

*the*  
BEAUTY  
*of*  
IMPOSSIBLE  
THINGS

RACHEL DONOHUE



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Champing his gilded oats, the Hippogriff will stand in our stalls, and over our heads will float the Blue Bird singing of beautiful and impossible things, of things that are lovely and that never happen, of things that are not and that should be.

Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

# Chapter One

I turned fifteen that summer which I never believed to be significant, though afterwards people claimed quite vehemently that it was. I was described as unfinished and open to powers from beyond – a dark ingénue. It is the kind of thing people like to write about young women, as if we were half witch. I should have found it insulting but in all honesty there was too much else to regret. I learned eventually to let their words go, along with much else that was whispered about me. Forgetting became an essential part of getting older and in this way I was exactly like my mother – one of the few traits we ever shared was the ability to avert our gaze from what had gone before. We understood very little, but stayed curious, which was something I suppose.

It is this forgetting which has led my therapist to advise that I return to that lost summer of thirty years ago. She is a very calm lady who I meet every few weeks in a small flat above a bookshop. She speaks about my endeavours to remember in the probing language of closure, encouraging me to retrieve

my story and understand better who I once was. This requires some level of optimism and indeed strength of will and I fear I may have lost both along the way, although I don't say this to her as I have tried over time to become more accommodating to the opinions of others. She seems hopeful, which reminds me of my mother sometimes, a blind willingness to want better things for me. I would like not to disappoint her faith. I am reluctant only because it will be a lonely journey, for almost everyone who was there that summer is gone now, and I am quite alone with my thoughts on all that occurred.

When I think back my memories are bleached white, blinded out, as if the sun has erased parts of us. I have glimpses of my mother, distracted and evasive, her brown arm stretched along the back of a deck chair. There would be a glass of something cold in her hands, often wine, that every now and then she would put to her cheek, her sweat leaving a moist stain on the glass. And Mr Bowen, our lodger, his tanned, lean back descending the cliff steps to the beach every morning, a red towel over his shoulders. I see Lewis, always cycling away from me to the Ridge, the large hill that towered over the end of the promenade; his unseasonable black coat blowing in the breeze behind him. Marcus, of course, with his thick blond hair covering alert, staring eyes and Dr Black too, his cream panama hat tilted at a jaunty angle, impervious to the heat and not a bead of sweat on his elegant brow.

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There was a heatwave that July, this is most definitely fact. It remains the exceptional month to which all the others are compared – we are only ever warmer or colder than that summer. Our small seaside town was heaving with tourists and day trippers. They jostled past each other, eating ice cream or drinking cold beer; their legs splayed as they sat on the side of the promenade, heads turned up to the sky, hoping for a tan; the smell of vinegar on the faint breeze. The sirens of the amusements would be exploding like guns every few minutes to the shrieks of children and at night there were small gorse fires on the Ridge, little spirals of blue smoke marking the evening sky.

It was a strange summer, even before it became tragic. The heat first of all, then the red sand that blew over the ocean from a far-off desert one June morning and dusted the garden. People worried that we were going to get a disease from breathing in its alien particles, with some even suspecting it was a Russian plot, though what that plot might have entailed was never elaborated on. And there were dead flies everywhere, you'd find clumps of them in corners of the room or along the windowsill in the mornings; people mostly blamed the red sand.

The liquid mercury never fell, the afternoons slow and sultry, the heat like a sedative, sucking the oxygen away and slowing your movements. Every step became a commitment you had to think seriously about, a negotiation with invisible forces that pressed against your body and demanded

submission. Most nights were too hot for rest and when sleep did finally come, I had anxious dreams about death and the end of the world.

Our old cream-coloured house stood aloof on the cliffs above the town, decrepit and sinking into a lethargy of simmering heat and late-afternoon silence as the summer wore on. The long sash windows staring dolefully out to the sea. A bottle of white wine would be stashed in a bucket of melting ice on the front steps, a blanket unfurled on the grass and a library book upturned and forgotten in the sun. My mother was painting again, so there would be an easel at the edge of the orchard, jars of coloured water at her feet and an unfinished, lonely canvas left aside to dry. She never seemed happy with what she painted and would retreat into the shade with a glass of wine, a large sun hat hiding her eyes, only occasionally throwing furtive glances at her work. She was thirty-three that summer, young really. She had studied art for a few months but never completed her degree, my birth a sort of fatal interruption, so painting was both an escape and a reminder of deep and lasting failure. There was always a brittle pain in her straight back as she stood before the white canvas.

