

Jane reached out blindly, but had no trouble finding the outstretched hands on either side of her. A faint current seemed to run through them when they touched, as if a circuit had been closed. The lightheaded feeling intensified, almost as though she was floating above her pillow.

“We begin in a meadow, just as the sun is setting,” Dee crooned, and Jane found that she could see the meadow clearly behind her closed eyes. Waist-high grass rippled in a light breeze, and Queen Anne’s lace and yellow dandelions competed with the green stalks for sunlight. “The stars become clearer and clearer as darkness rolls across the sky. The sliver of the new moon rises above the horizon: tonight is a time of new beginnings, of refreshed spirits, of renewed power. Tonight is the Storm Moon, the sign that light is returning to balance with the darkness, and that the world is reawakening around us. Tonight we begin again, journeying far . . .”

Dee led Jane past a lake covered with waxy lily pads, along a field of wild violets, then through a thick redwood forest where the ground was spongy with moss. The other women were there with her, too, examining mushrooms and oohing at breathtaking waterfalls. The experience was much more affecting than Jane had expected. A more ordinary sort of magic.

“Now I’ll start us off on our evening chant,” Dee announced, “and then we will continue silently together to seal our ritual.”

Jane exhaled softly as Dee slowly chanted a Latin-sounding phrase, then tapered off into silence. The syllables echoed in Jane’s mind, taking root as if the words had been there all along.

After two more cycles of the chant, she realized she was no longer hearing the memory of Dee’s voice. Instead, she was hearing a collection of voices, all chanting more or less together, cre-

ating an almost melodic harmony. *Like the wind through the attic at the Dorans'*, Jane thought.

Just then, one of the voices faltered, and Jane's eyes snapped open. The girl with spiky brown hair—Brooke—was staring at her from across the circle, her eyes wild. Brooke released the hands on either side of her and fumbled to her feet. Jane instinctively did the same. Curious eyes opened as the disturbance spread around the circle. The chanting noise stopped entirely, and then six pairs of terrified eyes were fixed on Jane.

"Did I do something wrong?" she stammered, trying to figure out why they were all staring at her, but no one moved. *Not staring at me, exactly*, she realized with a start: it was as if they were looking *through* her. She turned, and then she was staring, too, because all of the candles on the wood bench behind her were *floating*. She jerked at the sight, and the candles tumbled to the ground as if they had suddenly been released. One rolled toward a cushion near Dee, who bent slowly, as if she were under water, to extinguish it.

"Um . . ." A girl whose arms were covered entirely with colorful tattoos grabbed her purse. "I forgot I had this . . . um thing? So I'm just gonna . . ." She jumped up and all but ran to the door, followed closely by two of the other women. As if a spell had quite literally been broken, everyone rose to their feet and pushed toward the exit.

"Sorry," Kara said, quirking an apologetic smile at Dee. "Too weird for my blood." She circled an arm around Brooke's shoulder and guided the shell-shocked girl gently toward the door.

Within seconds, Jane and Dee were alone in the apartment, and Jane couldn't bring herself to look anywhere but the floor. "I'm so sorry," she mumbled. "This was a mistake. Please just forget—"

“Are you kidding me?”

Jane glanced up, startled. Dee’s eyes were wide, her smile even wider. Her skin shone and sheaves of tangled dark hair fell around her face. “You’re one of *them*, aren’t you? I was babbling away in the store that day, and this whole time you were one of them?”

Jane’s mouth opened, but no sound came out. She felt trapped. She had unwittingly jumped in with both feet and given herself away in front of six strangers. Now, she realized abruptly, there was nothing to do but ask for the help she had come for. “You’re right,” she forced her voice to say. “It is genetic.”

Dee grinned and shoved a cushion at her. “Nifty. Now would you sit the hell back down already?” Her amber eyes sparkled wickedly. “Let’s find out how it works.”