IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES
THE POISONED KING

KATHERINE RUNDELL

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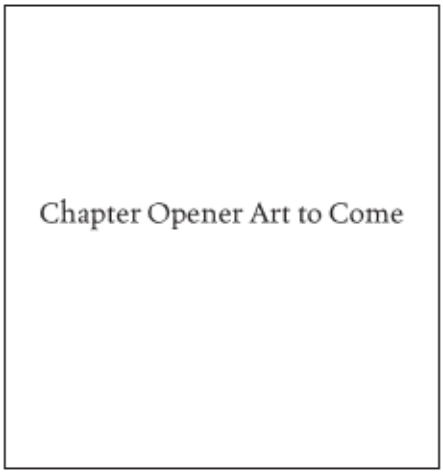
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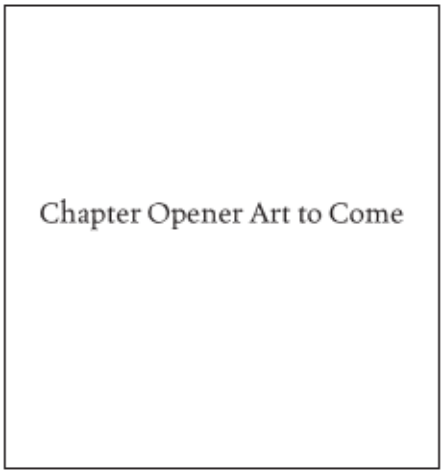
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A WARNING BEFORE WE BEGIN

They would have said it wasn't possible: the chaos and the mayhem she caused. They would have said she didn't have it in her.

It was in her, but deep. What's under your house, if you were to dig? Mud and worms. Buried treasure. Skeletons. You don't know. The girl dug into the depths of her heart and there she found a hunger for justice, and a thirst for revenge.



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THE JACULUS DRAGON

Christopher Forrester woke up to find a dragon chewing on his face.

The dragon was the size of a sparrow, small enough to fit on the top joint of his thumb, and a thing of ravishing silver-green beauty. His expression was haughty enough to burn a hole through a steel door.

The dragon spoke. 'Christopher!' he said. 'You have not been easy to find.'

Christopher sat up. 'Jacques?' he said. His whole body began to shake: with shock, and with joy.

He pushed back his covers, looking around his bedroom. His jeans were on the floor; the window looked out over a London street. Everything was as before, and nothing was as before, because a tiny dragon was perched on his bedside table.

'Jacques!' he said again. He was real, and he was here, and he was biting experimentally at the light bulb in Christopher's lamp. 'What's going on?'

'I have come to bring you back with me,' said Jacques. He shook broken glass off his back. 'Now, immediately.'

'Back? To the Archipelago?'

'Obviously. I command it!' Beneath the hauteur, there was a vibration to his voice; it was fear. The dragon flew on to Christopher's hand, and bit down hard on his thumb. It drew blood. 'I have urgent need of you.'



I HAVE URGENT NEED OF YOU

Christopher could feel his heart leaping, upwards and upwards. But he tried to keep the excitement out of his face, tried to breathe steadily, until he understood. He began to dress, fast, in yesterday's jeans.

'If you could *not* treat me as a buffet, that would be nice,' he said to Jacques. 'Tell me what's happened. How did you get here?'

'With immense ingenuity and effort. I went to Atidina, through the waybetween that runs in the river there. It was very damp, and I despise water. I did not enjoy it. That was unpleasant enough, but then I thought I would find you in Scotland, where the waybetween emerges,' said Jacques. 'But you weren't there. I dodged your grandfather to come south, following your scent. I was attacked by a flock of pigeons and an upstart crow. I couldn't make fire – I mean, I didn't want to,

lest I alert humans to my presence – so I ate what I found in those big baskets of rotting food you have inexplicably installed on your grey streets. It was disgusting. Except for the little plastic squares of red liquid. Those were toothsome.'

