

Chapter One

Things Not Yet Dreamt

October 1937

Abyssinia, kiddo.

Those were the last words Goldie Greenberg's mother ever said to her, and they echoed through the hollow space in Goldie's heart as she swung her legs over the windowsill and dropped into the cold autumn dark. She landed with a solid *thunk* on the slanted porch roof below her bedroom window and had a moment of panic as her feet slid forward in her too-large men's work boots. (Women's shoes fit better, of course, but T-straps and high heels were too impractical for Goldie's line of work.) She came dangerously close to tumbling off the roof before she pinwheeled her arms and righted herself, wishing sorrow and crotch spiders on the makers of women's shoes.

A light came on in the bathroom and Goldie's heart completed its descent into her stomach. Had she already been caught? She briefly considered diving off the roof—a broken

ankle sounded more appealing than seeing the disappointment and frustration on her father's face if he caught her sneaking out again—but after a long, breathless moment, water gurgled through the elderly pipes and the house went dark and quiet again.

Abyssinia, kiddo.

She counted out another thirty seconds for safety—an eternity crouched on the porch roof, a soft spot in the old wood causing it to buckle beneath her weight, spotlighted like an escaping prisoner in the glow of the streetlamp in front of her house. When she was sure the coast was clear, Goldie climbed down the trellis and retrieved the canvas bag she'd hidden behind a bush earlier that day.

Abyssinia, kiddo.

I'll be seein' ya, kiddo.

Her mom had always talked that way: jazzy slang that sounded silly when Goldie tried it, but somehow gave Elizabeth Greenberg an air of displaced glamour. “Abyssinia, kiddo,” she'd said with a smile and a Groucho Marx eyebrow waggle as she'd closed Goldie's bedroom door behind her two months ago.

She was supposed to be back in a couple of hours.

Goldie never saw her again.

She found a pool of shadow in the alley beside her house and did her best to lurk in it, the bag resting at her feet so its contents wouldn't clang together every time she shifted her weight. A storm had prodded the earth with fingers of lightning the night before, and it had left behind a cold shroud of fog that clung like spider webs to everything it touched. Goldie's wool cap was pulled low on her head in a Sisyphean attempt to contain her hair, but her curls were already surrendering to the damp. She'd tried taming them and sculpting them into soft Marlene Dietrich waves like the other girls were doing, but the best she could manage was to shellac them into temporary submission with her dad's Brylcreem. The effect only lasted a

few hours and the smell clashed with the scent of machine oil that was worked into every fiber of her clothes, so she was mostly resigned to letting her curls do their worst. The fog was already complicating matters, giving her hair funny ideas about its station in life.

She looked at her watch: ten minutes past 5 a.m. *Where was Finn?* She was prepared to find him and possibly murder him if he didn't show up.

There was movement in the alley—the odd, halting rhythm of someone trying to walk quietly and being bad at it. Goldie's breath caught in her throat and her hand went instinctively to the pocket of her trousers, fingers curling around the handle of the object she kept there. But to her relief, the shadows clanged, clattered, swore loudly, and produced Will Finnegan.

"You're late," Goldie said, the object in her pocket abandoned for now, though its weight still gave her comfort. She hefted the strap of the bag over her shoulder as Finn righted the trash can he'd knocked over.

"Fashionably," said Finn.

They fell into a comfortable rhythm as they walked, and soon Goldie's neighborhood was behind them. The dark was fraying at the edges as dawn approached, and even in the fog, Goldie could make out the broad strokes that sketched the town of Willow Point: the clock tower that loomed over the shops and bakeries and lunch counters downtown; the spas and resorts that lured the wealthy to Willow Point, even as breadlines carved up the bigger cities nearby; and, standing watch over everything, the roller coaster and Ferris wheel that formed the geographic heart of Point Park, the amusement park at the center of town, like the bones of some enormous prehistoric animal that had crawled from the cold depths of the bay to warm itself in the sun.

