

# THIEF EYES

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Janni Lee Simner

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Also by Janni Lee Simner  
*Bones of Faerie*

~ THIEF EYES ~  
*Janni Lee Simner*

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*Like Haley, I'm descended from a long line of strong  
women. This one's for them: my grandmothers,  
Anne Rosenel, Jenny Simner, and Isabel Simner;  
my aunts, Harriet Piltz and Ida Rosenel;  
and most of all my mother, Roberta Dunker,  
the strongest woman I know  
and the reason I grew up never doubting  
I could be anything I wanted.*





*I will not allow it.*

*I will not be given to the first man who asks for my hand, bartered like a horse or a sheep. I will determine my fate, as my father promised me long ago.*

*My father's brother, Hrut, says none may determine their fate, not even Odin One-Eye and his kin. Hrut is a fool. He says I have the eyes of a thief and that men will suffer for me. He says it is the future he sees.*

*Let Hrut see what he will. I'll show him what a thief's eyes and thief's heart can truly do. I draw my scarlet cloak close. None can see me in this cave beyond the Law Rock. None can hear me over the water that roars beyond it.*

*I take a skin filled with a fox's blood and pour it into a wooden bowl—driftwood, come over the waters I've never sailed. I longed once to seek riches across the sea, and my father promised me that as well. Then he told me his promises were a child's game, nothing more. He told me I was no longer a child, and that my marriage to Thorvald, Osvif's son, was arranged.*

*No matter. I have another uncle, Svan, a sorcerer who lives by Bear's Fjord to the north. Svan is my mother's brother, not my father's. When I asked him to teach me sorcery, he did not deem it his promise a game.*

*I take a black raven's claw and pierce my thumb. Above the roar of the waterfall, a raven cries out, as if angered by the loss of its kin. What do ravens know of anger? I squeeze my thumb, using my own blood to draw a circle upon a dull black stone. A fire stone, cool in my hand, yet with heat enough to burn at its core. I cross the circle with three intersecting lines, then draw smaller lines and circles at their ends, combining the runes Svan taught me, one for possession, the other for time. The stone grows warm. I drop it into the fox's blood. I toss a smooth silver coin—no mark upon it—into the blood as well, and then I chant, shouting to hear myself over the water:*

*Powers beyond the earth, hear me!*

*Powers beneath the earth, aid me!*

*Find her, turn her,*

*Show me her place!*

*The blood begins to boil. I take a yellow ring, woven from strands of my own hair—a gift I gave my father long ago, meant to seal his promises. Those promises are broken. The ring is mine to give again where I will. I slip it over my finger and thrust my hand into the bowl.*

*The boiling blood burns, but I do not fear pain. My fingers close around the coin.*

*Flames leap up from the blood—the flames of another world, one of fiery giants and melting stone. The flames take on shapes as they roar all around me—a grasping hand, a gaping mouth. My skin blisters and melts away. Fire burns through my bare finger bones as the figures reach for my hands, my hair.*

*Then the flames fall away, and the cave walls with them. Through air that shimmers with heat, I see a broad path beneath an open sky.*

*On that path, I see the years of my life laid out before me. I see beyond those years, to time when our warriors cast aside their swords and our weavers their looms, when our stories are turned to runes bound in leather, nothing more. Difficult times—but what time is not difficult? Better difficult life than one controlled by others. So said my forebears when they parted ways with the Norwegian king and sailed for this land. So say I, as I look down the path.*

*I see my daughter, by Thorvald or another man, I cannot tell. She looks right at me—in this vision she is older than I am—and nods sharply. She is angry, and not only at my spell. Crafted of my anger as the spell is, it is drawn to the anger in all my descendants' lives—to the moments of weakness when they might consent to my bargain.*

*The air whispers of my daughter's anger—a slain son, caught unaware while sowing grain—but then she turns fiercely away. She is more interested in avenging this wrong than escaping it. I'm glad my spell won't land on her. I will go farther—beyond my life, and my daughter's life, and every last tie between my father and me.*

*I see my daughter's daughters, and their daughters in turn, the path they stand upon branching as it stretches through time. The air around each woman whispers of a different grief: a cruel husband, a slain lover, a hungry winter, a deadly fall of ash upon the fields. For thirty generations, every one of them meets my eyes—and turns away. My blood grows thin, but my daughters remain strong, too strong to flee these moments of pain.*

*The branches that do not bear daughters are lost to me, one by one, until only two branches of my descendants remain. On one, a woman with long red hair trembles beneath my gaze. I hear her whisper of abandonment, of a man fled across the sea—it is often about a man. Yet she also turns away. She has no daughters, and so her branch, too, is lost.*

*The other branch slips out of my reach, its daughters growing ghostly and faint as they journey across a different sea—until one of them returns to this land, a woman with fair yellow hair like my own. She meets my gaze and doesn't turn away. I see the confusion upon her face: her line has forgotten much of magic. Tears streak her cheeks and make her gray eyes bright. The air around her whispers of betrayal, of a man lying in another woman's arms.*

*There is freedom in having a man leave you—but perhaps she does not know this. Perhaps she seeks escape after all.*

*I can give her that—and in so doing, seize the freedom for myself.*

*“A gift!” I call. The woman's eyes grow large as I draw the coin from the burning blood. There are symbols etched upon the silver now, the same signs I drew upon the stone. I throw the coin to her through thirty generations of time. The woman hesitates, then reaches out a shaking hand and catches it.*

*The path trembles beneath us. A moment more and this woman and I will trade places. I will see through her eyes; she will see through mine. She will marry Thorvald, Osvif's son, and I will be free.*

*The woman looks away, as if startled—by my spell or by something else, I cannot tell. She blinks hard, drops the coin, and runs.*

*Foolish woman! You must never run from magic, least of all magic born of fire. Thirty generations is not time enough to forget that.*

*The fire returns, roaring around us both. The ground lurches. Flames leap at the woman. The*

*burn through cloth and skin to ignite the bones beneath. She has no time to scream—in moments the fire consumes her.*