Looking closer, Christopher saw the dragon had ketchup on the scales under his chin.

'But why? W*hy* are you here? You're not safe, Jacques.'

'Do you think I am unaware of that? I would not have come here, and flown past your repulsive foul-belching four-wheeled murder-tins without reason. I had no choice,' said Jacques. He clacked his teeth; there was misery in his small face. 'I was sent.'

'Sent by who?'

But Jacques was so tight-wound now he would not speak. He exhaled and – instead of fire – a vast cloud of scalding black smoke filled the room. Christopher darted to the window before the smoke could set off the alarm, swinging it back and forth on the hinges. 'Jacques! T*ell me!*'

Jacques's words came out in a rush. 'The great dragons are dying, in their dozens. Nobody knows why.'

Christopher felt a bolt of horror strike through him. He had known dragons. He had been close enough to feel their power, their raw, exacting intelligence: not the intelligence of mankind, but of something infinitely more vast and wild and ancient.

'How? Which species?' Not the red-winged dragons, he prayed.

'The ice dragons in the north: six dead. The yellow dragons in the south: ten, gone, discovered by the phoenixes. Two families of silver-tails: a dozen found dead. And more, nobody knows how many more, more all the time.'

'Is it a disease? Or … murder? But how could any creature kill a dozen dragons? Even a sphinx wouldn't be strong enough; even a manticore.'

'I do not know! But Sarkany, the great red-winged dragon on whose back you once flew, has sent me to summon you. She said I must bring you back to the Archipelago.'

'But why me?'

'It can only be you!' Smoke poured from his nose. 'Some say it might be a dragon pox, so the great dragons dare not move among each other. They are separated by fear of contagion. But most believe that it is murder, and so no dragon will trust any man or creature from the Archipelago. But you are from the Outerlands. Sarkany will trust you and only you.'

Christopher stood by the window, his hand on the latch. The dragons, murdered? He thought of Sarkany, of her terrifying splendour, and the thunder of her wings.

'But what could I do—?'

Jacques huffed again: more black, angry smoke. 'Dragons do not enjoy human questioning. Ask one more and I shall burn the room to the ground. You will come?'

Would he come? What danger awaited on the far side of the jaculus's summons? What could he possibly do that the dragons, with all their years of strength and pitiless know-

ledge, could not? But there was elation too, rising in Christopher. For a dragon to have need of him! To go back to the Archipelago! Back to the unicorns and dragons, the longmas and kankos, to the glimourie, to the land of Mal Arvorian!

'Yes.'

He pulled from under the bed a small box. In it was the tooth that the sphinx had given him, carefully wrapped in cotton wool. There was also a knife, and a metal flask for water, and some food: chocolate, cereal bars, things that would last. He had been ready. He had been waiting. It was what he had been, secretly, longing for; for someone to call his name, and summon him back.

Christopher shoved the tooth, knife and flask into his coat pocket, along with all his money and his phone. Then he took the phone out again, turned it off and left it by the bed; he didn't want to be found. He left a note for his father: it was still early – he wouldn't yet be awake.

'*Dad, I've gone back to the Archipelago. The dragons need my help.*' Just to write it sent a spark of electricity up his arm. '*I'm sorry I didn't ask you. Don't worry about me – I'll be completely safe.*' Then he went back and crossed out 'I'll be completely safe'. No point in lying. He added, '*I'll be careful,*' then crossed that out too. He wrote instead, '*I love you. Christopher.*'

'Hurry!' said Jacques.

Christopher emptied his school bag of a stupendously dull geography project on the Belgian motorway system, an

ancient unwashed sock from his sports kit and a suppurating banana – then offered the backpack to Jacques.

The look the dragon gave him would have withered roses. It would have punched a rainbow straight out of the sky.

'I shall not be transported in that … putrid-smelling, foot-fetid excrescence of a sack. I shall sit on your shoulder as I was wont to do, like a mighty emperor upon his steed.'