Goldie quickened her pace to keep up with Finn's long legs. Her friend was absurdly handsome in a way that she tried, and mostly failed, not to resent. Even at seventeen—the

same age as Goldie—Finn was comfortable in his skin, a feeling Goldie couldn't even imagine. She was perpetually annoyed by his charm and the way he wielded it to get anything he wanted. Correction: any *girl* he wanted. But it was Finn's stupid, perfect face she'd seen more than any other—besides her father's—in the tear-blurred weeks that stretched on forever in the wake of her mom's death. Family drifted away, inconvenienced by the enormity of her dad's grief, the intensity of Goldie's anger. It was Finn who stayed, and Goldie loved him fiercely in spite of his Finn-ness.

When they stopped to pet a stray dog—there were fewer of them around these days, now that more people had cars—she pulled back one lapel of Finn's threadbare peacoat and reached into the inside pocket.

“Anything good in there?” she asked.

Finn twisted away and swatted at her hand. “I'm saving myself for marriage, you brazen hussy,” he told her, but he reached into his pocket and pulled out a bottle of bourbon. Goldie recognized the label—it was the same expensive brand that her father saved for happy times.

Dad's bottle had been gathering dust at the back of the shelf for months.

Abyssinia, kiddo.

“I'm impressed,” Goldie said.

“I'm a gentleman. I only steal the best.”

Goldie twisted off the cap as they resumed their walk, the dog having trotted off on important dog business. The small sip she took was enough to send a blast of heat all the way to her fingertips, even if it did nothing to chase away the twin shadows of guilt and regret that were forever stitched to her heels. What if she'd gone with her mother that night, or at least followed her? Mom had said no when Goldie asked to tag along, but Goldie had always

thought of her mother's *nos* as suggestions rather than rules. What if she hadn't picked that night to start listening to her parents?

She passed the bottle to Finn, who tipped his head back for a long swig. When he held out his hand for the cap, Goldie was already dropping it into his palm. That's how it was with them—this walk was like a dance, and they'd rehearsed every step. Finn tucked the bottle back into his pocket.

“Almost forgot,” he said, and when his hand came back out, there was a square of folded paper in it. He passed it to Goldie.

“What's this?” she asked.

“It was stuck up in a window downtown.”

“So you just took it?”

“It was for public information. You're part of the public, and I'm informing you. You're welcome.”

Goldie unfolded the paper and knew immediately why Finn has brought it to her. It looked like it was designed specifically to attract her attention.

The first words she noticed on the handbill were “Professor Morbido's Midnite Ghost Show,” because they were the biggest and printed in a typeface cribbed from the horror movie posters plastered to her bedroom walls. A vaporous ghost loomed over the text, its lower half tapering into a wispy tentacle of something that was probably meant to be ectoplasm. “Live seance and ghost show,” Goldie read aloud, and she ticked off the promises listed in smaller print: “Poltergeists, spirit lights, table tipping, materializations. Ghosts will appear. Spirits will speak. The dead will walk among you! Featuring a rare appearance by world-famous spirit medium Madame Zora.”

“We should go,” Finn said. “It'll be fun.”

“Some of us have to work.”

“Hey! I work too. Do you think I wake up looking this handsome?”

Actually, yes, Goldie thought. It's one of your worst qualities.

The flyer, Goldie would later decide, should have come to her differently. It should have found her on its own, borne on a sharp October wind, scurrying along the sidewalk in its own private tornado of coppered leaves and night-bug husks. It should have wrapped itself around her feet and demanded to be picked up.

You think so much has ended, it should have said, in a voice older than the pyramids but crackling with the promise of things not yet dreamt. *But it has only just begun.*

But Goldie had learned that life didn't work that way. The moments that will leave you forever changed, the ones that will cut you into pieces and sew them back together into someone new, don't announce themselves. Life comes apart when you're not looking—when the checkout girl says, “Did you hear they found a body under the boardwalk?” and you don't pay her any mind because no one ever does, and then you go home to find a pair of grim-faced policemen sitting in your living room and your father on his knees in the bathroom, retching his grief into the toilet.