*My sight clears. I kneel once more in this small cave, my hand yet immersed in boiling blood. I draw it free and overturn the bowl. Blood stains the dark rocks. My hand is whole and unburned save for a band of red where the ring, woven of my own hair, used to be. The coin is gone, sent through thirty generations of time only to be dropped and lost in a single instant.*

*I touch the band of red and find it warm. I close my eyes. Flames roar up once more behind my eyelids. “Free!” an inhuman voice cries, somewhere deep inside me. A fiery hand strokes my face. “We will be free.”*

*I know then that the spell is not through. The fire will consume me as well, and the powers that I wield it will be released into the world. Yet through the flames, I see something more. One last daughter, with yellow hair and strange dark eyes. The fire’s roar is loud; I cannot hear her but she whispered anger. She reaches for the coin where it fell into the dirt. The earth trembles once more as her fingers close around the silver.*

*The flames subside. The land grows still. I feel the power of the fire realm burning in me yet, but it is contained now within my hair—the same hair in my ring, the hair I gifted to the realm of fire—and also in the coin this new daughter now holds. My spell has been mended. My life has been spared.*

*Does this woman—no, this girl, for she is younger than I am—seek escape as well? I reach for her. She leans toward me, and I know the spell remains alive between us. Yet it is weaker now. The girl was not its target. I cannot simply take her place.*

*Not yet. Instead, I look at this daughter of my daughters and ask, “What is your name?”*

Icy rain blew into my hood and dripped down my neck as I knelt on the mossy stones. The sky was gray, layers of cloud hiding any hint of sun. The wind picked up, and I shivered, missing the hot desert skies of home. It was way too cold for a June day.

Not that Dad noticed. He grinned as he traced a crack running through the rocks. “Amazing, isn’t it? You can almost *feel* the earth pulling apart.”

“Yeah. Sure.” I looked down into the small fissure and saw nothing but endless dark. I shifted my soggy backpack on my shoulders and rubbed my eyes, gritty from a night spent flying across the Atlantic. I’d never been much good at sleeping on planes. *Yeah, Dad, you followed you four thousand miles to Iceland so we could stare at holes in the ground.*

I got up, stretching stiff legs. Beyond a metal fence, the cliff where we stood dropped down to a grassy plain. A gray river braided its way through bright green grasses, and a few wild geese hunkered down by its shores. The geese looked cold, too. Probably they were thinking the same thing I was: the sooner they could get somewhere warm, the better.

“So this is where it happened?” I tried to sound casual, like I didn’t much care.

Dad looked up. His dark eyes were shot with red—he wasn’t good at sleeping on planes either—and his hair stuck out from beneath his windbreaker, dripping water. “You mean the rifting? It’s happening throughout this valley. The North American and European tectonic plates meet here, and they’re forever pulling away from each other. Only the pulling doesn’t all happen in any one place, so—”

“That’s not what I mean.” I fought not to let my frustration show. *You know that’s not what I mean.*

Dad sighed. “No, Haley, this isn’t where it happened.” His sleep-deprived eyes took on the lost look I’d come to know way too well this past year. The look that made me decide Dad didn’t need to know if I’d blown another test at school, or fallen asleep in class because nightmares had woken me in the middle of the night again, or was tired of peanut butter and jelly for dinner but just as tired of cooking if I wanted anything else.

I’d come four thousand miles. This was more important than a few bad dreams or missed meals. “Where, then?”

A couple brushed past us, clutching the hands of the toddler who walked between them. Dad looked at the cracked earth. “*Logberg. Law Rock.*”

“Where’s that?” Rain soaked through my running shoes, turning my socks clammy and cold. Back home, we canceled track meets for weather like this—but I was the one who’d asked Dad to bring me here. He’d wanted to stay at the guesthouse and catch up on his jet-lagged sleep.

Dad sighed again. “You’re not going to let this go, are you?”

*Let this go?* I dug my nails into my cold, damp palms. No need for Dad to hear me screaming, either. *When your mother disappears without a trace, you don’t just let it go.* “I was



to see. Is that so much to ask?" I kept my voice calm, reasonable—the same voice I'd used to convince Dad to take me to Thingvellir today, because I really wanted to visit the national park that was the site of Iceland's ancient parliament and in the middle of a rift valley and oh, yeah, just happened to be the place where my mother disappeared last summer.

"Fine, Haley." Dad got to his feet, and I knew for once I'd won. I followed him away from the lookout, my running shoes squishing on the wet gravel path. Dripping tendrils escaped my blond ponytail and clung to my cheeks. I slowed to match Dad's pace. I'd grown taller than him this past year, which still seemed strange.

The path cut down through a cleft between blocky stone walls that formed a perfect wind tunnel. Goose bumps prickled beneath my damp sleeves. Dad looked up at the rocks. "You can almost see how they must have fit together once, can't you? Before the rifting tugged them apart."

What I saw was my father hiding behind another geology lecture. Maybe Dad couldn't hear it. Maybe when you spent your whole life studying rocks and earthquakes, you forgot how to talk to people.

The stone wall to our right dropped away as we reached a grassy outcrop. The wind let up and Dad stopped at the base of a walkway that led to an overlook. Some tourists stood on the walkway, huddled beneath umbrellas, listening to a tour guide in jeans and a T-shirt. The guide was soaked, but he didn't seem to mind.

"Here?" I asked. Dad nodded.

Even without the wind, I felt cold. "So what'd you two fight about?" My voice came out too loud, with a squeak at the end. So much for sounding casual.

Dad leaned down, picked up a black stone, and turned it over in his hand. "Obsidian," he said. "It's funny how the names of rocks translate in Icelandic. Obsidian is literally raven flint, while lignite—brown coal—has something to do with the fire giants, out of Norse mythology—"

"Dad!"

He dropped the stone but didn't meet my eyes. "No, Haley."

"No what?"

"No, I'm not going to answer your question. Some things are none of your concern."

*It's my concern more than anyone's!* Dad never answered, no matter how often I asked. I dug my nails deeper into my palms, felt the familiar pinch of nails breaking skin. I whirled away and stomped up the wet walkway, past the tourists. Mom would have run after me, but Dad just let me go. I reached the overlook and leaned on a railing, staring out at the river. A goose made its way into the water, followed by two fuzzy goslings. I watched them sail by. There should have been squirrels here, too, chipmunks, *something*—but Iceland wasn't big on native land mammals. A few arctic foxes, the occasional stranded polar bear—that was it.

