

The
Monsters of
Rookhaven





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PÁDRAIG KENNY

ILLUSTRATED BY EDWARD BETTISON

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For Catherine, Paul, Fran, and Jean.





GIDEON



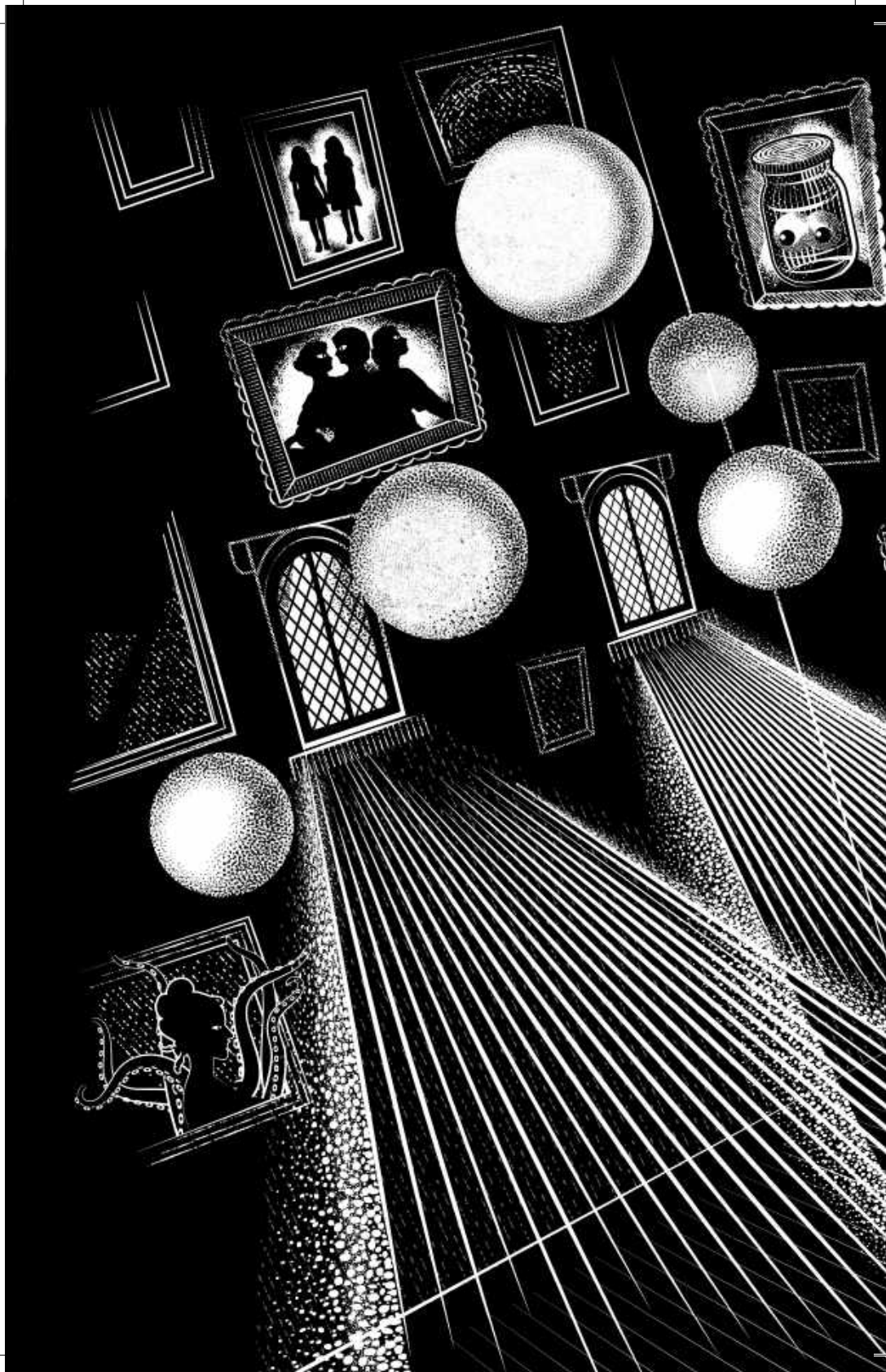
UNCLE BERTRAM



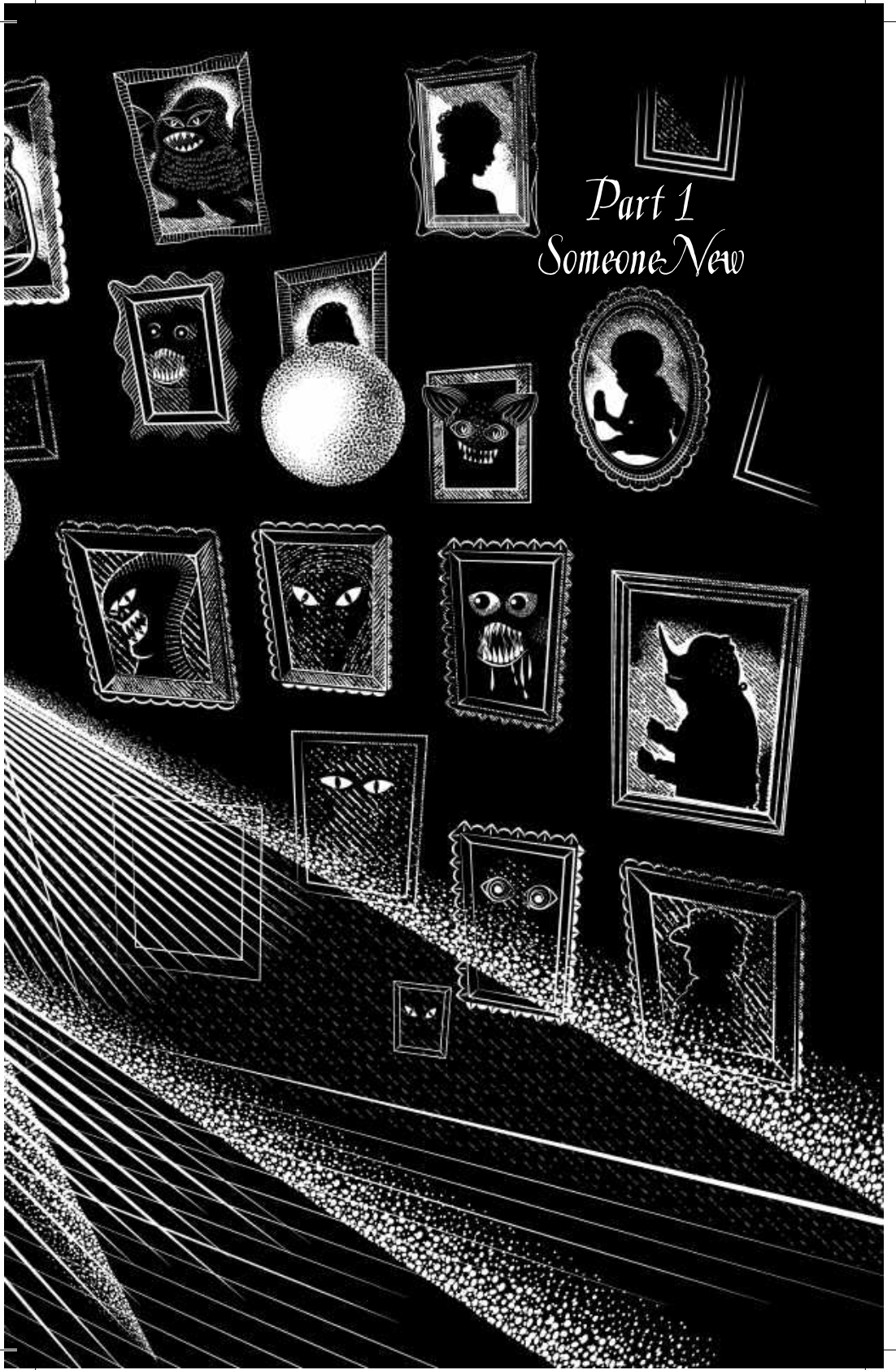
DOTTY & DAISY



PIGLET



Part 1
Someone New





Mirabelle

Mirabelle was in the garden feeding bones to the flowers when Uncle Enoch came for her.

