

### 3.

The fingers on her right hand twitch. Once. Twice. Three times.

Then it halts suddenly, like an invisible button has been pressed inside her.

She rounds the corner at Carrollton and the steering wheel vibrates between her hands. She can't tell if it's the reaction of the car against the cracked and ruined street or something else altogether.

Uptown is vacant, a shell of itself, a true ghost town, absent any human sign of life. Downed trees. Errant electric poles crashed across the tracks.

Gone. Everyone gone.

*Gone away. Gone away again.*

Or dead. Everyone's dead.

A shudder goes through her, making her fingertips tingle.

*Spirits. Souls of the long dead and recently removed. Haunting. Corners and crevices thick with agony and sorrow.*

Then she's on Prytania, just off Washington. Houses untouched but empty. Fallen

tree limbs stacked upon each other. A twisted bike flung up against a fence.

Her hands go static with needling pain.

She grips the steering wheel tightly, her teeth grinding together.

*Gone away. Go away. Coming for you, mama. Coming for you. RINA! Goddamned  
witches, all a you. Nothing here for you, child. Take her, Shay. Take her away from this place. Get  
her gone. Gone away. GO AWAY.*

Pain peppers up her arms, ticking at her skin, driving toward the base of her skull, drilling behind a wall that had been there for so long she's forgotten it even existed.

Her head knocks forward against the wheel, jolting her awake.

She is sitting outside Faith House. She is staring at her childhood home.

Her own personal ghosts drift across the soaking lawn, their anger and confusion still present, solid and thick, almost visible in the air.

*Mama, don't you dare. Sabine, goddammit, this isn't about you it's about the child we  
have to protect — Don't you tell me who we have to protect don't you tell me a goddamned thing  
— MAMA!*

Her heart thuds in her ears. She's out of the car now. Standing at the gate. Her hands grasp onto the wrought iron, her fingers twisting into the metal, white with tension, her whole body vibrating with wired fear.

She falls back to the sidewalk and then she is running. Running away. Running

toward her grandmother's house. Toward her Bibi who she knows will be waiting for her just as she knows her own mother won't be.

*You shouldn't be here. You can't be here. Go away. Go away.*

GOAWAYGOAWAYGOAWAY.

Saints House rises above her, the slate gray façade untouched by the storm, black iron balconies wrapping around the front and sides, hugging it in, containing it, the high stone wall keeping the grounds from view. The whole place is glowering, threatening, warning.

GOAWAYGOAWAYGOAWAY

She shakes it off, pushes it aside, ignores the pitch black pressure coming at her from every corner of the estate. The sky darkens with oncoming night. There are no lights on inside the house. There are no lights on anywhere in the neighborhood.

But that doesn't mean nobody's home.

She reaches for the gate and finds it locked, laced through with padlock and chain. She grasps the metal, jerking it back and forth. This is not normal. This is not how Saints House operates. It is never locked. It is always open, inviting, bringing everyone inside. It embodies Bijoux's own welcoming spirit, arms wide, full of love, full of life.

NONONONONONONO

The house pushes back at her like an angry toddler.

NONONONONONONO

She pulls at the gate again, as if this will help somehow. A flame of white heat blooms behind her eyes and suddenly she is pushing through the gate, a parasol in one hand, a rough gentleman's hand in the other. Her mind's eye flickers and an ancient film reel of the house unspools before her, springy green ferns appearing around every corner of the balconies, flower boxes dotting the rails. The thick scents of jasmine, gardenia and magnolia snake around her ankles, crawling up her skirts, pushing into her neck.

A sharp point of ginger spice snaps at her throat.

*A fine home, Henry a fine home and a fine husband — All for you, Eva, all for you my love —*

Electricity hits her palms and she springs backwards, the gate remaining unmoved before her.

The house stares down at her.

She reaches for the gate again.

*You. Should not. Be here.*

Razors of glass shoot through the back of her neck, stabbing into her brain, snapping her in two.

She moves away, stumbles back, the pain abating with each step. There's a flicker in the windows at the side of the house. She moves around the sidewalk, around the wall, her eyes glued to the two-story tall diamond-paned window bay that looks out

onto the giant oak and neatly ordered gardens of the estate.

The solarium.

Her grandmother's favorite spot. The place she watches the world go by. Her domain. Her kingdom.

Her realm.

GO AWAY.

Rina shakes her head at the voice and keeps moving around the house, her left hand running along the rough wall, knuckles scraping the surface, creeping vines grinding into her flesh.

Sparking flashes of her grandfather, her great-grandmother, faces and people she doesn't recognize. So many people. Touching these walls, putting their skin to stone, so much history and pain and joy.

She opens up her hand. Drags the palm across the cement. Sharp stucco cuts into her. Bloody traces left behind.

Then.

Children laughing. Hands on the wall. John Theo. John Theo. Another child. Older. Then her own voice, her own skin, chasing, chasing, chasing.

*RINA!*

*goawaygoawaygoawayGOAWAYGOAWAYGOAWAY*

*coming for you coming for all a you*

John Theo. Older now. So much older. So wasted. Bent. Broken.