My palms began to sting. Behind me the guide talked cheerfully about all the old stories that were supposed to have happened at Thingvellir. Mostly they sounded like a long list of who killed who, though at least one guy managed to fall in love, get married, and take his wife east with him. That didn't sound so bad—except that years later, when he was battling

enemies, his so-called true love refused her husband two locks of her long hair, which he needed to replace his severed bowstring. “Gunnar died, of course,” the guide said.

*Of course.* The rain dripped down my hood and into my face. No happy endings *here*. No endings at all, just a polite letter from Iceland’s *Logreglan*—their police—concluding that there was no sign of where my mother went but no evidence of foul play, either. The story stopped there.

It stopped *here*. Mom had come to Iceland with Dad last summer, the first summer of Dad’s three-year research grant. They’d visited Thingvellir to do some sightseeing, and they’d gotten into a fight. Nothing strange about that—Mom and Dad did fight sometimes. Who’s parents don’t? Well, okay, my boyfriend Jared’s, but that was beside the point. They were mostly stupid fights, anyway, about stuff like Dad spending too much time on campus, or Mom bringing home yet another stray cat to foster, or whose turn it was to cook or pay the bills.

As I stared out at the river, I could almost picture them here: Mom in her slacks and blouse, blond hair loose around her shoulders—she only pulled it back for work at her vet clinic; Dad in his rumpled T-shirt and jeans, his mad-scientist hair sticking out in all directions. Mom would do all the yelling, of course. Dad got really quiet when they fought. But then it would be over and life would go on. Except this time, Mom had been so mad that instead of making up with Dad like she was supposed to, she’d run away. Dad had waited for Mom to cool down and come back. She never did.

Dad had let me read the police report, but he wouldn’t tell me what he and Mom had fought about. So I gave up asking and started begging him to take me to Iceland with him instead. I’d figured once we were here he’d *have* to explain.

*So much for that theory.* I stared at the wet wooden slats beneath my feet. What could make Mom so angry she’d decide not to come home? How well could she hide in a country smaller than Arizona? How could she want to, when I was home waiting for her? Did she hate me as much as she hated Dad? Mom and I fought, too, also about stupid things, like whether I washed the dishes or could cut my hair or was old enough to date. Mom wouldn’t abandon me for any of *that* ... would she?

The wind picked up again, cutting right through my fleece-lined jacket. What if something else had happened, like some creepy kidnapper or human trafficker had spirited Mom away? Was she even still alive? My stomach clenched at the thought, even as I told myself that of course Mom was okay. We’d know if something really awful had happened to her—wouldn’t we?

If Dad knew anything—anything at all—he had to tell me. I’d *make* him tell me. I turned from the railing and headed back to him.

At the end of the walkway I stopped short. Someone was staring at Dad, a woman in a long wool skirt and deep green jacket. Her hood was pulled back in spite of the rain, her flyaway hair barely tamed in a long red braid. Dad drew his arms around himself, as if he’d only just noticed the weather. “Katrin. We’re not meeting until tomorrow.”

Wait, that was Katrin Jonsdottir? Dad’s coauthor—they’d written a bunch of papers together about new ways to predict earthquakes and volcanoes.

“Umm, hi,” I said, then realized I’d spoken in English. “*Godan daginn,*” I tried instead words from the Icelandic phrase book I’d read on the plane.

Katrin frowned. The wind blew damp strands into her face. “You must be Haley.” Her English was perfect, just the slightest trace of an accent. She gave Dad a look cold enough to freeze water, and I wondered how they even sat in the same room together, let alone wrote all those papers. “You shouldn’t have brought her here,” Katrin said.

“Excuse me?” *Nice to meet you, too.* Maybe Katrin was one of those people who hated teenagers on general principle—but no, Dad had said she had a kid, too.

Dad shrugged uneasily. “Haley and I don’t mind the rain.”

“I’m not talking about the rain,” Katrin said. The look that passed between her and Dad should have turned that rain to jagged shards of ice.

“Haley, why don’t you go on ahead?” Dad said. “I’ll catch up.”

“Sure, Dad.” I didn’t want to watch him and Katrin stare at each other a moment more. If I did, I thought I might turn to ice, too. What was going on here? And why did the stomach-clenching feeling I had—the same feeling I got when Mom and Dad fought—tell me I didn’t want to know?

Before I could make a break for it, Katrin laid a hand on my shoulder. I was afraid she’d tell me to stay, but she said only, “Be careful, Haley,” before looking back to Dad.

“Umm, yeah. Okay.” I turned away from her and hurried down the path. After a few steps I broke into a jog, ignoring the way my sneakers squelched against the gravel. Running felt good after seventeen hours waiting in airports and being crammed into airplane seats meant for short people. For the first time since landing in Iceland, I almost felt warm.

The path led to a pond with an interpretive sign. I stopped to read it, stretching my calves and watching raindrops ripple the water’s surface. The sign explained that in the Middle Ages women convicted of things like lying and adultery had been drowned here. *Nice.*

A bit of sun fought its way through the clouds, making the water seem red, like blood. I shivered and ran on, following a dirt trail that branched away from the main path, winding around the far side of the pond and then following a stream uphill.

The rain slowed to a few soggy drips. The path grew steeper and water roared in the distance. *Be careful.* I scowled, remembering Katrin’s warning. Careful of what? I kept climbing. A huge waterfall came into view.

Huge if you lived in southern Arizona, anyway. White spray leaped into the air. I left the path and clambered over slippery rocks, trying to get closer to the water. The roaring grew louder, the air colder. Too cold—I stopped and rubbed the sleeves of my wet jacket. What was I doing here, anyway? What made me think I could find Mom, when the people who actually lived here had failed?

Spray blew into my face. A few more threads of sun poked through the clouds, casting rainbow patterns onto the water. *Beautiful,* I thought, but I only felt colder. I wondered if Mom had seen this same waterfall. “Where is she?” I asked the rushing water. Of course it didn’t answer. I sighed, turned around, and clambered back down to the trail.