“Sorry, Finn,” she said, crumpling the flyer into a ball and tossing it into a trashcan beside the front gate of Point Park. “I've got more important things to do.”

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There were more versions of Point Park than Goldie could count—cotton-candy summers and mulled-cider winters, afternoons that trilled with endless loops of calliope music and nights that hummed with big-band swing spilling from the dance hall. But this was the version she loved best: early mornings, before the sky pinked with first light, when the midway was quiet and still and belonged only to her. The grounds crew wouldn't be in to

open the gate for another hour, so she and Finn had to shimmy over the big iron fence that wrapped around the park, Goldie shoving her canvas bag between the rusting bars before she climbed over, hoping nothing was damaged in the process.

The electric thrum of night frogs had given way to morning birdsong by the time they reached their destination: a ride with an elaborately painted facade that depicted a river winding through a dense forest. The ride had been named The River Cave when Goldie's parents bought it from its original operator a few months ago and put Goldie in charge of revamping it. She had left the facade intact but changed the ride's name to Firefly Cove, adding the huge, lighted moon that now loomed over the forest scene and shone like a beacon above the midway's cotton candy stands and hotdog carts. (In a moment of inspiration, Goldie had painted a witch gliding across the moon in pitch-black silhouette.) Since then, she'd wired the entire facade for lights and embedded tiny bulbs throughout the scene so that it came to life when the sun went down. Bright yellow pinpoints lit up the trees like fireflies, and red eyes glowed from the depths of the painted forest. The best dark rides were like horror movies: You give riders just enough detail to trigger some primal fear—a shadow beneath the water's surface, watchful eyes biding their time in the darkest part of the woods—and let their imagination do the rest.

“Sneaking out of your house at five in the morning so you can add a few extra hours to your work day,” Finn said as Goldie unlocked the ride's maintenance door. He paused for a yawn so wide Goldie wondered if he was about to unhinge his jaw and swallow a goat before he finished his thought: “I can't even get my head around all the things that are wrong with that sentence.”

“I just want everything to be perfect,” Goldie said.

It wasn't exactly a lie—she'd helped her parents build rides before, but Firefly Cove was the first one she had designed by herself, and she *did* want it to be flawless. But it also

wasn't the truth, or at least not all of it. She didn't want Finn to know that her dad worried about the time she'd been spending in the Cove—that it had become something like an obsession. So what if it had? Of all the things she could be obsessing over lately, getting Firefly Cove in prime operating condition in time for Halloween seemed like the safest option.

She flipped the switch that turned on the ride's houselights, and suddenly she and Finn were standing in an October dreamland born of Goldie's imagination. The work lights drained away most of the magic—the Cove was best experienced in near dark, with the only illumination coming from the colored lightscapes Goldie had created throughout the winding labyrinth that made up the ride's innards. But even under the dim glow of the overheads, there was a hint of the spell she hoped the ride would cast when the lights were out and the little boats drifted into the mouth of the damp, dark tunnel.

The recesses throughout the ride had once housed a bizarre mishmash of second-hand props. Most of the original owner's budget had gone toward the structure of the ride itself, which consisted of a wood-lined canal that snaked through the building and an enormous water wheel that churned the 87,000 gallons of water it took to carry the boats through the serpentine course.

Goldie had painstakingly replaced those random props with self-contained scenes inspired by the horror movies she and her mother had watched together with a devotion that bordered on religious fervor.

If the movie theater had been her mother's church, this place was her shrine.

