Trick. The name was like a lantern flickering into life. For a split second, flashes of memory filled Harper's mind – pealing laughter, a mischievous smile, a book of childish handwriting. She blinked rapidly, trying to keep hold of them as Fletcher continued.

"…are people known as Spectaculars. We are performers – singers, dancers, actors, and so on – who were gifted special powers from the stars. Your dad was a cracking musician; he played a starlight-infused trumpet that could levitate you right out of your seat."

At the mention of her dad, Harper felt another memory spark in her mind, distant and vague, but still there. Jazz music. Four figures, playing together. An old lady dancing a twostep.

But… Harper shook her head as the logical part of her brain caught up with the image. Starlight trumpets? Levitating grannies? It all seemed fantastical, impossible – but Fletcher carried on in a perfectly serious manner.

"Now, your Minister, who isn't so keen on people who are different, decided to deem

us ‘dangerous’ and turn all his citizens against us. So, we commandeered a few of his prize vehicles and escaped through a gateway into the Hidden Peaks – a realm which has been a refuge for magical people for centuries now. However –” Fletcher looked down, his voice softening – “on the way there was an accident. The last carriage came loose and didn’t make the crossing.”

Harper let out a soft *oof* as this particular piece of the puzzle slotted into place. So, the accident *hadn’t* been between “two ordinary commuter trams”, as her mother had claimed. It had been a tram filled with these…*Spectaculars* – a tram that was supposed to be taking them to a new life. Except not all of them had made it.

“My dad…he died in that crash,” Harper said quietly.

Fletcher bowed his head. “We heard. I’m so sorry. I can only imagine that your mother couldn’t find the gateway, or didn’t know how to cross…so she bought you back down here. We only just found out that this was where you’ve been all these years. We arrived down here earlier to collect you, but I think we accidentally set off some of your dad’s stuff – *someone”* – he looked pointedly at Trick – “decided to have a go on his trumpet, but the Star-Stuff inside it hadn’t been used in so long that it got a bit over-excited and exploded. We thought we’d better come back after the shop was shut. It’s lucky we found you tonight – just in time!”

“Just in time for *what*?” Ever since Fletcher had mentioned her dad, a tiny seed of excitement had planted itself in Harper’s chest, ready to bloom and sprout and grow into a full-blown excitement tree. However, the fear of being wrong had her grabbing that feeling by the roots and stuffing it back down again. “What has all this got to do with me?”