Something glinted in the dirt there. A small silver coin, not much bigger than m

thumbnail, crisscrossed with a strange pattern of circles and lines. I knelt down, and somewhere a raven cried out, and picked the thing up.

The coin burned as my fingers closed around it. The ground shook as if a train were going by. The air blurred and a hot desert wind stroked my cheek. I should have been scared, but that heat felt so good after the chill rain. I clutched the coin harder and leaned into the wind. The roaring waterfall seemed very far away.

Somewhere a woman's voice whispered, "*Hvad heitir thu?*"

I knew that from my phrase book, too. I frowned, trying to remember the right response. "*Eg heiti Haley.*"

Someone touched my shoulder. The air snapped back into focus, and rain spattered from the cold sky onto the trail. I turned around, looking for the woman who'd asked my name. No one stood there but Dad. "Ready to go?" He shouted to be heard over the water.

I shoved the coin into my pocket. It felt merely warm now, like it had been too long in the sun. Maybe I was just homesick and had imagined the desert wind. But why would I have imagined a woman's voice to go with it?

I followed Dad back down the trail. "Did you feel the earthquake?" he asked, once the waterfall was far enough away that he didn't have to shout.

"Earthquake?" I remembered the ground shaking—was that what an earthquake felt like? Did the air usually go all blurry during a quake?

"Just a small one." Dad grinned, like he couldn't wait for the ground to rattle and shake some more. "Earthquakes, volcanoes—really, Iceland's just one huge geologic event waiting to happen."

*Now there's a comforting thought.* I stepped past the drowning pool and onto the main gravel path.

Katrin ran up to us, her braid flying out behind her, and looked right at me. "You're okay?" The anger was gone, and her face was pinched with worry.

"I'm fine." Was there some reason I shouldn't be? "It was just a small quake." I smiled, but Katrin didn't smile back.

She looked sharply at Dad. "Tomorrow, Gabe. Both of you."

Dad sighed, as if he found the idea troubling. "Yes, Katrin. We'll be there."

Katrin nodded and walked away without another word. I looked at Dad.

"Lunch," he said. "We're meeting to talk about this summer's observation stations, and Katrin invited you along." Dad shoved his hood back and ran a hand through his unruly hair. Before I could ask why Katrin would want me to come to lunch when she thought I shouldn't be here at all, he said, "Speaking of food, what do you say we get some dinner?" Dad blinked hard, like he did when he stayed up too late working on a paper.

I rubbed my eyes, too. A night without sleep was enough to make the world seem more than a little blurry, right? "Dinner sounds good."

"We'll get hot dogs," Dad said. "Iceland has the best lamb hot dogs—"

"Yeah, Dad." I laughed. "I came four thousand miles just to eat hot dogs."

Dad laughed, too, and for a moment the tiredness left his face. It wasn't only the flight—he'd looked more tired at home, too, since Mom had disappeared. I knew how he felt.

I *had* to find her. For both of us. I'd have dinner first, and try to get some sleep—and then I'd make Dad answer my questions. Or else I'd go look for Mom on my own. No way was I letting this go. I followed Dad back to the car. My hand itched, and I glanced down at it.

There was a small red circle on my palm, right over the red half-moons where I'd dug my nails in—right where the coin had burned me.

The red mark had long faded by the time we ate dinner and returned to our guesthouse in Reykjavik. It was nearly ten by then, not that you could tell by the sun, which was low but still up, shining like an old quarter through layers of gray. I scribbled a postcard to Jared, changed into an oversized T-shirt, and crawled into bed. I was so, so tired. I clutched Mortimer, the stuffed brown wombat no one but Mom knew I slept with, and let soft sleep wrap around me, hoping for once I'd sleep without dreams.

Yeah right. Just because I'd traveled thousands of miles and not slept for two days, who made me think the universe would give me a break?

*I dreamed of a gray tower of toy blocks, stacked on a golden hillside. Dandelions had rooted the blocks and gone to seed. Little white-and-black birds perched on their heights.*

*I dreamed of a bow made of fire. Someone drew the bowstring back, and a burning arrow arched through the air. The arrow struck the hillside; the ground shuddered and gaped open where it fell. More flames leaped up from beneath the earth. Birds screamed and fled. Blocks caught fire as they tumbled to the ground.*

*The flames leaped higher, turning into grasping arms that were made, like the bow, all of fire. I ran, and as I did I felt something catch beneath my skin. I knew then the fire was in me, not the earth, after all.*

*The acrid stench of smoke filled the air. "You must never run from sorcery," a voice yelled, but I just ran faster, struggling to breathe through the smoke, while my skin melted away and my bones crumbled to ash—*

I bolted upright in bed, sweat pouring down my face. Something burned in my hand—I opened my eyes and saw the small silver coin, engraved with its pattern of circles and lines. I flung the thing across the room. I'd left it in my jeans last night. I knew I had.

I sat there, gasping for breath, trying to shake off the nightmare. Sweat plastered my T-shirt to my skin. "Just a dream," I whispered. Slowly, the fear that burned through me faded. I had nightmares all the time now. Usually they were about Mom: Mom being kidnapped, Mom falling into a ravine, Mom being stabbed or shot or simply getting lost and calling my name. By day I told myself Mom had to be all right, but at night I dreamed about every possible awful thing that could have happened to her.

Mom hadn't been in this dream, but I still had that stomach-aching, hands-trembling, after- nightmare feeling. "Just a dream." I kept whispering so I wouldn't wake Dad. Dad never knew what to do when I had nightmares; he just looked lost. I needed Mom here, to stroke my hair and chase the dreams away.

At least it was morning. Sun shone around the drawn shades. Through the thin wall I heard Dad talking about pyroclastic flows in his sleep. I dug Mortimer out from beneath the covers and hugged him close. The old wombat's eyes had fallen out long ago and had been replaced with mismatched buttons. The thread of his seams was a different color each place Mom had

patched him up. Mom was always bringing me stuffed animals, every one a different species and none of them the standard bear. Still holding Mortimer, I leaned back and shut my eyes.