I sometimes think we were made for doing little and completing nothing, and the heat brought out the worst in us both. There was an indolence at the heart of our very being which we always tried to hide, but never quite did. People said it was because we were creative, bohemian even, but I think

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we were mostly just idle. We were the products of money but the money had all gone, leaving us marooned in a fading dreamland of what once had been. We were an echo and barely real at all, the recipients of both a respect and a dislike that we didn't really deserve. The guests we took in every summer in order to survive were an inconvenience and an embarrassment; we failed them mostly, as we did each other.

Elizabeth, my mother, was probably at her most beautiful. I have come to understand that her face was one of the central, defining features of both our lives and that beauty is far from the superficial thing people like to suggest. It should really be studied more completely, and not by fashion magazines, but by psychologists. Men watched her endlessly, and I spent my life watching them. It became one of my habits. That year her hair was still black and very long, her skin brown with the sun and her eyes large and green, with thick dark lashes. We had Spanish blood and it came out most fully in her, a Mediterranean flavour to her being that she emphasized with colourful scarves and by drinking wine in the middle of the day.

She read books by French authors and talked to me about Marx. She thought exams were an anachronism and never bothered to turn up for parent-teacher meetings or school concerts, but she could be charming if she decided to be, so most people in authority of one kind or another forgave her. And of course she was very beautiful, it disarmed people,



interrupted them. People lose themselves in beauty, they lie when they say otherwise.

My mother meanwhile cultivated the idea of freedom, believed that you could and indeed should live a life that did not impinge on others, which was ironic considering her beauty and the way it drew attention to us. She thought it was noble to need almost nothing, to turn your back on convention and be self-sufficient. Despite evidence to the contrary, my birth in particular, she had a sort of puritan's soul. She imagined there was a grandeur and defiance in splendid isolation, in being apart from others. In practice this meant we grew fruit and would spend most of every September soaking, boiling and pouring congealed substances into jars before storing them in a dark cupboard. The house would be filled with the smell of plums, apples, cherries, and to this day the aroma of a stewed apple makes me think not of a pleasurable dessert, but of deprivation and the coming of a long winter.

We bought second-hand clothes and books, had a twenty-year-old car and travelled almost nowhere, though many an evening was spent talking of the places we were going to visit. She took me on a tour of the world from the faded couch in our sitting room, an atlas laid out on the floor, along with ageing travel guides. I was at least twelve before I realized we were never actually going to go anywhere, indeed that she had never been anywhere either. It was all a sort of elaborate dream.

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She dressed our way of living up as a philosophy – even as a very small child I remember her talking to me about authenticity and freedom – but in truth much of who we were was driven by poverty and a profound sense of failure, shame even. Our existence was the opposite of freedom, we had few means and could do nothing. We were just eccentric and alone, with little money and ever subject to the scrutiny of those who belonged more easily.

My mother was not vain – I feel I should emphasize this – she held her face at arm's length, like it was a terrible experiment in a jar that had to be kept under wraps for it could explode at any time. She never knew what to do with her beauty really, it was an inheritance that, like our house, was unearned and she felt she had to make up for her good fortune by not wearing make-up and reading about starving people in far-off countries. My birth was part of that in a way, a radical act of deflection, or even self-destruction. She had stepped outside polite society and could never return after my arrival. I too became part of her alternative philosophy for living, both reason and excuse.

It's important to add that I did not look like her. My therapist explains, in kind tones, that perhaps I had a misconception about my external value and it was this that made me feel lesser, an awareness that propelled me to all kinds of strange actions. I try not to laugh when she speaks so, for you only needed a mirror to understand. Beauty is undeniable, one of

the many systems of merit at play in a life. I accepted this early on and was never jealous of my mother. I thought she was wonderful, her beauty a kind of statement of intent. I just knew to have been born without a similar face was a particular kind of failing as a woman, as was not having a father, or indeed any money. My shields as a girl in the world were weak from the beginning, and so I had to find other ways to protect myself and find meaning.

It was this understanding of my precarious position that cracked open the summer I turned fifteen, and brought the sky down with it.

## Chapter Two

I should explain that my name is Natasha and when I was small a fortune teller in a striped tent on the beach told my mother that I had the mark of the psychic cross on my palm. The woman had large black eyes and many gold rings on her fingers that she tapped rhythmically on the makeshift table between us. She stared at me closely as she spoke and when we got up to leave, she bowed her head.