Only Finn and her father would recognize Firefly Cove for what it really was: a memorial to every midnight story Goldie's mom would never hear again. Here was the witch that arced across the moon on a broomstick that left lightning in its trail; there was the nameless thing that lurked in the shadows, all glowing eyes and puffs of hot, close breath that

would startle riders in the darkest part of the tunnel. (Rigging the boats to trip the air compressor had been a nightmare.) Goldie had engineered and built every effect herself. She even restored the water wheel and repaired its failing motor, though she'd had to slow down the speed a little. The original builder had designed it to sweep passengers through the entire course in ninety seconds to maximize profits, but Goldie had something else in mind. Maybe a ride could be more than a minute and a half of jump-scares and getting pawed by a teenage boy with delusions of sexual grandeur. Maybe a ride could do what a story could: transport you to another place, another time.

Even, if only for a few minutes, to another life altogether. A world where anything is possible, and death is not the end.

“Alright, then,” Finn said. “Let’s see your monster.”

Goldie adjusted her tool belt for what felt like the hundredth time that morning. Even with the new hole she'd awled in the leather, the belt inevitably crept down her hips and threatened to take her mutinous trousers with it. She placed her canvas bag on the floor between them, slid the zipper open, and, not without a certain degree of ceremony, pulled out a tentacle.

To say that Goldie was proud of her tentacle would be an understatement. (She knew it wasn't really a tentacle, but she was tired of explaining cephalopod physiology when she called it a giant octopus arm and someone said, “Oh, you mean a tentacle.” She had decided that hypothetical monster anatomy was not the hill she wanted to die on.) The arm was the first thing she'd made with the new foam latex they were using in the movies. She machined the metal armature herself on her dad's mill and formed the rubbery, sucker-covered latex “skin” in molds she painstakingly cast from clay and gypsum concrete. She'd had to cure the molds in a fire pit she dug on the beach, since their kitchen oven didn't get hot enough. The

process had felt wonderfully witchy, like conjuring some infernal creature from the depths of hell.

“Oh,” Finn said. “I thought it would be bigger.”

Goldie’s heart sank. She started to explain to him that she was counting on the rider’s imagination to do the real work. Sure, there were only three pieces, and they weren’t particularly big pieces as monster parts probably went. But if you spaced them out just right—a hump of octopus arm here, another one there, and whatever you call that pointy bit at the end a few feet away from that—and rigged it all to rise out of the murky canal just as the little boat was drifting toward it, three feet of armature and foam rubber became a twenty-foot horror lurking just below the surface. She wanted to remind him that Willis O’Brien’s King Kong puppet was only eighteen inches tall.

But soon the park would be humming with activity and her father would be there to manage the day’s official slate of repairs and routine maintenance on their other rides, so instead she just got to work. She’d already installed the mechanism that would lift the arm out of the water and lower it again, so it was just a matter of attaching the arm and hoping the water didn’t eat away at the latex faster than she could replace it. Finn was a competent helper if she supervised him carefully, and they almost had a functional aquatic horror when Finn looked at his watch and swore.

“Shit! Sorry, doll. I’ve gotta go.”

“What’s the rush?” Goldie asked.

“Got a job.”

“A job? You? What kind of a job?”

“A big one.” Finn tossed the wrench he’d been using onto the floor—Goldie, to whom tools were like religious artifacts, only more useful and not as apt to be filled with some random saint’s moldy finger bones, winced at the sound it made when it fell—and

wiped his grease-blackened palms on his pants. “Can’t be late.” He gave her a brotherly kiss on the top of her head, and then he was gone, and Goldie was in a state she’d tried like hell to avoid since her mom’s death.

She was alone.

#

She’d never been troubled by solitude before, but since her mom died, Goldie’s mind had been playing tricks on her. It always seemed to happen while she was working—a curl of hair that moved of its own accord, as if an invisible finger were pushing it away from her forehead, or the tell-tale prickle that whispered of another presence, someone standing just over her shoulder, even when she was sure no one else was around. She knew it was her imagination getting the best of her, and that’s why she needed Finn. It wasn’t that he was a good mechanic—his usual approach to machine repair was to either kick it or steal a new one. But he was something she needed even more than an extra set of hands. He was noise and motion and laughter. He was an engine of constant distraction, and sometimes Goldie thought he was the only thing keeping her sane.