Flames danced behind my eyelids. I leaped to my feet, breathing hard. “Just a dream,” I said, over and over. “Just a stupid dream.” My hands shook, and I tasted ash at the back of my throat. No way was I closing my eyes again.

I dug through my suitcase instead, pulled out running pants and a tank top, and got dressed for a run. My track coach was impressed by how much I’d practiced this past year, picking up county honors as a sophomore. I didn’t tell him I didn’t run for the honors. I ran because running chased the nightmares away.

My hands trembled as I laced up my sneakers. I glanced at the clock—4:17, it read. I groaned. It wasn’t morning. It was just Iceland, where the sun barely set in summer and barely rose in winter. I wasn’t about to go back to sleep, though. I pulled my tangled hair into a ponytail, wrote a note for Dad and taped it to the fridge, and headed out. The clouds and the rain were gone, leaving behind a deep blue sky and low pale sun. The cool air smelled heavy with water. It felt good against my sweaty skin.

My trembling eased as I headed down the gray brick sidewalk at a brisk pace, warming my cold muscles. *Just a dream.* Concrete buildings lined the street, painted red and blue and green, like toy houses. A woman pushed a stroller toward me. The baby inside slept quietly. The woman’s eyes were red, as if she hadn’t slept nearly as well. I smiled in sympathy, but she didn’t smile back.

I broke into a slow jog. The dream faded, the memory of flames turning less real than the slap of my rubber soles on the pavement and the music blaring from a distant bar. Bright blue water shone in the distance. I headed toward it. Somewhere a car horn honked—a quiet honk, oddly polite. Two small white birds with red beaks, black caps, and long tail feathers stared at me from a rooftop. Arctic terns? Somewhere farther away, a raven krawked, and the little birds flew off abruptly. I was less interested in birds than in mammals, but I remembered that arctic terns migrated all the way from the Arctic to Antarctica and back again, every single year. They were tough little birds.

The street met a paved black trail that followed the bay, beside a seawall built of large gray rocks. Perfect—I turned right, onto the path, and broke into a faster run. Sun reflected off the water beside me. Across the bay, smooth black volcanic hills swept toward the sky, so different from the dusty brown mountains of home. Different, but kind of cool—I stared at them as I ran. In the distance I heard barking.

Something furry barreled into my legs. I tumbled to the pavement, speed turning to stillness in an instant. A wet tongue licked my face.

Someone pulled the dog away and began speaking—angry Icelandic words I didn’t understand. It was a boy around my age, with a wool cap jammed down over his ears and shaggy brown hair that fell into his eyes. He knelt in front of me, his arms overflowing with a wriggling brown-and-white Icelandic sheepdog.

“I’m sorry, I don’t—*Talar thu ensku?*” I asked hopefully. That was on the very first page of my phrase book.

The boy’s mouth pulled into a sardonic smile. He wore a scuffed black leather jacket

mended at the elbows. “Yes, of course I speak English. I yell at the dog, not you. Though you do not look like a tourist.”

I laughed. “I’ll take that as a compliment.” My great-great-grandmother had come from Iceland, but that hardly seemed to count. I got to my feet. My running pants were torn, and the scraped skin beneath bled from a jagged gash. I flexed my knee and felt a twinge of pain.

The boy glanced at the scrape. “Sorry,” he said. The dog squirmed out of his arms and licked my knee, making the rip larger. His rough tongue stung, but I didn’t flinch away. I drew the dog into a hug, rubbing his shaggy fur and letting him know I forgave him for knocking me over. He licked my face, as if he forgave me, too, for not watching where I was going.

“He likes you.” The boy stood and offered me his handkerchief. He was taller than I seemed—taller than me. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.” I took the handkerchief—he had lovely long fingers—and did my best to wipe the blood away. I stood, testing the weight on my knee. Already the pain was fading and the bleeding slowing. I reached down to scratch the dog behind the ears. He was a sweet dog with one of those always-questioning faces. “What’s his name?”

“Flosi,” the boy said.

I rubbed Flosi’s nose. Flosi nudged my hand away, gave my knee an enthusiastic final lick—that stung, too—and looked up at the boy.

“We need to go,” the boy said.

“Yeah.” Of course he had to go. No reason for him to hang around chatting with some random tourist his dog had toppled over. Still, we both hesitated. In the sunlight, his green eyes were nearly as bright as the sea.

We looked away at the same instant. My face felt hot. There was no reason for that, either.

“Sorry,” the boy said again.

“No harm done.” I smiled. Then, because I didn’t want him to think *I* was the one hanging around too long, I added a “see you” and jogged off. My knee hurt at first, but I’d run through worse, and the pain disappeared as I found my pace once more. I realized I still held the boy’s handkerchief, but when I glanced back, he was already gone. I shoved it into my pocket, thinking about the way his shaggy brown hair fell into his face, over those bright eyes.

There was definitely no reason to be thinking about his eyes. I turned my thoughts to Jared, in his jeans and the sleeveless T-shirts he wore even in winter, his arms well muscled from hours spent helping with his family’s landscaping business. Jared’s hair was clipped close to his neck and never fell into his face. We’d only started dating this past year, but we’d been friends forever. I needed to find a net café to e-mail him—my cell phone didn’t work in Iceland, and it felt strange being out of touch. Jared was doing a wildlife biology internship in San Diego this summer. Before I’d decided to go to Iceland, I was supposed to intern there with him. Jared and I both wanted to work with animals one day, not in a clinic but in the wild.

I ran past houses and apartment buildings, offices and warehouses. Sweat trickled down my



neck and into my eyes. A few cars drove past on the nearby road. A duck with brown feathers and a bright green head drifted by on the water. Given how little Dad was willing to tell me, maybe I should have gone to San Diego. I felt a twinge of anger at the thought.

A warm wind picked up. A desert wind—it dried the sweat and caressed my arms, just like at home. The air shimmered, as if with heat haze.

“*Haley,*” a voice whispered. That voice tugged on some thread anchored deep inside me. I skidded to a halt.