*coming for you child oh sweet honey love the things imma do to you for you with you*

Menace spills out from the stones, inky tentacles unfurling toward her. She is at the back gate now. The latch locked and chained.

Her hands find their way to the iron, fingers curling over the metal, the feeling of her brother in her skin.

*coming for you sister coming for all a you*

Another flicker from the solarium. A pale face staring out. Looking down at her with an unreachable sadness. A sadness tinged with anger.

Bijoux shakes her head.

*You shouldn't have come, child. I told you not to come.*

Needles of pain through her skull.

*Stop, Bibi. Stop. Stop it. Please.*

GO. NOW. GO.

Rina launches herself at the gate, at the wall, pulling herself over the top, falling to the ground like an iron paperweight.

Dirt sinks into her hands. John Theo is coming at her. He is coming for her.

He is there.

She scrabbles against the ground, her back coming up against the wall of the garçonnière, trapped, pushed, gone.

*You never shoulda come back.*

Her brothers voice scraping against her mind.

Hands around her throat. Pressing. Squeezing. Holding. Up against her. So close. So close. His other hand reaching, reaching down, searching for her, digging into the base of her.

*NONONONONONO*

His lips smacking together, tongue swirling out, licking thirstily on the cracked surface, leaning into her mouth.

*oh the things i want to do to you sister the things i will do oh the things i can't wait to get inside you and tear you apart*

*NO RINA NO*

*"Rina?"*

She feels herself pulled back, pulled away from the building, the ghost of her brother evaporating, that day slipping away, that day he—

*"Rina? Is that you?"*

Her mothers voice.

Sabine's voice.

*GOAWAYGOAWAYNONONO*

*"Rina, you shouldn't be here."*

Rina's on all fours, struggling to stand. Sabine is on the back patio with a drink in

one hand and a cigarette in the other. Her eyes are half-lidded, sleepy, lazy. Rina half-crawls, half-runs toward the patio.

Sabine's eyes shift into stormy clouds

GO. NOW. GO.

Bijoux's razors shoot at her from above.

"Mama?" Rina whispers.

Sabine's body jerks backwards. Gin sloshes onto her shaking hand.

"You shouldn't be here, Rina. You need to go."

"But Mama—"

NONONONONONO

"No no no."

Her mother stumbles into the patio furniture. Drunk. Sloppily drunk and disorderly.

A sob chokes out of her throat.

"You can't be here. You should not be here. You get the hell out of here, Rina. You hear me? YOU GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE."

Sabine backs up into a post. Her drink falls out of her hand, glass shattering into the air.

"We sent you away for a reason, goddammit. YOU NEVER SHOULD HAVE COME BACK."

Fat, hot raindrops slap at her face. The entire sky slices with rain. A storm brews from nothing.

Suddenly, Bijoux is there. She is there, next to her daughter, next to Sabine, a hand on her forehead.

“Shhhh, *bébé*. Shhhh. Don’t you get upset now. Don’t you get upset. Go on inside to Beau, hm? Go on.”

Sabine tumbles up the kitchen stairs. The screen door slams shut behind her, hinges screaming out.

“Bibi?”

Her grandmother slowly turns her eyes to the side yard. She doesn’t move.

*You shouldn’t have come back, girl. Get the hell out of here. Get back in that car, get back on that road, and get back to where we sent you.*

*Get back to where you were.*

#

“FUCKING STOP.”

Rina shot forward into the front barrier, her forehead smacking against the fiberglass divider, as the cab jerked to a squealing halt.

“Jesus Christ, lady! I was just about to!”

She glanced out the window. They were on Gravier, a foot away from the

lawyer's office.

The dream was gone.

And with it, Bijoux and her brain-cracking voice.

"What the hell is wrong with you, lady?"

Rina blinked at him through the fog of the daydream and just shook her head.

"Sorry," she mumbled. "Bad dream."

She tossed a hundred dollar bill over the divider and shoved her way out of the car. The cabbie looked at the bill in disbelief.

"Whatever floats yer boat, sister," he muttered as he peeled off, practically knocking her to the curb with his departure.

"You make quite the entrance, Ms. Savoy."

She looked up. Standing on the balcony above the building entrance was an owlish-looking man in his mid-forties. Dressed in floor-to-ceiling seersucker, complete with buffed white bucks and a pink and green paisley pocket square, Percy Boudreaux appeared as dewy and refreshed as Rina decidedly did not.

"Attending a garden party this afternoon, Mr. Boudreaux?"

His lips pursed. "Attending a goth biker convention after our business, Ms. Savoy?"

Rina knew right then and there that if she wasn't blowing town in twelve hours, she and Percy Boudreaux would likely have become fast and furious friends.

“Depends,” she said.

“On?”

“On whether or not you have a drink up there with my name on it.”

“Oh, I think you have personally acquainted yourself with several cocktails already, Ms. Savoy.” He stepped back toward the French doors behind him and beckoned her up with a small wave. “Why don’t you come on up and we’ll try some coffee instead?”

She squinted up at the windows.

“Irish coffee, maybe,” she called out.

“Just get up here,” he shot back.

She hoisted her bag, slinging it across her body, and made her way toward the entrance.

“Trust me, Boudreaux,” she muttered under her breath, “we’re both gonna need that drink.”