He’d only been gone for a few minutes when something stilled Goldie’s hands. She wasn’t sure what it was—not really a sound and nothing she could see or smell, just a sudden, undeniable sense that she was no longer alone. But there was something ... *thicker* about this presence, something solid. She listened for footsteps, but all she could hear was the occasional gurgle of water and the faint sound of the boats banging against the loading station out front. The air in the Cove smelled the same as always: pleasantly musty, with notes of machine oil and cotton candy and the ozone tang of electrical discharge.

For all the ghosts she'd rigged to swoop from the rafters and descend on shrieking riders, she knew Firefly Cove wasn't really haunted, at least not in any of the ways you usually got ghosts. As far as Goldie knew, no one's head had been cut off here and no one had died with unfinished business within these walls, unless you counted the dead skunk she hauled out two weeks ago. (And if the skunk's business had been stinking up the place to a truly spectacular degree, it had definitely finished it.) Goldie chided herself for being excitable and finished tweaking her handiwork. She looked up to reach for a spanner wrench, and that's when she saw him.

A man had followed her into the Cove.

The sight of him sent Goldie's heart pistoning into her throat, a jolt of surprise so intense that a wave of nausea shot through her on its heels. She couldn't think of any reason why a man would follow a girl into a dark, deserted place—or rather, she could think of many reasons, each worse than the last. He was slim but tall; he had a good foot on her at least, plus longer legs and arms to boot. Speed and reach, reach and speed. She thought of what her dad would tell her to do. *Run*, Saul would say. *Just get away*.

But the closest way out was the maintenance door, which the intruder was blocking. And anyway, this was *her* place. Why should she run? Who did he think was, to threaten her here, on her own turf? Her fear shapeshifted into something just as feral but far more useful.

Anger.

She reached into her pocket and found the little piece of confidence she kept there. She wrapped her fingers around its handle. It was a good blackjack, simple but brutal; Goldie had made it herself. There was a lead weight at one end and a spring-coil shaft that served as a handle at the other, all wrapped in soft, supple leather that she had scavenged from an old tool bag. It was elegant and mean at the same time, a weapon of sailors and gangsters and girl mechanics who only wanted to be left alone to build monsters in the dark. For a girl like

Goldie—a girl who looked breakable, who wore men’s trousers and tucked her wild hair under a boyish cap, who felt swoony inside when the pretty new girl who tore tickets at the mirror maze smiled at her—that was no small thing.

“Listen, buddy,” Goldie said, thwacking the weapon gently against her palm so that the man was sure to see it. “I haven’t had a day off in a month and I’ve got one week to get this ride working the way I want it to work before Halloween. I’m not in the mood for whatever you’ve got in mind and if you take one step closer, and I do mean *one single step*, I am going to beat you until I break something.”

To Goldie’s delight, the man looked shaken. “Most people don’t threaten to beat me senseless until they get to know me a bit,” he said.

But his smile was warm and genuine, which put Goldie off her game a little. He had a thin, immaculately groomed black mustache and a habit of smoothing it with two quick flicks of his thumb. His gray eyes were the color of storm clouds that had sailed in over the Atlantic from strange lands, but they were full of humor, and they sparkled like a boy’s beneath the brim of his perfectly blocked trilby hat. She put his age at somewhere in his early thirties. Something about him looked oddly familiar, and it finally dawned on her.

“You’re the guy from the flyer,” she said. “The magician—Captain Macabre.”

“Ghostmaster, if you please.” He squared his shoulders and tugged at the lapels of his jacket, like he’d just conquered a small European country and was waiting for someone to paint his portrait. “And the name is Professor Morbido.”

It’s possible that Goldie could’ve suppressed her eyeroll if she’d put some effort into it, but the world would never know. She decided he wasn’t much of a threat, unless he planned to incapacitate her with the sheer force of his ego. She returned the blackjack to her pocket and got back to assembling her octopus. “Professor, huh? What exactly are you a professor of?”