A woman in a long scarlet cloak stood atop the seawall. She was just a few years older than me, her eyes a smoldering gray, her blond hair so long it blew about her calves. I should have seen blue sky behind her, but instead I saw black stone. I caught the faint scent of hot asphalt. “*Haley.*”

It was the same voice I’d heard at Thingvellir. She reached out a hand, and the gesture pulled at me, too. I stepped toward her, not sure why, not sure whether I had a choice. My feet clambered up onto the seawall. The ground trembled. “Who are you?” My voice shook, which surprised me.

The woman spoke sharp Icelandic words I couldn’t understand—a question? Her accent was very different than the boy’s had been. She reached for my hand, and her fingers slid through mine, ghostlike, right through mine. A wave of dizziness washed over me. The hot wind blew on. I swayed and reached for the woman in turn, not sure if I was awake or asleep.

A raven’s cry cut the air. A gust of cold wind blew. I stumbled and fell from the seawall into the icy water. Rocks jabbed my arms and cut through my running pants. The woman cried out in anger. More faintly, I heard beating wings.

I staggered to my feet, dripping water, the sea up past my knees. The blue sky was gone; I could barely make out the fog-shrouded seawall above me. That made no sense. How could fog move in so fast? It raised goose bumps on my arms, which were covered with gritty black sand. I climbed back up onto the seawall.

The woman had vanished. That didn’t make sense, either. For a moment the wings beat over me. Then another gust of wind blew, and I knew only that I was too, too cold.

I stumbled back down to the paved path I’d run on, teeth beginning to chatter. Wet, itchy sand had gotten down beneath my tank top. My skin felt like ice, and the fog was like ice, too. Only my hand was still warm, my fingers clenched around some small hot coal. I unclenched them and saw the silver coin. I swore and flung it into the sea, then immediately missed its warmth.

I shivered violently, barely noticing the small red circle on my palm again. God, I was cold. The buildings had disappeared into the fog, but I could still see the seawall and the paved running trail. I ran back toward the guesthouse, hoping that running would warm me up. There were rocks in my squelching shoes. I didn’t care. I ran faster, desperate for any warmth I could find.

The fog slowly cleared. The sun was always so low here—I couldn’t tell what time it was. My knee had stopped bleeding, and the sea had washed the blood away. Instead of the jagged gash that had been there, I saw only an angry red scab.

As if I'd been running for quite some time.

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By the time I reached the guesthouse, the fog had cleared and my knee ached again. My lips were numb, and so were the tips of my fingers and toes. I threw the door open and stumbled into the entryway, soaking in the wonderful indoor warmth.

It took me a moment to realize that Dad stood there, watching me. He wore jeans and yesterday's shirt, and his hair stuck out in even more directions than usual. He trembled as he grabbed me into a hug. "Haley, where were you?" I drew back and looked at him. "Just out for a run. I left a note."

Dad shook his head. "That was *six hours ago*."

*What?* "No, I only ran a few miles, I—"

Dad turned his watch to me—10:30, it read. "I've been out looking for you." His voice was tight, like a string about to snap. "I was getting ready to call the police."

My wet clothes felt clammy and cold. "That's impossible." No way had I been running for six hours. I thought of the sudden fog; that should have been impossible, too. Was I going insane? If Dad couldn't handle a few nightmares, what would he do if I lost it completely?

I stretched my cooling calves, not looking at him. "Guess I'm still learning my way around." I tried to keep my voice light—a nothing-to-worry-about-here voice. "Took a few wrong turns. Sorry."

Dad reached out and touched my damp hair. It had fallen out of its elastic and hung limp about my face. He glanced at my torn pants. "Haley, is there something I should know?"

"Oh, yeah." I forced a laugh. "Some boy's dog ran into me, tripped me up pretty good." I pulled off my sodden shoes and set them on the shoe rack by the door.

"You ran." Dad's voice was little more than a whisper.

"I'm a runner, of course I—" The words stuck in my throat as I realized what he meant. "No, not like that!" I hadn't run *away*, not like Mom. I rubbed at my damp arms. A rock inside one of my soaked socks dug into my toe. "I told you, I got lost!"

"I know what you told me." Dad's face set into firmer lines. "But I'm telling you something too, Haley. I won't leave Iceland without you. Do you understand that?"

My fingertips and lips were still cold. I wanted to get out of there, into a warm shower. "I said I was sorry."

*"Do you understand?"*

"I lost track of the time, I—" I couldn't meet Dad's steady gaze. How could he even think I'd run away? "I understand," I muttered.

"Good," Dad said. I couldn't tell whether he believed me or not. "Go get changed, then, or we'll be late for lunch."

I bolted for my room, leaving wet footprints on the wooden floor. I had a sudden fierce thought: *How come you left without Mom?* I grabbed shampoo and a towel and headed for the

shower. I knew well enough why Dad had left Iceland last summer—to look after me. But I could have stayed with Grandma in Yuma a few weeks longer, or else with Jared's family back in Tucson when school started. Why had *Dad* let this go?

I peeled off my wet clothes—it felt good to get out of them—and turned on the shower. Warm water burned against my skin, chasing the last of my shivers away. The water held a faint rotten-egg sulfur smell. I thought of the woman on the seawall, of the hot ash scene before I fell into the bay. I turned the water up. Steam rose around me, and the numbness left my fingers and toes. I knew well enough that the smell came from the geothermal vents that heated the whole city. Hot water by volcano, Dad had said.

*Fire leaping up from beneath the earth*—I scrubbed fiercely at my scraped knee, only stopping when the scab began to bleed. I didn't want to think about my dreams, any more than I wanted to think about the long-haired woman and the way her hand had gone right through mine. I glanced down at my own hands. The red circle from the coin was gone—again. I saw only half-moon scabs that were already healing. The pale white scars beneath them seemed to have settled in for good this past year, though.

Steam fogged the shower door. What if I really was going insane?

Could Mom have gone crazy, too? Crazy enough to dream of fire and see ghosts and fall into the sea? Was *that* what Dad didn't want to tell me?

I drew a shuddering breath and coughed on sulfur-scented steam. This wasn't just about some nightmares or a few failed tests. Whatever was going on, I should talk to Dad. If he couldn't cope, maybe he'd find someone who could. Maybe this was a matter for professionals.