'You can't do that. People will see you.'

'Then I shall fly back among the clouds, as I came.'

'The train will be faster and easier.' The tiny dragon looked exhausted, though Christopher knew better than to say it out loud.

'Then find another option. The filth-pack is out of the question.'

Christopher's coat was long and thick, and the pockets were large. 'You can go in my spare pocket.'

Jacques sniffed. 'Better. Barely tolerable, but at least it doesn't have the scent of a minor apocalypse.'

Christopher held the pocket open, and the dragon flew in. His scales were hot and dry to the touch, and the pocket grew warm immediately.

'And now,' said the dragon, 'we go.' He huffed, and dragon smoke – white, this time, and light, and almost sweet – rose from his pocket in a cloud. It smelt, Christopher thought, of the Archipelago: of glimourie, of huge skies spotted with longmas and phoenixes; of the wild enchanted islands.



THE WAY TO THE WAYBETWEEN

It was simple to do, though not easy: they are not the same thing.

Christopher took the bus to Euston Station, expecting every moment to be caught and stopped. Jacques did not make things calmer by attempting to devour the chewing gum he found in Christopher's pocket and becoming stickily entangled in it. Christopher boarded the train. It took half his savings, and Jacques insisted on being fed sausages from the buffet car, thick with ketchup, which he smeared gleefully across Christopher's coat. His thoughts, all the time, were on the dragons – their opaque knowledge, and their dangerous beauty.

On the ferry Christopher left his hard plastic seat and went to stand outside on the deck. The wind and sea spray had kept the other passengers inside.

Jacques emerged triumphantly and laid one chewing-gum-flecked claw on Christopher's chin.

'What are you doing?'

'Investigating your face. How long has it been since we met in the Glimouria Archipelago?'

'Nearly a year.'

'How have you fared? With your new knowledge, and new sorrows, and new delights?'

Christopher smiled. 'I dream about her.' He still thought of Mal Arvorian every day. He spoke to her in his imagination. 'But I know she's there. Somewhere. I know she's out there.' And she had taught him that the world was more colossal than he had known. Sometimes he woke up in the night and the thought of the Archipelago gave him a shock of fresh, strange joy.

'Have you heard anything from any Archipelagians? Nighthand, Irian, that odoriferous ratatoska Ratwin?'

Christopher shook his head. 'I tried to go back – my grandfather stopped me. So we'll have to sneak past him. And my dad will be panicking.' He thought of his loving, world-wary father and felt a sharp pang of guilt touch his excitement. 'Your dragon smoke won't exactly have reassured him.'

Jacques huffed. 'There are many that would be thrilled to have a room bear the trace of a dragon's presence. He should consider it the height of interior design.'

Finally, in the gathering cold and dark, Christopher took a shabby damp-smelling taxi to his grandfather's house. It was

a long drive, and took the last of his money. He asked the driver to stop when his cash ran out, and then he walked.

It took an hour on foot for him to reach his grandfather's gate. He walked along the wooded avenue, under the dark of the trees. Jacques rode triumphantly on his shoulder, the tips of his wings scratching against Christopher's neck, reminding him that this was real.

Once in sight of the house, Christopher ducked behind a tree and peered out. He could see his grandfather Frank sitting at his desk, and his heart leaped. Christopher longed to run to the window, to knock on it, to wave – but he mustn't be seen.

He slipped past and up the hill towards the waybetween; up to the lake at the top that would take him into the Glimouria Archipelago.

But now, as he neared the lake, the thrill and yearning he felt were mixed with a shiver of fear. How could a human survive against a power capable of killing dragons?

Christopher slowed as he reached the top of the hill. The water in the lake glowed green. Jacques gave a low, wordless hoot of urgency.