That night a storm blew up along the coast and I woke to my mother singing lullabies beside me in the bed. I explained to her that the fortune teller had come to me in a dream and told me that I had been born before and that to live once was not so special, you needed to do it a few times. As the wind swirled around our house that night, my mother laid her head on the pillow and started to cry, her tears a very clear warning to me – I should speak little about who I really was.

So it became an unspoken vow between us that I remember breaking only once. I was ten and helping her rake up the leaves in the garden one breezy October afternoon, the sun pale and

weak, the air biting, the grass slippery and damp underfoot. The rake tangled in the thick grass and wet earth.

As she worked beside me I stopped to watch the fishermen from the town head out for the afternoon in their small, white trawler, rounding the rocks that edged the foot of the Ridge.

‘They won’t be coming back,’ I whispered to the air.

I could see cold, clear water swirling at their feet, filling the boat, getting higher and higher; could sense the weight of it, dragging them down and under into the endless deep. I heard them shouting and felt their desperate panic. I stayed fixated on their boat, trance-like, as it sailed past the rocks and out of sight, reaching my hands out to the coast. If I was a giant I could have bent just down and plucked them out of the sea, leaving them to rest back on the shoreline.

My mother stopped her work at my words and followed my gaze. Her hand was at her neck, her cheeks flushed, a look of confusion briefly flitted across her features. She knew I was afraid of water and refused to learn to swim. A faltering smile returned then as she tried to reassure me that all would be well.

‘They will be home later,’ she said, gathering the yellowing, brown foliage.

‘No, they won’t,’ I said, turning to her.

My eyes filled with tears and my hands started shaking uncontrollably. She had to take me into the house and make me hot cocoa. I stayed there alone in front of the fire and watched the afternoon darken into evening, until the first of the flares

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went up and she came in from the damp garden, her eyes wide with alarm. They didn't come back. They were, all of them, lost at sea – the fathers of my friends Marcus and Lewis among them. The town mourned for months, and some said that none of us ever got over it, my mother included, for she never quite looked at me in the same way again. While I understood that I had failed in the most profound of ways; I might have saved even one life, and did not.

She valued silence. I try and explain this now and it is difficult without making her seem cold, or disinterested. But it was her sacred inner space, and the understanding of my dreams, visions, premonitions – whatever you care to call them – she placed carefully in this silence, along with her own precious but futile desires. I think perhaps she thought if she didn't understand, it might just not be true. She could wish it away.

My therapist suggests I hold buried anger at her conscious ignoring of the very thing that I believe made me special, but I disagree. I understood she had packed the knowledge of my gifts away along with all the other fragile, precious things that were important to her but she could no longer look at. She hid things away, we both did, it was one of the few activities at which we excelled.

I forgive her this.

★ ★ ★

The only other person who knew about my psychic abilities was Marcus, my one friend. I don't really know why I had no other friends, or certainly never kept them, but there were no party invitations on our mantelpiece. I didn't dwell on it then, but perhaps I should have. I asked my mother once, many years later, why we never baked cakes or had people over to play for the afternoon. She looked alarmed at the idea and didn't respond. Did I make her strange or did she make me so? It was never very clear.

Marcus lived with his mother in the flat above their fish-and-chip shop on the seafront. In summer they also sold sticks of peppermint rock and hired a candyfloss machine to feed the tourists who had an insatiable appetite for sugar. Marcus had thick, tangled fair hair that half-covered his pale blue eyes and he would stare at you quite meaningfully through the strands. We went to different schools but met at recorder lessons. One day when the music teacher left the room, Marcus hid behind the couch and put me in a tight and painful headlock. He got into trouble for it, even though it was a joke, and he was asked to leave.

Afterwards I used to see him in the window of his shop when I passed by on my way to the lessons – sometimes he would wave and his eyes would be sad. I had a sense even then that there was a long story playing out between us, something deeper and far more unusual than friendship, or even love.

There was a small memorial to Marcus and Lewis's father and the other fishermen near the ornate Victorian bandstand

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on the seafront. If you'd asked me then did we talk about our missing fathers, I would have said no, though now I understand it played a far bigger role in our friendship than we ever admitted. It was like a submerged rock, lying in wait under the water, and we invariably cut ourselves against it every time deep water beckoned.