The flowers swayed above her, sniffing the night air. She could hear the creaking of their tree-trunk-thick stalks and the soft wet sibilance of their petals smacking together as they fed. Though they were nursery plants, each one of them was already over six feet tall, their heads moving blindly in the starry night. A light breeze was blowing. Mirabelle inhaled the air. It was grass-scented and warm. Behind her in the great house, she could sense the others stirring from their day-long slumber.

A shadow moved over the moon. Mirabelle smiled as she heard the light flapping of wings and the sound of feet touching the earth.

‘Good evening, Uncle Enoch.’

The tall black-clad figure stepped out of the darkness, his wings melting into the air behind him. His pale face was dominated by a long nose. His jet-black hair was pasted back over his skull in a widow’s peak. He had an austere presence, but there was genuine warmth in his eyes.

‘Good evening, Mirabelle. How was the day?’

Mirabelle sniffed. ‘Bright and sunny.’

Enoch shook his head. ‘Not my cup of tea.’

He reached into the bucket beside Mirabelle, fished a bone out and threw it up in an arc. One of the flowers whipped forward and snatched it from the air. Another hissed at it, then turned away and went back to bobbing its head.

‘They’re very hungry,’ said Enoch.

‘They’re always hungry,’ said Mirabelle.

‘Like children. Always hungry. Like your Uncle Bertram, but with more table manners, perhaps.’

Mirabelle took another bone from the bucket. It still had some meat and gristle attached, and for a moment she turned it over and examined it. Enoch watched her.

‘I take it you’re not tempted to try it.’

Mirabelle shook her head. She was never hungry. Not like the others were. They spoke about their hunger and their appetites frequently, but Mirabelle never fully grasped what that actually meant. She had never experienced hunger of any kind. Nor did she sleep, either during the day – as



the others tended to do – or at night, like the humans in the outside world.

She held the bone up in the air towards the nearest flower. It craned its head downwards, and she heard the warning in her guardian's voice.

'Mirabelle.'

'It's all right,' she said.

She smiled as she held the bone towards the flower. The flower's head dipped slowly, and it seemed as if its dozen or so companions inclined their necks towards her to have a look too.

As it came closer to Mirabelle's hand, its head unfurled and she could see the rows of needle-sharp teeth that lined the mouth just where the stem met its petals. With a deft flick of her wrist, Mirabelle threw the bone. The flower snapped it out of mid-air but kept its head close to Mirabelle as it chewed its morsel. Mirabelle stroked the



smooth leathery petals, and the flower nuzzled her cheek and started to coo. The other flowers followed suit, and soon they were all cooing gently. She smiled.

‘So, why are you here, Uncle?’

Enoch stood with his hands clasped behind his back.

‘I may have some news,’ he said, pursing his lips in an effort to hold back a smile.

Mirabelle frowned. ‘What kind of news?’

‘I had suspicions this week about one of the Spheres. It seems my suspicions were correct. We may be about to witness a very rare event.’

‘No!’ she said, dropping a bone back into the bucket without even noticing. ‘Someone is coming?’

Enoch smiled now.

‘Someone new?’ Mirabelle squealed.

Enoch nodded. ‘Someone new.’

Mirabelle felt a quick fluttering sensation, then her heart started to pound.

‘But there hasn’t been anyone new since . . .’

‘Since you,’ said Enoch.



‘We need to tell the others.’

‘You can tell them.’

Mirabelle nodded, not quite believing what she was hearing.

‘Everyone can convene in the Room of Lights as soon as possible.’

Mirabelle was already halfway to the back door when Enoch shouted, ‘Don’t tell Piglet.’

‘Why not?’

‘It may well be that he already knows, but it’s best not to overexcite him.’

Mirabelle nodded. ‘What about Odd? Where is he?’

