

PROLOGUE



IT HAD TAKEN FATE A MILLENNIUM TO LEARN THE SONGS OF THE threads, and even longer to discover how to weave them.

He sat on the floor of a cellar lit by a waning candle, hunched over a bare tapestry draped across his lap. Above it, a needle glinted between nimble fingers, the color threaded through it ever changing as Fate crafted yet another lifetime.

The first color was always the same—a hymn of white that signified new life. He promptly followed it with a calming hum of blue threaded across the canvas, fueled by the music that thrummed in his veins. Passionate riffs of red and a wailing of yellow came next, the colors exploding over the tapestry like a sunburst as Fate allowed himself to be consumed by the life of a wealthy aristocrat who would one day become so devastatingly beautiful that she'd inspire the most wondrous art. Paintings and sculptures, music and poetry—none of which would ever fully capture her beauty. Her life was a series of torrid affairs, each of them spun from gossamer threads

as fragile as they were exquisite. With each new lover she took and every twist he foretold, Fate grew more frantic, tearing through her life as he followed a crescendo only he could hear.

Anyone who saw him work would assume Fate was more a musician than an artist—the needle his bow and the tapestry his violin as he strummed life across a canvas. With every slice of his needle, he hurried to capture an entire lifetime that came to him in seconds, spinning songs into colors. He wove with such haste that he did not think. Did not breathe. So lost was he to the story that when the strike of a minor chord sounded and the thread of his needle turned black to mark the end of the tapestry, there came a second where Fate did not remember who he was, let alone what he was crafting.

Fate remembered himself eventually, though, when he looked about the empty room with its bare gray walls and recalled that such vibrant colors no longer belonged to him but to those whose stories he foretold. For while Fate's tapestry had once shone a brilliant and pure gold, the final thread had been marred by a new color for centuries—a quiet, perfect silver that he couldn't bring himself to look upon, for it signified all that had been taken from him. All that *Death* had taken from him.

As he blew out the candle, the walls surrounding him morphed into rows of tapestries that hung from moving lines stretched endlessly ahead. The moment a clear space revealed itself, Fate stilled the line long enough to hang the newest addition. He brushed his finger across its whorls of rich crimson—his favorite of all the colors, for love and passion that strong always made the most

gripping stories. The tapestry continued onward as he drew back his hand, and onward it would continue until all the threads had unwoven and it returned on the next line, blank and ready to craft a new tale.

Golden eyes had slid to his next canvas when a sound from behind drew his attention. It was unlike any he'd heard before, one as soft as harp song and yet as arresting as Death's minor chord. It drowned out all other noise, and while Fate made it a rule to never revisit the tapestries he'd already hung—for why alter a masterpiece?—he could not resist its call.

Fate moved between the rows, ducking and sidestepping as he made his way toward it. The line stilled as he approached, and Fate saw that the song did not come from one tapestry but two.

The first was perhaps the ugliest that Fate had ever woven, for too much of it was gray, and purpled like a bruise. And yet it was one that Fate had taken his time with, every thread sewed with precision as he crafted this cruel gift for his brother: a woman Death would love but could never have. Only now, Fate frowned as he looked upon the tapestry, for somehow his creation had been altered. The gray shifted into lines of black that merged into red and gold. Yellow. Blue. And then more black—not just a single line of it but thousands of threads that continued to stitch themselves even as Fate took the marred creation in his fists.

The second tapestry was no better than the first. Swirls of faded rose and icy blues were struck out by thick lines of black and white, over and over like the keys of a piano. He bent to listen to its song—the darkest, quietest hymn in which each note struck like a

punch—and drew away with a sharp breath. Its beauty was undeniable, and yet it was *wrong*.

Fetching a needle he'd tucked behind his ear, Fate stuck it through the second tapestry to see what might happen when he tried to weave in the final black thread of death. To his surprise, the tapestry spit the needle back into his palm. He clenched his fist around it.

Whatever these monstrosities were, he had not created them. The sight of them soured his stomach, and he yanked both tapestries from their lines. Even as Fate hauled them over his shoulder, they continued to grow, black and white stitches waterfaling down his back, brushing over each lip of the stairs he stomped up while trying not to trip. He hurried to a crackling stone hearth that cast an amber glow across yet another bare room, this one dressed with nothing more than a single leather armchair that faced the roaring flames.

Fate tossed the striped tapestry into the flames and took a seat in his chair, eager to watch it burn. Yet the flames sizzled out the moment the fire was fed, bringing an all too familiar chill into the room. It felt like ice sinking through his bones, seizing hold of his body and sending tremors down his spine.

Fate lurched to a stand and yanked the tapestry out, scowling as the hearth reignited. Anger stirring, he took the hideously bruised tapestry this time and thrust it into flames that coughed embers up at his face. Fate stumbled back, shielding himself. When he'd glared down at the fire, it was neither red nor orange but a color he thought he'd never see again.

Color leached from his face as he latched trembling fingers around the tapestry, not caring that the heat scorched his palms as

he freed it from the flames. He pushed the chair to the edge of the room so that he could spread the tapestry before him on the floor. He fell to his knees, staring, searching—and there they were, glinting like stars: silver threads. Perfect, impossible silver threads. Until he blinked, and they were no more.

His breath grew strained. Likely, what he saw was little more than a product of his loneliness. A delirium brought on by too much work. Because after all this time searching . . . could he have found her at last?

As delicate as a lover, Fate brushed his hand across the threads to behold exactly who this tapestry belonged to—a girl he'd crafted out of spite, made to tempt Death just enough to ruin the man when it turned out they could no longer be together. And yet her fate had somehow continued to spiral onward, no longer in his control.

The second tapestry was similar, belonging to a girl who had defied Fate not once, not twice, but three times over. Death had often warned him that he was too cavalier with the fates he wove—that there was no such thing as a perfect creation and that, someday, someone would overcome the future he had bestowed upon them and beat Fate at his own game. Until now, he had never believed that could be true.

He needed to know. Needed to see this girl with threads of silver, this Signa Farrow, for himself. And so Fate grabbed his hat and gloves, and he went to crash a party.