My father had left for France soon after my birth and moved to a small town on an island off the south-west of the country where he painted for a time, before becoming by all accounts an amusing and popular alcoholic. My mother spoke of him wistfully which is strange when you consider it really and I always knew a part of her completely understood why he had run away and so forgave him. For a time this worried me greatly. I would trail her around the house and garden, checking she was always in sight, just in case the lure of the sun and my father took her away.

He wrote occasionally and once, when my grandparents were still alive and I was quite little, he invited us to visit. I remembered raised voices in the kitchen. It would have been a step too far to go to him then and perhaps it was easier to forgive from a distance. And so he became another of the ghosts in my life – the most interesting fact about him was his absence, and that he could read palms, something my mother mentioned casually one day.

Marcus said to me once that it was easier having a father who was dead, than one who was missing. He was trying



to be nice, but I wasn't sure he was correct, and it wasn't a competition. There were a myriad of ways to be abandoned and each had its own particular way of branding your skin. Lewis, Marcus and I all carried scars – it was what brought us together. I am sure of that now.

When we turned twelve, one wet afternoon in my bedroom I confided in him about my dreams and visions. I had to tell someone and I trusted Marcus completely. We were sitting in front of the small fireplace in my room, the flames spitting as the afternoon darkened outside. When I spoke his eyes became round and his mouth hung open, making him look vaguely stupid. He asked a million questions at first, looking for examples of things I had predicted, then laughed out loud for a bit with joy as if we had discovered the cure for cancer or something important, before finally going quiet and taking my hand. We sat in silence for ages, the only sound the rain blown hard off the coast and the crackle of the fire in the grate. He looked at me differently after that, like I was both invincible and fragile, which I suppose I was in a way.

'What does it feel like?' he would ask endlessly.

'Like you are dissolving,' I would answer.

And it did, it was like the edges of my being and consciousness faded off into something far bigger than me. Unconstrained by the limits of myself I became part of everyone and everything. I was like liquid seeping into the minds of others, flowing through their thoughts and understanding all

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they were, and all they tried to hide. I recognize this sounds incredibly odd, but that's how it seemed.

'Does it scare you?' he asked once as we walked on the Ridge.

The sea mist was rolling in off the cliffs, the sodden path winding through the trees ahead, the air all around us vaporous and murky.

'No, never,' I answered.

And he turned back to me and smiled, proud somehow. 'Some day you will do amazing things,' he said.

It was always a gift, you see, though a melancholic one. There was a dark beauty to it, a sense of being connected to the unseen forces that shape our lives. I was privileged really, I knew from very early that our lives were small and built on fragile hope. You could do your best but much was beyond your control, determined elsewhere. I was also quite profoundly naive, and in this way I was, indeed remain, a very ordinary person.

It was how I used my knowledge of the future that I regret. I could have done something different with it, like my mother and her beautiful face.

JUNE

## Chapter Three

The story of that long ago summer truly began in the middle of June, on the evening of my fifteenth birthday. Marcus had polished some coloured stones from the beach and along with a box of chocolates and a mix tape wrapped them up and left them on the doorstep. I knew his mother had been involved in the present, certainly the purchase of the chocolates and the wrapping paper. She liked us and would often ask us over for a coffee morning. My mother generally found ways not to go and sometimes I worried that it was because she thought they were slightly beneath us, though she avoided a lot of well-off people too.

That birthday evening, my mother had bought us a takeaway treat which we ate in the garden, listening to the sounds of the seafront far below. She had also got me a bike from a shop in the city, a blue-and-white racer that sparkled in the evening sun. It was the first new bike I had ever owned and she must have saved up for months. We both looked at it leaning against the gate as we ate the sticky, greasy food. It seemed to signify a new stage of independence and intent.

It was close to nine when we finished eating and I decided to take the bike out, dragging it down the narrow cliff steps and on to the seafront which was still relatively quiet, the real summer season still a few weeks away. I cycled fast along the promenade, the evening warm, barely a breeze. The bike glided, it had several gears all of which I tested out and soft, cushiony handles. It felt almost like flying. I stopped at Marcus's shop to show it off through the glass. He was working behind the counter, doling out onion rings with a white cap on his head. He looked red-faced and I knew he didn't like me seeing him working there, but he seemed impressed.