Enoch shrugged. ‘He’s on his way.’

Mirabelle ran into the house and through the gloom of the dusty unused kitchen, dominated by its old wooden table. Cupboards lay open and bare, and a single chipped mixing bowl sat forlornly on a countertop.

There was a subtle movement from the top of a cupboard. Mirabelle looked up to see the one-eyed raven looking down at her. It came and went inside the house as if it owned the place. The bird was old and scraggy, and now it blinked its one

good eye at her. Its other eye was a blind milky grey. Mirabelle nodded at it in greeting, and it seemed to regard her with



an air of calculated indifference. She grinned at it, feeling almost compelled to share her news.

She tried her best not to run in the hallway, but she was giddy with excitement. She stopped outside Aunt Eliza's room and pulled at the cuffs of her black velvet dress as she tried to compose herself. She rapped on the door. When there was no reply, she opened the door quietly.

She looked in at the large four-poster bed, its blanket neatly tucked under the mattress. Then at the dresser, with its large vanity mirror and the ornate chair placed in front of it. The dresser was filled with perfume bottles, and jewellery boxes, and various containers of powder.

Mirabelle sensed movement. She looked up into the far-left corner of the ceiling to see a patch that was darker than the rest.

Mirabelle whispered, 'Aunt Eliza, someone's coming. Someone new.'

The patch rippled slightly in response and Mirabelle heard Eliza's voice in her head, the words gentle as butterfly wings beating on a window pane.

Allow me to make myself presentable and I'll be there in a moment.

Mirabelle nodded and closed the door.

She felt a strange pressure fill the air, and she tasted the tiniest hint of iron on her tongue as a familiar magic was being worked. She turned and smiled at Odd, who now stood before her, his portal by his side already shrinking to a black dot before finally winking out of existence.

Odd was the same height as her, and like her he looked no more than twelve years old, but he of course was far, far older. He was wearing a bulky seal-skin coat that stretched right down to his ankles, heavy mittens, a cap, and goggles. He pushed the goggles up his forehead and brushed snow from his sleeves.

‘Where were you this time, Odd?’

Odd frowned. ‘Somewhere far north. Plenty of snow and ice.’

‘I can see that,’ said Mirabelle, her eyes sparkling.

Odd smiled. ‘You know, then?’

‘Uncle Enoch told me. We’ve got to go to—’

‘The Room of Lights.’ Odd nodded. He’d taken a mitten off and had a finger in the air, as if testing it. ‘Not long now.’

‘Tell the twins.’

Odd made a face. ‘Do I have to?’

Mirabelle was already running down the hall. ‘I’ll find Uncle Bertram.’

Odd shouted after her. ‘Whatever you do—’

‘Don’t tell Piglet – I know.’

She slowed down as she reached the yawning opening to her left that led down into the bowels of the house. She crept towards it, one eye on the incline that led deep into the dark. She fought the urge to whisper, ‘Piglet.’ She remembered the words Uncle Enoch and the others were so fond of using.

Piglet is dangerous.

She turned to go to the entrance hall and out through the main door. Her excitement was building. There was a constant fluttering in her stomach. She ran down the steps and stopped in front of the bushes. Something was snuffling in the undergrowth, something huge and hulking rooting at the soil.

‘Uncle Bertram.’

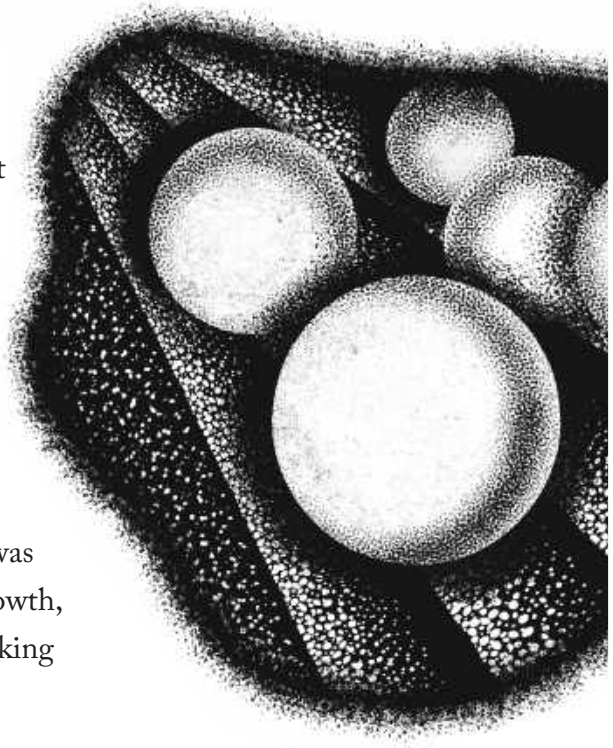
The snuffling stopped suddenly.