Christopher walked around the edge of the lake. Below him, deep beneath the surface, the phosphorescent green was bright. He pulled off his boots and hung them round his neck. He hesitated, and Jacques felt the hesitation. The jaculus, for once, did not mock him.

'You cannot both jump and not jump, Christopher,' said Jacques. 'You must choose.'

Faith is paradoxical, in that it consists of belief in the possibility of the impossible; his grandfather had told him that. Christopher thought again of the dragons, and of what dark creature might be hunting them. He thought of the Archipelagian sky, the impossible blue of the impossible place, into which Mal Arvorian had flown.

To dare is to lose one's balance, one's footing in the world. Not to dare is to lose everything worth having.

'Christopher.' Jacques's claws dug deep into his skin. 'Please.'

Dragons do not say please. Christopher took three steps away from the water. Then he gave a yell, a battle cry of love and *yes*, and he turned and ran and leaped far out into the centre of the lake.

It was savagely cold, vicious against his skin. He kicked downwards to the depths of the water, where the phosphorescence swirled around his face. He reached out to touch it. A sudden unbearable pressure crushed his chest as the current seized him. He swallowed water and choked.

Christopher spun in the current, looking desperately for the surface. His head struck a rock and he retched. He was going to drown, his lungs were screaming. His legs kicked again, frantic, and then his head burst out into cool air, and he saw in the dusk light a face watching him from the banks of a river.

The face was at once lion and human. It was ancient, and beautiful. The creature's great back was tawny in the moon-

light, and her four legs were plaited with sinew and muscle. Wings lay along her back, folded, ready. Next to her on the dew-wet grass lay a sword.

It was a sphinx.

Christopher knew that face. Suddenly it no longer mattered that he was bleeding from the temple, staining the river water red. He pulled himself up on to the bank.

'Naravirala!' he said.



NARAVIRALA

The sphinx pounced. With one swipe of her paw she knocked Christopher to his knees. She leaned over him and ran her tongue across the side of his face.

'Welcome!' She licked again, across the cut on his forehead. The bleeding stopped. Like a cat with her kitten, she fixed her lion jaws around his arm and pulled him to his feet, then gave him such a powerful headbutt of pleasure that he nearly fell again.

It was like being mugged by the ancient powers of knowledge and generosity. Christopher laughed.

'Naravirala! What are you doing here?'

'I have come to carry you on my back to Sarkany.' She stretched out her wings, and their scope and beauty were astonishing. 'Jacques came to beg my aid.'

'I never beg,' said Jacques, flying to land on Christopher's

ear. He shook himself like a dog, and steam rose from his scales. 'If you dare to use that word in my biography, Christopher, I shall set fire to your undergarments while you're wearing them. It was more of a lordly request.'

'And he solved a riddle, which you must likewise do,' said the sphinx.

'What happens if I get it wrong?' said Christopher. 'Will you refuse to help us?'

'Of course. And I will also consider eating you,' said Naravirala. She did not laugh, and he was reminded that a sphinx is not a human, and their logic is not human logic.

'Here is your riddle: *What is it that you can give to another, and only then must keep?*'

Christopher stared at the sphinx. Money? A … shoe? And then he looked at Jacques, and at the huge Archipelagian sky, and understood. 'Your word,' he said. 'I gave my word to protect the islands.'

'Good,' said Naravirala. 'It is not to be done lightly. A promise is a sharp and shining thing: it should cut like a knife and weigh like a stone.'

'My riddle,' said Jacques smugly, 'was about the powers and properties of dragon dung. I knew the answer immediately, as you'd expect. Naravirala, are you content? Do we fly?'

'Yes. Sarkany is on the island of Edem,' said Naravirala. 'It is to the south-west of here.'

'Then let's go!' said Christopher. 'I'm ready.'

'Wait,' said Naravirala. 'There is something else; something

I have read in the stars. I ignored it at first, but these last nights it has become insistent. There is a child in trouble. She is at risk of death. She is connected, somehow, to you and the dragons.'