Continuing along the promenade, waving to the rowers who carried their boat on their shoulders down to the shoreline, I cycled to the edge of the Ridge. Marcus knew to find me there when his shift finished close to ten p.m. Locking the bike carefully to the last of the street lights near the small train station, I walked in the low pink sun through the sandy scrub grass and up the hill into the edge of the trees. I never liked to go too much further into the woods on my own. It was a desolate place, lonely, with dense fir trees and narrow cliff paths that led to secluded clearings which were guarded by large, moss-covered boulders where people would light fires and smoke drugs. A few people had even killed themselves up there and I always imagined I could sense their lost spirits hidden amongst the trees, ever watchful. Couples went too in the evenings, their cars parked up on the sand.

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I sat in the grass for almost an hour as the town started to light up below. Music drifted up from the bars, the deep bass line throb of 'Stairway to Heaven' pounding the still, warm air. I could see my house in the distance, windows alight and staring out to sea in its lonely manner. It was a transient, once-elegant town, with tall, decaying pastel-coloured houses along the seafront, truly alive for only a few months of the year. It was near enough to the city to be aware of all that it was missing, and not far enough away to be considered particularly interesting. I think now that all of us who lived there had a native inferiority complex, a sense that we were not quite good enough. We belonged to a place of leisure and forgetting, mere snapshots of people caught in the sunshine. I loved it though, in my own way.

That night I thought about turning fifteen, how it seemed quite a significant age, and I wondered vaguely what it was I was supposed to do with my life. My father drifted into my head then, a fleeting idea of a man, and I wondered what, if anything, he might expect of me. There was one of his paintings in the attic, lurid thick colours, that had been laid on with a knife, pulsating from the canvas. As a small child I had taken to pressing my face right up close to it and tracing the movement of the paint across the surface, gorges and cliffs of rough colour. I imagined him Picasso-like, stripped to the waist, with a blade in his hand.

As the hour passed, I missed Marcus, glanced at my watch and wondered briefly why he hadn't come. I worried

about him sometimes, he had been in fights with some boys from his school at the end of term. There was a restlessness in him, a boredom which I felt in myself too, as if all the things that summer had once meant to us no longer seemed true or very interesting. We were pressing hard against the limits of something we had not yet been able to define.

As the light dwindled I got up to head home and gazed back up the Ridge. It was forbidding as ever, brown-, purple- and gold-coloured in the fading light. It had always seemed too large for the town below, like an accident of nature, the only large hill for miles and we seemed to crouch beneath it. I closed my eyes for a second and breathed in the smell of coconut from the gorse and the earth, an odour distinctive to the Ridge. There was the sharp crack of a bird's wing far above me and I imagined it soaring high into the empty space of the night. I envied its wild freedom and opened my eyes.

This was when I first saw them.

The trees were starkly outlined against the orange of the sky and deep within the woods small, blue lights were flickering and sparking in the gloom. They swooped and turned between the black of the heavy, entwined branches as if they were doing silent somersaults, turning and rolling, rising to the treetops, then falling sharply. It was enthralling, like a secret fireworks show, and I briefly stepped forward from the sandy path to the edge of the burned grass that marked the beginning of the forest. I reached my hand out as if drawn in by some magic

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and I could feel my own breaths rise and fall with them, there was a rhythm to the movement they made that seemed not outside of me any more, but deep within. The air was cracking around me with a harsh energy; the lights began to move faster then, darting among the trees, moving in circles, ever quicker, dizzying, and I felt nauseous and needed to look away, but before I could they soared suddenly again to the top of the dark trees, disappearing into the sky. I strained my eyes, trying to see where they had gone, my neck tilted back, but they had disappeared. It must have lasted less than a minute and I felt numb, paralysed almost, standing there in the twilight while the air all around me seemed to be reverberating and shimmering with both threat and possibility.

They left as quickly as they had come and I stayed staring upwards for a few seconds longer, both willing them to come back and afraid that they actually might. I felt winded, as if I had run a race, and my stomach had butterflies. I bent over and took some deep breaths to steady myself. The breeze picked up suddenly then and the trees began to creak; an eerie, painful sound as if they were starting to come alive, their limbs cracking as they awoke from an eternal slumber. It would be dark soon.