He seemed to consider his options before he settled on, “Forbidden knowledge. Dark wonders. Arcane secrets from beyond the pale ...” He trailed off and looked embarrassed.

“No one ever actually asks.”

“Could you maybe be a professor of handing me that spanner wrench?”

He handed her a hammer.

“So you’ve seen our advertisements?” He said it the way British people do, with the stress on the second syllable, though he didn’t sound British at all.

“I’ve seen one,” Goldie said. This conversation was less than a minute old, and though she was glad she hadn’t had to expend the energy it would’ve taken to beat him to death, he was already wearing on her patience. She desperately wanted him to go away so she could work. “Why are you here?” she asked. “And how do you not know that this is a hammer?”

“Actually, my name is not Professor Morbido—”

“It’s like finding out there’s no Santa Claus.”

“Yes, well.” He was hard to rattle—Goldie had to give him that much. “It’s Wyman T. Holloway the Third. And I’m here to offer you a job. You see, I—”

“Wait a minute.” Goldie blew an errant curl out of her eyes and took a deep, steadying breath. “You stalked me through an empty amusement park, waited until I was alone, and cornered me in a dark building where the only way out is through you, to offer me a job?”

“When you say it like that, it does make my judgment sound questionable.”

He looked uncomfortable, and for half a second Goldie worried that she’d hurt his feelings. She gave herself a good mental shake. Honestly, what were men thinking, ever? And why were women so quick to assume responsibility for their feelings?

“Do you know that I nearly clobbered you?” she asked him, waving the hammer in his direction for emphasis. “Do you know what a hunk of lead can do to a human skull? Do you

know that I was already thinking about what to do with your body in case I hit you too hard?

Do you know how dangerous it is to approach strange girls in dark places?"

"I'm beginning to realize."

He did look genuinely sorry for having started this conversation, and that was worth something, she guessed. She wasn't entirely without mercy, and she couldn't deny that she was curious about his offer. "What is it that you want to hire me to do?"

He smiled and relief radiated from him, like he'd just realized the light barreling toward him in a narrow tunnel was a headlamp and not a freight train. He gestured to everything around them.

"This! I want you to lift the spirit veil and wield esoteric magics and wrangle impossible creatures."

She rolled her eyes again, but there was less conviction in it this time. "How did you even find me?"

"The gentleman who sells tickets at the Rialto told me you're the one I need."

"So you walked up to the box office and said, 'I'd like one ticket for *Top Hat*, please,' and Mister Christy said, 'Sure, but what you really need is a lady engineer to do special effects for your ghost show, so you should probably go bother Goldie Greenberg.'"

"Exactly!" he said. "Well, not quite. There was a bit more to it than that. Has anyone ever told you you're rather difficult to talk to?"

Only everyone I've ever met, Goldie thought. "No," she said.

He was quiet for a moment as he surveyed Goldie's handiwork all around him. He seemed truly impressed by what he saw. No, *impressed* wasn't quite the right word. He seemed ... proud.

“The world is not always a kind place for people like us, Miss Greenberg.” Holloway smiled, and there was so much sadness in it that Goldie felt a sympathetic ache in her own heart. “Being alone doesn’t make it any easier.”

“People like us?” What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Come to the Rialto tonight and find out.” He tipped his charcoal-gray trilby, and Goldie revised her estimate of his age. He was older than she’d first thought; now she could see that his dark hair was threaded with silver, and the corners of his eyes were etched with crow’s feet. If he was younger than her father, it wasn’t by much.

“Rehearsal begins at nine,” he said as he turned to leave.

And that could have been the end of it—he could have walked out of Goldie’s life and disappeared into the new morning, and she might never have thought of him again. But he paused in the doorway, darkness on one side of him and light on the other, a silhouette propped between one world and the next. By then he was far enough away that she only barely heard the last words he called over his shoulder as he stepped into the plum-colored dawn:

“Abyssinia, kiddo.”