

Annabelle's eyes flicked over to Olive. "I see that you escaped from the lake," she said. "You must be feeling awfully proud of yourself. But it will only make things worse for you later." Candlelight flickered against the lifeless veneer of Annabelle's gold-brown eyes. "Then, I promise you, you'll wish you *had* drowned."

Annabelle lifted one hand from the urn and made a sign in the darkness. The pendant grew hot, burning Olive's skin. Olive tried to grab the chain, to lift the necklace away from her body, but found that she couldn't move a muscle. The pendant lay like a lump of burning coal against her chest.

With a twisted smile, Annabelle made a circular motion in the air. Olive spun in place. "There we are," said Annabelle. She glanced down at the cats. "If you wouldn't care for the same treatment," she warned, "I would suggest that you three make yourselves scarce."

Then, with a whisk of her long, filmy skirts, Annabelle set off for the stairs. Olive trailed behind her involuntarily, like a deflating balloon on a string.

Apparently, this was the last straw.

"*Charge!*" bellowed a voice from the darkness.

Olive saw a black blur fly through the air and plant itself firmly on Annabelle's shoulders. Another reddish blur tangled itself around her ankles.

belle bowed her head. “I have kept my promise to you,” she whispered. “This is still our house. It will always be ours, and no one will ever again chase our family away.”

Olive glanced at Morton from the corner of her eye. He was staring down, mouth agape, squeezing his hand. The cut had vanished.

Annabelle lifted the urn above her head. Its gold body flashed in the moonlight. A sudden wind rose, knocking Olive and Morton off of their feet. Olive managed to catch herself, and realized that her body was once again doing what she told it to. The necklace hung cold and heavy against her shirt. Morton scrambled toward her. She wrapped her arms tightly around his skinny shoulders, and this time Morton didn’t shrug her arms away.

The black trees bent wildly in the wind. Bits of dead leaves and twigs whipped through the chilly air. Olive squinted up into the fading light to see that Annabelle was laughing, holding the urn high. A trail of ashes coiled from the urn’s mouth. As Olive watched, the rising ashes grew thicker, darker, spinning through the air. They eclipsed the moon. They filled the sky. They muffled Annabelle’s triumphant laugh with the sound of a swirling, papery storm.

Pulling Morton along beside her, Olive crawled toward the edge of the clearing. The cycling wind



belle moving closer, the spectacles glinting on their chain. In the distance, a little white shape darted forward. Something gleamed through the darkness.

“YAH!” Morton yowled, leaping forward and landing on Annabelle’s trailing skirts, pinning her to the ground. Annabelle whirled around. The beam of Morton’s flashlight struck her full in the face. Annabelle let out a shriek and raised her arms, shielding her eyes from the light.

All at once, the branches around Olive’s body loosened. With a wriggle, she slipped out of their grasp and charged through the trees into the clearing, throwing herself against Annabelle’s back. Morton still had the flashlight aimed at Annabelle’s eyes. “YAH!” he shouted again. Annabelle covered her face with one arm and flailed blindly at Morton with the other.

“Grandfather!” Annabelle yelled toward the sky.

Olive felt her fist close around the spectacles and yanked backward with all the strength in her body. The chain snapped. The spectacles were secure in her hand.

“Come on!” Olive shouted, grabbing Morton’s arm.

They bolted down the path, the beam of Morton’s flashlight bobbing wildly over the ground in front of them. Its light was already getting weaker. “I think the batter is draining out!” gasped Morton.

Another pair of running footsteps joined the sound

of their own. Olive glanced over her shoulder. Annabelle was after them, the dagger she had used to cut Morton clasped in her fist.

Olive put on the spectacles. "When we get to the frame," she panted to Morton, "you go first. I'll be right behind you."

The small square of hallway light shone just a few steps in front of them. Olive pushed Morton ahead. He grabbed the bottom of the frame, Olive held him by the ankle, and Morton dove out into the hallway.

Annabelle lunged closer, her hands reaching out, her mouth forming a furious *NO*. Willing herself not to look back, Olive grasped the frame. She heaved her body over it, pushing her head and shoulders out into the gold light of the hallway. But she couldn't get any farther. Annabelle's hand was locked around her foot.

Olive kicked wildly, her legs hitting nothing but the cold, swirling air of the forest. Then there was a sudden tug, and the sensation of something slipping away. Her left sock was gone. Her foot was free of Annabelle's grasp. Annabelle stumbled backward, still clutching Olive's stripy sock, and Olive toppled out into the hallway.

She landed on her stomach on the hall carpet. Morton sat in exhausted silence beside her. Then his eyes grew wide. He looked at Olive. "We did it," he said. He scrambled to his feet. "We did it! We did it!"

“I’m coming too!” shouted Morton. “Somebody give me a lantern!”

Olive scrambled to her feet, gripping the handle of the camp lantern in her left hand and the flashlight in her right. Horatio and Leopold ran at her heels. Behind them came Morton and Harvey, looking for something to light Morton’s candle. Olive skidded into the hallway, raced to the front bedroom, and stopped in front of the huge gold frame. The ancient town, like every other painting, had gone dark. Only the huge stone arch remained on the canvas, its stern-faced soldiers staring down from either side. But now, at the end of its massive stone tunnel, there was only blackness.

“The spectacles—” moaned Olive. “I can’t get through.”

“I’ll take you, miss,” said Leopold.

“It would be a privilege, my lady,” said Harvey, bolting into the room and bumping Leopold aside.

“I’ll take you, but I’m not sure what will happen if we go through a painting that looks like this,” said Horatio.

For a moment, all of them stared through the stone archway into the darkness.

“We have to try it anyway,” said Olive. “Let’s all go.”

Olive grabbed Horatio’s tail in one hand and Leopold’s in the other. Morton, unlit candle still clamped