Christopher felt his heart beat faster. 'Not … the Immortal?'

'No,' said the sphinx. 'This child is something else entirely. She is in need of you; and you are in need of her. But I do not know precisely where she is: we would have to hunt. We could also choose to ignore the stars. It has been done many thousands of times before, and sometimes it is wise to do so.'

'But who is she? What danger? What does she have to do with me?'

'I do not know. Only that she is a child in need of aid. That is the difficulty of stars.' The sphinx blinked huge ironical eyes at him. 'They are notoriously unspecific.'

Jacques snorted. 'I loathe star-talk. If they have something to say, they should do us the service of spelling it out in a recognisable alphabet.'

Naravirala ignored him. 'Will you make a detour on your way to Sarkany? There will be dangers, I believe. I do not order you, I merely ask.'

'Of course,' said Christopher. If this girl was going to die, they had no choice but to go.

Naravirala looked at Jacques. 'And you?'

The small dragon's face was grudging, but he huffed

white smoke. 'If we ask the sphinx's aid, it is fair that she may ask ours in return.'

'Then yes,' said Christopher. 'Yes!'

Naravirala took the sword in her mouth and laid it at Christopher's feet. 'Take this,' she said. 'The blade has heat and light in it. It's an ancient thing; it was forged from dragon obsidian.' She knelt, and Christopher swung himself on to her back, settling between her wings with his legs pulled up under him. There was a great pulsing beat of muscular strength against stubborn gravity, and they took flight.



THE PRINCESS OF DOUSHA

At the exact same moment, Princess Anya Phoebe Cornelia Argen of the Island of Dousha, Duchess of the Silver Mountains, Countess of the Winged Forests – dirt in her fingernails and blood on her lip – darted over the rooftop of her castle. A dozen royal gaganas flew overhead, following her. It was dusk, and the gold beaks of the gaganas caught the moonlight and sent it skittering across the stone.

There was a movement in the darkest corner of the rooftop. Anya froze, and whisper-hissed, 'Who's there?'

But it was only Coren, a young gagana, scarum-feathered and confident as a king. He came skimming up to land on her shoulder. 'Quick. He's coming up the stairs.'

Anya's bedroom was in the far corner of the West Wing: you could slide sideways out of the window on to the battlements, and from there look out across the stately gardens,

down over the rooftops and clamour of the city, to the ocean where the winged unicorns bathed.

But Anya was not there that evening for the view. She was there to stop a death.

It was Gallia who had warned her. The old bird had come flying in through her bedroom window just minutes earlier, croaking in a high panicked urgency Anya had never heard before. 'The egg! Anya! He's coming for her egg!'

A guard in the grounds – a stranger, a man Gallia had never seen before – had shot a gagana with a crossbow. It was unheard of – royal gaganas were protected by law.

The soldier had nodded in satisfaction and had turned to his companion: 'Get the egg then. It's what he's paying us for.'

Who would want a gagana egg badly enough to kill for it? It was unthinkable! The gaganas were not just birds; they were her best friends and dearest companions. They were as wise as any human – much wiser than most, Anya thought. In a castle built on rules and regulations, they filled the air with light and song and the clamour of wings.

The egg belonged to Felin, whose body now lay limp, out of sight by the castle lake. Anya did not know Felin well, but she knew her nesting spot: on top of a chimney for warmth, on the far side of the West Quadrangle.

Crouching low, she ran as fast as she could along the courtyard side of the slanting rooftop. She had never run it before, and her stomach swooped as her feet fumbled for purchase.

'Take care,' said Gallia. The old bird flew just above her head, and came now to rest on her hair. 'The slate!'

Too late. Anya set her foot on a loose tile, and she lurched as it dislodged and dropped to the ground with a crash. But she had not been drilled for endless hours in posture for nothing. Anya Argen could pirouette with a book on her head; her balance was strong and true. She caught herself and dropped to a crouch.