*It'd be easier to talk to Mom. I want to talk to Mom.* I turned off the water and watched the steam disappear. *Tomorrow*, I promised myself. I'd get some sleep, make sure I didn't just have the worst case of jet lag ever, and then I'd talk to Dad.

I wrapped myself in the towel, dug some Band-Aids out of the first-aid kit Dad had stuck in the medicine cabinet, and ducked into my room. As I pulled on jeans and a Desert Museum t-shirt, I heard Dad start the shower.

I still had the boy's bloody handkerchief. Meeting him and Flosi, at least, had been real. I shoved the handkerchief into my jeans pocket, a reminder that I wasn't crazy about *everything*. I ran a brush through my wet hair and pulled it up into a new elastic. Then I jammed a water bottle and the phrase book into my backpack, grabbed my jacket, and headed into the kitchen. I felt a little better after the shower. I filled a bowl with cornflakes and poured on the milk.

Or what I thought was milk—I sputtered and only barely managed to swallow. When we'd gone shopping on the way home last night, my phrase book had insisted *mjolk* was milk—but this tasted like yogurt mixed with sour cream. I dumped in a bunch of the Noa Kropp malt balls I'd also bought. They didn't taste like malt balls, either—more like chocolate-covered Rice Krispies—but at least they helped take the edge off. I stashed the rest of the bag in my backpack, in case lunch was no better than breakfast.

Dad joined me in the kitchen as I spooned up the last few bits of chocolate. Mom would have approved of mixing candy with breakfast. Dad didn't even notice. He was dressed up

for Dad, in khakis and a button-down shirt, his hair combed into submission. I tossed the bowl into the sink and we headed out.

The sun was bright, the sky so blue I wondered if I hadn't imagined the fog after all. Dad focused on the road and on shifting gears in our small rental car, but he kept stealing glances at me, like he wanted to ask what had really happened during those six hours. I stared out the window, where a few puffy white clouds clung to a black volcanic hillside. No, not clouds—steam, rising up from within the earth, like a mini-volcano. At the base of the hill a green field was streaked with bright yellow dandelions. Didn't they know better than to grow in a place like that, where molten fire could wipe them out at any time? We drove past more black hills and more stretches of startling green, dotted with purple and yellow wild-flowers. In a field, a pair of shaggy-maned Icelandic horses scratched each other's backs with their blocky teeth as we drove past.

Silence stretched between Dad and me. The green gave way to a rocky gray wilderness, then the rocks to a grassy hillside with a shining blue lake down below. Beyond the lake I saw the gray walls of the rift valley, row upon row of them. Dad turned, turned again, and pulled into a parking lot beneath the cliff we'd stood on yesterday, in front of a red-and-white building. A road sign had labeled the Hotel Valholl.

Cold wind hit me as I got out of the car, in spite of the clear sky. "It really didn't feel like six hours," I told Dad.

He sighed and ran a hand through his hair—so much for his combing it—and I knew he didn't believe me. I sighed, too, and followed him inside, past an entryway hung with—yuck!—animal skins, and into a small dining room. A gray-haired couple in matching puff-sleeved sweatshirts sat at one table, a boy scribbling in a notebook at another. The boy closed the notebook and looked up. I blinked hard. It was Flosi's owner.

His hat was still jammed over his ears, but he'd hung his leather jacket over his chair, revealing a faded *Star Wars* T-shirt. His mouth quirked into a smile. "You're Haley, then?" Ari asked. I wondered how he knew, Dad crossed the room to shake his hand. "You've grown, Ari."

"That is the usual way of things." His smile stiffened as he shook Dad's hand. He quickly turned to me as I walked up beside Dad. "So you see, I have a name as well."

My face grew hot. I realized I'd asked his dog's name but not his.

"Mom went to get some things from the car," Ari continued, still not looking at Dad. "She'll be right back."

"Wait—you're Katrin's son?"

"So they tell me," he said dryly. He had more of an accent than his mother did.

Dad took the seat across from Ari. I sat down next to Dad and draped my jacket over the back of my chair. "It's nice that you could join us," Dad said.

"Yeah, well, I never turn down food. I invited myself, actually." Ari stared at me through those green eyes, like he was trying to figure something out. "Flosi forgives you, by the way. The women do like to throw themselves at him. It is a problem."

My face flushed hotter. Was he *flirting* with me? How did you say "no, sorry, I have a boyfriend" in Icelandic? Or in English, for that matter? It wasn't like it had ever come up

before.

Dad cleared his throat, and I realized I'd been staring back at Ari. I looked quickly down. "We met on my run," I said.

"Would that be before you got lost or afterward?" Dad's voice grew quiet.

"Before," I said.

"She tried to kill my dog," Ari agreed cheerfully.

"Well, Flosi does have a way of getting underfoot." Dad laughed, but there was an uneasy edge to it. "So that's how you tore your pants?"

"Yeah."

"And is it also how your clothes got wet?"

"Well, no, but—" I fell silent as Katrin slid into the chair beside Ari and dumped a pile of geology books onto the table.

"Hello, Katrin," Dad said.

Katrin didn't answer him. She looked right at me. There were tired circles around her eyes. "I don't suppose there's any chance you'd take the next plane back to the States?"

Right. Katrin really did want to get rid of me, though I had no idea why. I shook my head firmly. "Not unless you plan to put my mom and dad *both* on that plane home."

Dad flinched, but Ari looked up with interest. Of course—his mom probably knew what had happened, and she'd probably told him. At least he didn't look like he felt sorry for me the way some of my friends at school had.

"Very well. If you insist on staying, there are some things you need to know." Katrin's expression turned businesslike. She handed me a small yellow spiral notebook from the pile, like one of Dad's waterproof field notebooks. "For you, Haley. Had you grown up here, you would have had a copy years ago, but there's no helping that now."

I flipped through the pages. They were filled with a mix of cramped writing and strange symbols—squiggles and circles and lines. The waterproof paper felt slippery against my fingers.

"Read it through," Katrin said. "Let me know if you have any questions. Your mother—"

I pressed the notebook shut. "What do you know about my mother?"

