

“Prologue”

Maggie Stiefvater

This is their world: flippant love, ceaseless dancing, flowers beneath the stars, roses on their lips, and pleasure. Always pleasure.

This is my world: nights in my car, road beneath my tires, rooms paid for with bills that turn to oak leaves after I have gone, table for one, and time. Always time.

I have seen the world over and then I have seen it again and then I have seen it again; I have worn through one thousand pairs of shoes. My wandering stops for only one thing. For only one person.

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My Queen sent the hounds for me, all frost-bitten and fire-hardened, and she sent the Hunter for me, his skin covered with runes and smelling of clover. And they brought me back to her.

“I want you to watch this one,” my Queen said. “Lady-of-the-skies, show him.” Lady-of-the-skies was what she called her lady, but that’s not what I called her.

Her lady tossed bones into a shallow pool of water that floated lilies on its surface, and the face of a girl appeared. “Deirdre,” said the Queen’s lady. “That’s her name. Go watch her, love.”

With a smile so beautiful that the sky wept, the lady moved past me. She gave the iron in my pocket a wide berth. Once upon a time, that would’ve given me pleasure, but now, looking at the face of the girl in the water at my feet, I just closed my eyes.

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And so I watched Deirdre. I watched her walk into her high school for the first time and I watched the seasons change and I watched her frown get deeper.

I watched her coax music from her harp. I didn't have an eye for magic, but I had an ear for music, and when she played her harp, I wanted to take my flute out for the first time in years. I was fascinated. Not when she effortlessly played transcendent tunes in front of her family. That invisible proficiency was like magic and I had seen lifetimes worth of magic.

No, I liked it when she sat in her room and her fingers stumbled over a phrase and so she played it again and again, her eyes darkening and her jaw set, until her fingers learned better than to displease her. It was very human, this intense repetition. Brilliance that was earned instead of bestowed. That fascinated me.

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The Queen's lady found me in my car.

"I thought you were watching her, love," she told me. Her disappointment burned faintly in my chest.

"I'm watching her," I told her. Unlike her, I didn't have to tell the truth, but I did anyway.

"I heard her play tonight," Lady-of-the-Skies said. "And I think you know what happens now."

I knew.

Soon I'd be wandering again.