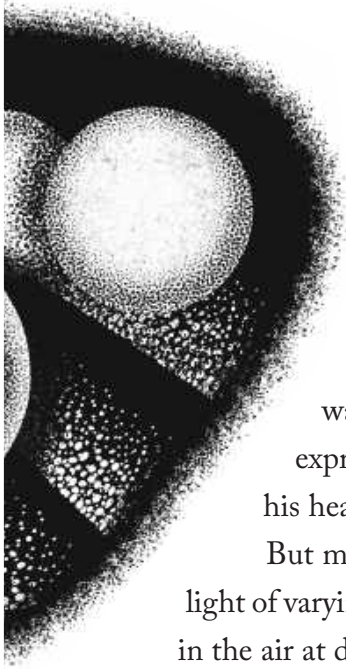
‘Uncle Enoch wants us all in the Room of Lights.’

She saw red glimmering among the leaves and she heard a grunt. Her job done, she turned and went back into the house.

She followed the hallway around, passing the dining room on her right, before stopping in front of a pair of impossibly tall double doors at the end of the corridor.

She pushed the doors open and stepped into the Room of Lights. The towering walls of the cavernous room were covered in dozens of old portraits that seemed to stretch upwards into infinity. Mirabelle’s neck hurt to look up at the topmost ones, and even then she couldn’t make them out clearly. The ones she could see were stunning in their





variety and strangeness. There was a painting of a man in sixteenth-century dress, his collar a huge white ruffle. He would have been unremarkable except for the three large eyes that took up most of his face. There was a painting of two Victorian ladies in billowing dresses, both of them with four arms. There was a small boy in a white robe, his black eyes expressionless orbs, and four twisting horns on his head.

But most amazing of all were the dozens of orbs of light of varying brightness and colour that hung suspended in the air at differing intervals and heights.

Enoch called them the Spheres. These were through-ways for their people into this world, passages in from what they called the Ether. Uncle Enoch had described this to her as: 'The place where we are created, where we sleep before birth. A place we have no memory of, but which haunts our dreams.'

Mirabelle didn't quite understand it, but she'd read in a book in the library about a place called Heaven which humans believed was a place they went to after death, and she supposed maybe it was something like that: a grand mysterious idea, unquestioned. She liked the idea of magic, of miracles that couldn't be explained, even among a family as miraculous as hers.

Enoch was already standing before one of the orbs. Dotty and Daisy, the twins, were with him, their blonde

ringlets spilling down over their shoulders. They looked like dolls in their matching blue-and-white pinafores.

‘Hello, Mirabelle,’ said Dotty, smiling, her voice timid and quavering.

‘Hello, Mirabelle,’ Daisy sniffed haughtily.

Mirabelle smiled sweetly.

They were interrupted by the sound of the double doors crashing open as Uncle Bertram huffed and puffed his way into the room. In his changed aspect Uncle Bertram was very tall and fat. He wore yellow pinstriped trousers, a red cravat, a mustard-coloured shirt, a purple smoking jacket and a green waistcoat. His large bearded face twitched with excitement.

‘How long?’ he panted.

‘Not long,’ said Enoch without taking his eyes off the orb. It was a greenish gold, and mist swirled in it, and within that mist was something grey and spindly. Sometimes it would look like it was coalescing, then it would become smoky and vanish altogether, reappearing again seconds later.