I ran down the sandy path of the Ridge in fear, unlocking my bike and cycling home quickly, too afraid to look at the sky above me. The journey back seemed to take for ever, the distance stretched out and the sights strangely unfamiliar; the



promenade empty and desolate, rubbish blowing across my path. The lights were out in Marcus's takeaway, they had shut early. For a moment I believed I was the only one left in the town and everyone had been vanished away, but then as I sped past the bandstand I saw Lewis, a lonely shadow, standing in the centre of the empty stage. My bike screeched and stuttered to a halt, coming to rest in front of the wilting flowers that lay on the stone memorial for his and Marcus's father. A handwritten prayer covered in plastic was attached to the stone, fluttering in the breeze.

Lewis lived in the cottages on the far side of the town and was nineteen that summer. He was not well, though no one ever really explained what it was that was wrong with him. My mother said he had suffered a nervous breakdown but even this didn't shed much light on the matter. I knew when he was younger his teacher had thought he was going to be a genius but around the time of his thirteenth birthday he had been found speaking some kind of broken gibberish in the middle of a roundabout outside the town, picking wildflowers as the cars went past. He'd been in a hospital for a while after that incident and given medication to take. It's to balance him, my mother had explained, to keep his moods in check. She always looked sad when she said this. He was a favourite of hers, some evenings he would climb the cliff steps to our house and sit in the garden, she would give him our home-made lemonade.

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Lewis walked slowly to the locked, small gate at the top of the steps of the bandstand and looked down at me, his face pale and shining in the anxious yellow light of the street lamps.

‘Lights.’ He pointed to the sky above the Ridge.

He had seen them also and for a brief second I wanted to cry with relief, and hold him tight. A man let out a deep, savage scream somewhere in the back end of the town, and there was the sound of glass shattering, followed by more raised voices. Lewis looked past me to the promenade for a second, before holding his thin hands out to me and moving his fingers up and down to mimic something flashing.

‘Like spirits,’ he whispered.

‘I know, I know.’ I was too unnerved to look back in its direction.

I had such a strong desire to dump my bike and hold him close, but he didn’t like that – outside of his family my mother was the only one he ever permitted to touch him.

‘They have come back,’ he said.

I wondered if he had seen the lights before and what it was he knew about them. The noises in the back street of the town grew louder, a fight was breaking out which was not unusual on those nights.

‘I have to go home, you do too, go home now. . . we’ll talk about it again, OK?’ I said, pointing furiously in the direction of his house.

He nodded sadly at me but didn't move and I could feel his eyes on my back as I cycled home.

I slept little that night.

\* \* \*

Marcus was the only person I told about the sighting the next day. He looked shocked, enthralled and then a little bit afraid – unexplained lights on the Ridge, what could it mean? He very much regretted not coming to meet me and was envious of Lewis for having witnessed it too, but he had been made to clean the storeroom that night.

We talked about what I had seen often in the days afterwards and spent a few long afternoons huddled over books about 'extraterrestrial encounters' and 'ghost lights' in the encyclopaedia in the library. We were keeping all options open but the supernatural of some kind or other seemed like a logical conclusion, to me anyway.

'Aliens?' he said, eyebrows raised.

'Maybe ghosts? The people who killed themselves up there,' I replied.

The librarian tutted and put her finger to her lips. I tried to explain to him how it had felt, as if the air was cracking, in some way sparking, and that the trees were whispering and the

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lights were like little souls, floating. They were trying to tell me something. Marcus looked perplexed.

‘People go there especially, to die,’ I said.

The Ridge a lonely graveyard of restless souls.

In the nights that followed my sighting I had a series of strange, intense dreams in which I was flying high above the Ridge, bathed in blue light, with wild, roaring, angry water beneath me. Lewis was in them and Marcus too, both of them crying or separated from me by water, my hands would reach out to try and grip them but they always slipped away. My mother featured in one too, she was collecting apples in the orchard but the trees kept dissolving into water every time she touched them. I woke gasping for air in the dead, dark heat of my bedroom.

‘Perhaps I’m supposed to warn everyone,’ I said to Marcus one afternoon about a week after the sighting, towards the end of June.

The lights had appeared on my birthday, the very night I was trying to understand who I was and what my purpose in life might be. It was perhaps all connected. A mystical message, demanding I accept my fate as a prophet and not hide any more.

‘Why do you think something bad is going to happen? It could mean something else,’ he said.

‘The dreams I’ve had since, but also that night, it felt ominous, like heavy, despairing almost, but also strangely

beautiful. Like you might want to stay up there, if you were brave enough.'

Marcus kicked some stones and stared at the sea. 'It always smells of death on the Ridge,' he said finally.