'Hurry!' called Coren. 'He's close!'

Anya scrambled onwards, and the egg was there: small, silver-white, delicate as blown glass. She took it as if handling the world's most precious porcelain, and her heart surged with relief. She turned to run back to her room.

The trapdoor in the roof shifted, creaked, began to lift.

With a low cry, she dropped to her stomach, pressing herself against the stone. The shadow covered her, but it wasn't enough. She would be caught. He would take the egg from her.

The trapdoor lifted. Anya swore. The soldier's face appeared, scanning the rooftop.

Anya waited until his whole head was clear of the trapdoor. Then she cried out, 'Coren! Attack!' Coren gave a high shriek and dived straight at the man's eyes. The man bellowed in shock.

Anya cried, 'Together! Now!' and every gagana around her rose in a cloud, and cannoned towards him. He roared, and ducked back down behind the trapdoor – and Anya ran, one hand clutched to her chest with the egg, back to her room.

She crouched on her bed and feverishly checked every inch of the shell. It was uncracked, unharmed.

Anya held the egg close, breathing on it to warm it. She would tell her father, she thought, as soon as he was free of his royal duties. He loved the gaganas. He would know what to do. He always did.

Her fingers went to her pendant: a small silver disc on a chain. Her mother had left it to her when she had died ten years ago, and Anya never took it off. Touching it gave her comfort; when she was a baby she had cut her teeth on it. Now she put the edge in her mouth, and bit gently down on it.

Something was bitterly wrong in Argen Castle. This was fresh proof of it.



THE GLIMOURIA ARCHIPELAGO

Anya's home was in the bright-lit southern end of the Glimouria Archipelago.

In the Archipelago you would find thirty-seven species of dragon, and mermaids with shimmering tails twenty feet long. You would find behemoths in the ocean that could eat a dozen people in a mouthful, and sphinxes on the (unimaginatively named, Anya felt) Sphinx Peninsula.

The sphinxes cut words into the rock of the mountains with their claws: mathematics, astronomy, history, and even jokes, most of which did not work in translation.

One of those histories was that of the Island of Dousha, and the family of Argen: the last royal family left in the Archipelago.

A king or queen from the Argen family had ruled the Island of Dousha for more than a thousand years. They had

built Argen Castle back at the beginning of their reign, and bedecked it in silver; the metal had been beaten to the thinness of paper by blacksmiths, and hammered on to each brick. It had, the histories said, been a thing of astonishing beauty. It had not, though, been practical. The sunlight had caught the silver, burning the grass and toasting the feathers of birds in the gardens.

Nowadays, the silver was largely gone, through rain and time and theft. But the castle was still silver-*flecked* and, seen from above as the phoenix flies, it still glinted in moonlight.

It had been a strange year. The army had grown larger, and soldiers lined the streets in ways they had not done before. It should be spring, but the snow had lingered on the Island of Dousha for far too long. The sky felt uneasy. People said the snow was a sign of nothing good to come.

The current king, His Majesty Halam Argen, had just turned seventy years old. He had a stern jaw, a thin mouth and wrinkles that expressed a life of scepticism and pride.

Anya Argen – with hair the colour of an unwashed moon, brown eyes, gagana scars on every finger and all the way up her forearms – was his granddaughter.

Though she did not know it, as she carried the egg to the fire to warm it, her life was about to change – beyond all recognition, and forever.



THE GRAMMAR OF BIRDS

Anya had not always lived in the castle. Indeed, she would gladly, if given the option and the matches, have burned it to the ground.

Until last year, Anya had lived her whole life with her father in a sandstone house in the vast forest that stretched out behind Argen Castle. Winged unicorns flew over the treetops to drink in the great lake. As a toddler, Anya had tried, once, to stroke them, but just once: only Gallia pulling her away by the hair had stopped her from being politely and graciously gored to death.