‘Oh my, oh my. Imagine if Aunt Rula were here to see this,’ said Bertram, cramming his knuckles into his mouth in an effort to stop himself from squealing.

Enoch gave a good-humoured sigh. ‘Yes, imagine.’

Aunt Rula had lived in the house long before Mirabelle had arrived. Like Odd, she hadn’t been very fond of being stuck in one place. One day, she’d decided to go out and travel the human world – and she’d never come back. Aunt Eliza once confided in Mirabelle that Bertram had been

heartbroken. He'd had a soft spot for Rula, Eliza said, and had pined for her for 'a hundred years or so'. By the sound of it, he was still pining.

The doors opened again, and in swept Aunt Eliza, fixing her hair and patting her long red dress.

'I hope I haven't missed anything,' she said, speaking aloud now that her form was fully constituted and solid. She pulled a long glove on to her right arm, and despite her cool demeanour Mirabelle knew she was excited because her arm was undulating as the spiders that made up her body settled among themselves, trying to find their places and form the shape of fingers.

There was another tang of iron, and a black circle formed in mid-air beside Mirabelle. The circle swirled and grew larger, and Odd stepped through it. Now he was dressed like a Victorian public schoolboy in the customary black jacket with its white collar, along with trousers that stopped at his knees. He twirled his little finger in the air, and the portal suddenly shrank and blinked out of sight.

Mirabelle sighed and shook her head.

He shrugged. 'What?'

'Can't you use the door like normal people?'

Odd winked at her. 'I can – I just choose not to.'

All attention turned back to the orb. Mirabelle could almost taste the expectation in the room, and she was surprised to find she was on the brink of tears. She was moved, but above all she felt an overwhelming sense of pride. This was her first time welcoming a new member

of the Family. She wanted to be dignified and calm for everyone. She wiped her eyes quickly, hoping no one would notice.

‘This is like your arrival all those years ago.’

‘I’m sure you were delighted,’ said Mirabelle.

Odd considered this for a moment. ‘I’ve had worse days, I suppose.’

‘Hush now,’ said Enoch, ‘the moment is here.’

The orb started to shimmer. Its light was almost blinding, but everyone kept their eyes on it. The grey shape started to solidify, and Mirabelle heard Eliza’s voice in her mind now, awe-filled and gently hushed.

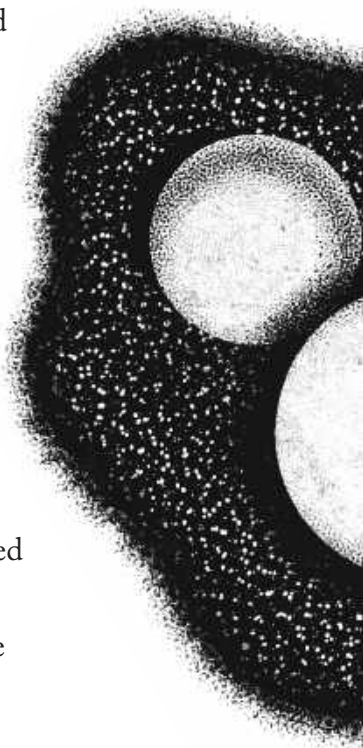
... the youngest of us all ...

‘The youngest must step forward,’ said Enoch.

Mirabelle didn’t even notice who put the blanket in her arms. She stepped towards the orb and held the blanket out between her hands. The small figure emerged from the light, and as it did the light faded, and Mirabelle found herself holding a baby in her arms.

The baby had one eye and was covered in grey scales, and when he mewled Mirabelle could see his sharp teeth. She loved him immediately.

‘Welcome,’ said Enoch. ‘Welcome to the Family.’



Everyone else applauded, apart from Bertram, who was blubbering about how much Rula would have loved to share the moment. Aunt Eliza rolled her eyes, then patted him on the arm.

‘And now the once-youngest must show our new arrival his home,’ said Enoch.

They parted for Mirabelle.

‘Gideon,’ she said. ‘His name is Gideon.’

