

The Watcher, the Thief, and the Sacrifice

She notices small things, this one. She notices cracks and imperfections in the concrete. She notices the trail of ants that slip so easily through the walls of her prison. She smiles at a spider in the corner, spinning its invaluable, little web. But most of all she stares, transfixed, at the enormous black and brown moth on the wall above the bare mattress where she sleeps. *The black witch*, she calls it, because that is its species, but also because that's what she wants it to be. She is an amateur entomologist and an expert dreamer.

“How'd you get in here?” she says to the black witch. “You must have cast a spell.”

Her name is Juniper Adams, she is fourteen years old, and she has been in the cellar three weeks and a day. The morning she arrived, she was terrified. She screamed and screamed until she was hoarse. She pounded on the walls until her fists were swollen. Then she gave up, lay on her stomach, and cried.

Her captor left her alone until her tears were dry and she had no energy for more. Then he entered the cellar and explained her situation. She was to live in this place until he tired of her. The man had a terrible craving. He needed to own a human being, and Juniper would fulfill that need. If she was good and did not try to escape, the man would be satisfied with her, and he would not need to abduct anyone else. But if she did try to escape, the man would be forced to kill and replace her. He had kidnapped one person, but he kept her by holding the rest of the world hostage.

She doesn't dare test his resolve. Instead, Juniper spends her days reading the books he has given her, drawing on the walls, and conversing with the black witch until her captor finally cuts her power and she is forced to sleep.