You never saw Anya without the royal gaganas, their golden beaks, silver claws and iridescent black feathers. Sometimes it was just old Gallia, her constant companion; sometimes a half-dozen young birds of her own age, still fluffy in the neck and head. Coren had once, in a fit of high-spirited

delight, bitten off the very tip of Anya's ear. He had refused to apologise. 'I'm entitled, surely, to a tiny amount of your ear, in exchange for my friendship. It was a very small piece.' At night, the entire flock of thirty came to roost along her bed and curtain rail.

The gaganas were not easy. They needed the windows open at all times, even in the snow. And they had, Anya couldn't deny, an odour to them. But they were the greatest glories of her life. Few children came by the forest, so Anya grew up with the birds as her most cherished friends. They were the living creatures she adored most, second only to her father. And they loved her, ferociously, birdwise adoring, in return. Coren's beak was her alarm clock, and Gallia carefully pecked off the ends of her hair so she never needed a hairdresser.

Best of all, the birds were her professors.

'I want,' her father had said to them, 'for Anya to have a different education from mine – one far, far away from the money-hunger of the royal court. Will you tutor her?'

And so they taught her history, philosophy and mathematics, and the ancient gagana songs, gleeful and wild, about castles and dragons and revenge. They taught her sword-craft, using whittled sticks clutched in their beaks, three birds against Anya. 'I don't need school,' she would say. 'I've got the birds.' Anya's voice – though the recent elocution tutors had tried – could not be rid of some of the intonation of the gaganas. Nor did she look un-birdlike herself: long and supple in the hands and feet, quick in the eyes.

Her father, Argus Argen, was the King's elder son and heir. Argus's dream, though, was to be a plant scientist. He was tall and swift-smiling, and when he talked, he seemed to spark. All her life Anya had helped him graft and nurture new hybrids; a rose-nettle, with beautiful stinging petals, and a snapdragon that could take the tip off your finger. They bred nasthairtiums that made your hair grow an inch a day, and honeysuckle you could spread straight on to your toast. As soon as Anya could toddle, her father let her help – really help, not just watch, but real pruning and cutting and planting. Together they crossbred thirty-seven plants to make frogweed, which allowed you to breathe underwater for ten glorious minutes – but if you ate it more than once a day, she painfully discovered, it had the disagreeable effect of covering your bottom in pustules.

Argus protected every living thing that passed through the garden. He refused to kill even the snails. 'We're entangled in life,' he said. 'All that lives is sacred.'

Anya and her father were attempting to cultivate the rascovnic, a wild herb that could open any lock or door. It was shaped like a five-leafed clover, and grew only on the Island of Dousha. 'If we could find a way to extract seeds, Anya, and grow it across the whole Archipelago! What if the unlocking would work for more than doors? For blocked arteries or hearts?'

His younger brother, Claude, had rolled his eyes. 'The locksmiths of the island wouldn't thank you, Argus.'

Argus had only laughed; he loved his younger brother, but could not quite be persuaded that he was a grown adult. Claude was three years younger, and generally reckoned the handsome one. Anya, who revered her father's large eyebrows and crooked nose and big gentle hands, fervently disagreed.

But neither the King nor Claude came often to the forest, and so Argus had been free to experiment, and Anya had been free to leap and whistle and swim. They were splendours, those times – with the exception of one month a year. Anya always spent April in the castle: the King insisted on it. 'She mustn't grow up a hoyden,' he said, 'without a sense of what is due to her position.'

The visits were grim for Anya. The year she was seven, she had been forbidden to walk down the castle stairs by herself without someone coming to hold her hand, lest she slip. Seven! Anya Argen could, at seven, climb to the top of the highest tree in the forest, with twenty gaganas guiding her way, perched on her hair, her back, her hands.

Anya knew that eventually of course her father would have to return to the castle, when her grandfather died and her father was crowned king. But King Halam was only seventy. They might have lived another ten years at least in the forest, had it not been for Anya's mistake.