‘A good strong name,’ said Enoch.

‘Lovely . . . just . . . lovely,’ Bertram snivelled, wiping tears from his eyes.

Mirabelle left the Room of Lights and the first place she went with Gideon was the deepest part of the house.

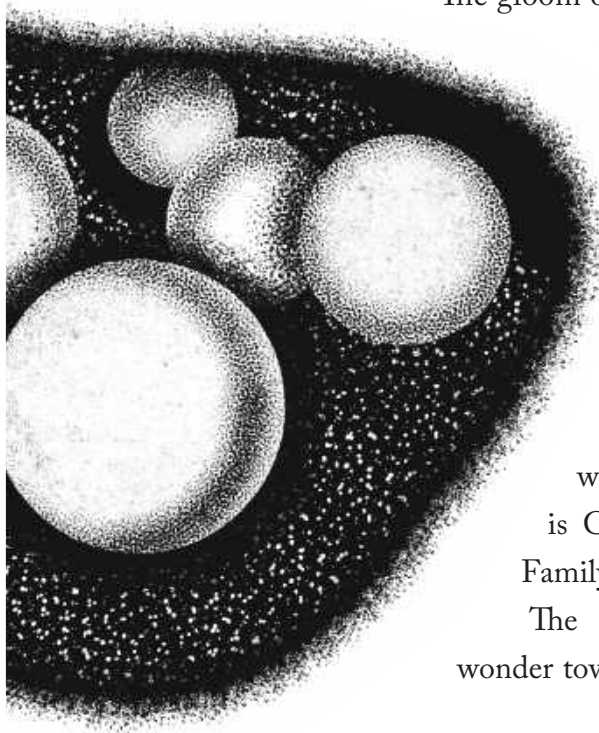
The gloom of the cavernous corridor that led down to where

Piglet was kept was no impediment to her.

She stood before the huge metal door that kept him contained.

The child murmured in his blanket and sucked his thumb as she whispered, ‘Piglet, this is Gideon. He’s part of the Family now.’

The child’s eye turned in wonder towards the heavy iron door



as it heard the great deep moan that emanated from within.

Mirabelle smiled, and she chatted to Piglet for a few more moments, while he purred and rumbled contentedly behind the door.

Mirabelle then carried Gideon up to the top floor of the house. She took him to the large window that overlooked the front garden. It was lit by moonlight, and she could see as far as the Path of Flowers. She looked down at Gideon, his single eye now closed, his chest rising and falling as he slept.

‘This is your home now,’ she whispered. ‘This is the House of Rookhaven. Outside these walls is the Glamour, which keeps our kind safe from the outside world. No one can come in here without our permission. You came from the Ether, and now you’re here with us, and we welcome you.’

Mirabelle looked out of the window and smiled. She felt whole and strong and proud and protected.

But Mirabelle wasn’t to know that the humans were coming.

And humans, as is their wont, have a terrible habit of making a mess of things.



One week later
Jem

Jem looked at herself furtively in the wing mirror. By the light of the moon she could see a nose she considered too flat and too broad with too many freckles. Her hair seemed to her to be more rust-coloured than red. She felt awful, small, beaten down. Her brother Tom was beside her in the driving seat. He'd been trying to get the car started for the past five minutes. Now he sat back with one hand still on the wheel and ballooned his cheeks in exasperation.

'All right, Jemima?' he said. Jem nodded briskly. He only called her by her full name when he wanted to lighten the mood. Tom tapped the steering wheel and tried to smile encouragingly. 'It's just petrol. We need more petrol.'

Tom was a year older than her, and tall for his age. He looked quite a bit older than his thirteen years, and he carried himself with the swagger of an adult. Even the way he now beat a solid rhythm on the steering wheel reminded her of their father.

His reddish-brown hair was flopping down in front of his eyes, giving him a look that served him well. It was a look that fooled strangers, a beguiling charming look, but it didn't fool Jem. She could see the truth in his eyes. The pain, like hers, that he always carried with him.

Jem rummaged in the satchel at her feet and took out