Katrin drew a long breath. "There is no easy way to say this. Your mother got caught by a sorcerer's spell."

I stared at her, not sure I'd heard right. Dad set his hands down on the table. "Not this again," he said in his quiet angry voice.

Katrin's fierce gray eyes reminded me of the woman on the seawall. "Yes, this again, Gabriel, and perhaps now you'll listen."

I was listening. I shoved the notebook into my pack. Magic seemed as good an explanation for this morning as anything else. "There was this woman, I saw her on my run—" I stopped, realizing how stupid I sounded. If I mentioned my missing six hours, I'd sound stupider still.

"You didn't mention any woman before," Dad said.

“With long hair,” Katrin said. Her face pinched into the same worried look as yesterday. “In a red cloak.”

“How—who *is* she?”

“Who is *who*?” Dad demanded. Ari looked back and forth between us, opened his mouth as if to say something, and closed it again. A waiter walked up, left menus at the edge of the table, and quickly departed. Ari grabbed one and disappeared behind it.

Katrin laced her hands together. “*Hallgerdur Hoskuldsdottir*—Hallgerd, you’d say in English. Hallgerd was—some say she was a spoiled child who didn’t get her way. Others say she was just a woman seeking a way out of an unwanted marriage. A thousand years ago, Hallgerd’s father betrothed her to a man she didn’t care for. Everyone knows this story—it’s in our sagas. Only the sagas don’t tell that Hallgerd was a sorcerer, and that she cast a spell to get out of her first marriage. She meant to find someone—some descendant of hers—to change places with. In doing so she hoped to escape to another time.”

“And leave someone else stuck with the guy instead?” I asked. *What does this have to do with me? Why am I seeing this woman?*

“Hallgerd called on power deep within the earth for her spell,” Katrin said. “That power echoes on to the present day, in the patterns of the plates that shift beneath our feet and the fires that stir the earth.”

Dad rolled his eyes. “Or the plates could be shifting because Iceland is located both atop a hot spot and on the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, making it one of the most geologically active places on the entire planet.”

“The spell failed,” Katrin said, as if she hadn’t heard, “so Hallgerd sent her—her foster father, that’s the best translation, though it’s not quite right—to kill her husband Thorvald instead, after Thorvald slapped her during a fight. Her foster father killed her second husband, too, though it’s less clear Hallgerd wanted that. As for Hallgerd’s third husband—he died when she refused him her hair to make a new string for his bow.”

*Gunnar died, of course.* I remembered the tour guide saying that. How much did you have to hate someone to refuse him a few strands of your hair?

“She was quite the charmer,” Ari said from behind his menu.

Katrin glanced at Ari, then back at me. “But all of that was later,” she said. “First Hallgerd cast the spell on her descendants—on her daughter and her daughter’s daughters, all the way down the line. Not many of her descendants remain, but I’m one, and your mother was another, only I didn’t know that when she came here.”

“Wait—we’re related?” *And Dad just happened to wind up working with Mom’s long-lost cousin?*

Ari snorted. “No more related than most Icelanders,” he said. “This is not a large island. Haley. I’m more closely related to the prime minister than to you.”

“The common ancestor was some twenty generations back,” Katrin said. “You’re probably more closely related to your president, too. And we probably have other common ancestors closer than Hallgerd—but that is not the point. The point is that Hallgerd searched for one of us to possess. For thirty generations, we all knew to turn away from her spell. Until you

mother—” A pained look crossed Katrin’s face. “She probably didn’t even understand what Hallgerd offered her.”

Dad shoved his menu aside. “We don’t have to listen to this.”

I ignored him. “What happened to Mom?”

Katrin swallowed and looked down at her laced fingers. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t know Amanda was one of Hallgerd’s daughters—that she was part of the line that had left for North America—until it was too late. I would have warned her, but—she ran, and so the spell consumed her.”

“Consumed?” My throat tightened around the word.

Dad grabbed my hand. “I won’t have you upsetting Haley with this nonsense.”

Katrin glared at him. “Better for her to be upset and alive. What you need to know, Haley, is that you’re one of Hallgerd’s daughters, too. And while the spell should have ended with your mother, it hasn’t. I don’t understand why, but the power Hallgerd called upon is with us still. You felt the earthquake yesterday. I think the problem may be—there’s a coin that Hallgerd used to cast her spell. And that coin hasn’t been found.”

My hand fell limp in Dad’s hold. My stomach did a little flip.

“It’s possible,” Katrin said, “that the coin was consumed as well, but—”

“No. It wasn’t.” I drew my hand free and reached into my pocket. I was only a little surprised to feel warm metal there. Sweat trickled down my neck. I’d thrown the coin away—in my room, and by the water, too. Somehow it always found me again.

I pulled it out and set it on the table. The symbol on it looked a little like the symbols in Katrin’s notebook.

Katrin’s shoulders stiffened. She grabbed my hands, not noticing the scars there. “You’re unharmed?”

I nodded, frightened by her intense gaze, feeling a headache starting up. I forced myself to focus on Katrin’s words.

“The coin must be returned to Hallgerd, at Hlidarendi in the east, where she used to live,” Katrin said. “Thorgerd—that’s Hallgerd’s daughter—left instructions for her descendants, and they were very clear on this point. Perhaps the spell will not be done until we follow those instructions. There’ve been too many small quakes this past year, and the pattern they form is unsettling. Yet if we return the coin, maybe the pattern will be ended.”

“Enough.” Dad’s chair scraped the floor as he shoved it back. “Amanda *ran away*.” Did I think his voice was quiet before? It had been loud compared to how softly he spoke now. “We fought, and she ran, and no one knows what happened next. I’ll regret that fight—and other things, too, Katrin—for the rest of my life, but there was *no magic involved*.”

I stared at the coin, afraid it would find its way back into my pocket if I dared look away. Katrin picked it up, then dropped it as if burned. The coin clattered to the table. “You’ll have to carry it,” she said, frowning. “We should go now. I don’t know how much time we have, but I’ll do what I can to save you from your mother’s fate.”

“Bullshit.” Ari threw his menu down. He looked *furios*. “You use magic as an excuse for



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