

This one just kept growing and growing . . . When Liz Hand first talked to me about "Cleopatra Brimstone" (that a neat title?) she thought it would come in somewhere around eight thousand words. Then it began to grow. The next time we chatted (this is e-mail I'm talking about; which, as I've said before, is equivalent to the Victorian postal system—you can get "mail" in the morning, again at noon, and yet again in the late afternoon), she said it would come in at about fourteen thousand words. By that time I was getting tight for space in the book but thought four thousand would be just fine—then the story landed on my doorstep (with a solid ka-thump!) and I noted with a little shock that it had grown to almost twenty thousand words!

*As things were really tight by that time, I thought about asking Liz to cut the story—but I just couldn't. Her work (as in her novels *Black Light* and *Glimmering*) is so full-bodied and evocative that I had to present it as written.*

Cleopatra Brimstone

Elizabeth Hand

Her earliest memory was of wings. Luminous red and blue, yellow and green and orange and black so rich it appeared liquid, edible. They moved above her, and the sunlight made them glow as though they were themselves made of light, fragments of another, brighter world fallen to earth about her crib. Her tiny hands stretched upward to grasp them but could not: they were too elusive, too radiant, too much of the air.

Could they ever have been real?

For years she thought she must have dreamed them. But one afternoon when she was ten she went into the attic, searching for old clothes to wear to a Halloween party. In a corner behind a cobwebbed window she found a box of her baby things. Yellow-stained bibs and tiny red and blue jumpers blued from bleaching, a much-nibbled stuffed dog that she had no memory of, and whatsoever.

And at the very bottom of the carton, something else. Wings flattened and twisted out of shape, wires bent and strings frayed: a mobile. Six plastic butterflies, colors faded and wings giving off a musty smell, no longer eidolons of Eden but crude representations of monarch, zebra swallowtail, red admiral, sulphur, an unnaturally elongated skipper, and *Agrias narcissus*. Except for the *narcissus*, all were common New World species that a child might see in a suburban garden. They hung limply from their wires, antennae long and broken off; when she touched one wing it felt cold and stiff as metal.

The afternoon had been overcast, tending to rain. But as she held the mobile to the window, a shaft of sun broke through the darkness to ignite the plastic wings, bloodred and green, the pure burning yellow of an August field. In that instant it was as though her eyes and being were burned away, skin hair lips fingers all ash; and nothing remained but the butterflies and her awareness of them, orange and black fluid filling her mouth, the edges of her face scored by wings.

As a girl she had always worn glasses. A mild childhood astigmatism worsened when she was thirteen: she started bumping into things and found it increasingly difficult to concentrate on the entomological textbooks and journals that she read voraciously. Growing pains, her mother thought; but after two months, Janie's clumsiness and concomitant headaches became so severe that her mother admitted that this was perhaps something more serious, and took her to the family physician.

"Janie's fine," Dr. Gordon announced after peering into her ears and eyes. "She needs to see the ophthalmologist, that's all. Sometimes our eyes change when we hit puberty." He gave

mother the name of an eye doctor nearby.

Her mother was relieved, and so was Jane—she had overheard her parents talking the before her appointment, and the words *CAT scan* and *brain tumor* figured in their conversation. Actually, Jane had been more concerned about another odd physical manifestation, one that no one but herself seemed to have noticed. She had started menstruating several months earlier: nothing unusual in that. Everything she had read about it mentioned unusual things—mood swings, growth spurts, acne, pubic hair.

But nothing was said about eyebrows. Janie first noticed something strange about herself when she got her period for the second time. She had retreated to the bathtub, where she spent a half hour reading an article in *Nature* about oriental ladybug swarms. When she finished the article, she got out of the tub, dressed, and brushed her teeth, and then spent a minute frowning at the mirror.

Something was different about her face. She turned sideways, squinting. Had her nose broken out? No; but something had changed. Her hair color? Her teeth? She leaned over the sink until she was almost nose-to-nose with her reflection.

That was when she saw that her eyebrows had undergone a growth spurt of their own. At the inner edge of each eyebrow, above the bridge of her nose, three hairs had grown remarkably long. They furred back toward her temple, entwined in a sort of loose braid. She had noticed them sooner because she seldom looked in a mirror, and also because the hairs did not arch above the eyebrows, but instead blended in with them, the way a bittersweet vine twines around a branch.

Still, they seemed bizarre enough that she wanted no one, not even her parents, to notice. She found her mother's tweezers, neatly plucked the six hairs, and flushed them down the toilet. They did not grow back.

At the optometrist's, Jane opted for heavy tortoiseshell frames rather than contacts. The optometrist, and her mother, thought she was crazy, but it was a very deliberate choice. Jane was not one of those homely B-movie adolescent girls, driven to science as a last resort. She had always been a tomboy, skinny as a rail, with long slanted violet-blue eyes; a small mouth; long, straight black hair that ran like oil between her fingers; skin so pale it had a periwinkle shimmer of skim milk.

When she hit puberty, all of these conspired to beauty. And Jane hated it. Hated the attention, hated being looked at, hated that the other girls hated her. She was quiet, not shy, impatient to focus on her schoolwork, and this was mistaken for arrogance by her peers. Through high school she had few friends. She learned early the perils of befriending boys, earnest boys who professed an interest in genetic mutations and intricate computer simulations of hive activity. Janie could trust them not to touch her, but she couldn't trust them not to fall in love. As a result of having none of the usual distractions of high school—sex, social life, mindless employment—she received an Intel/ Westinghouse Science Scholarship for a computer-generated schematic of possible mutations in a small population of viceroy butterflies exposed to genetically engineered crops. She graduated in her junior year, took the scholarship money, and ran.

She had been accepted at Stanford and MIT, but chose to attend a small, highly prestigious women's college in a big city several hundred miles away. Her parents were apprehensive about her being on her own at the tender age of seventeen, but the college, with its ele

cloister-like buildings and lustily wooded grounds, put them at ease. That and the assurances that the neighborhood was completely safe, as long as students were sensible and not walking alone at night. Thus mollified, and at Janie's urging—she was desperate to get away from home—her father signed a very large check for the first semester's tuition. In September she started school.

She studied entomology, spending her first year examining the genitalia of male and female scarce wormwood shark moths, a species found on the Siberian steppes. Her hours in the zoology lab were rapturous, hunched over a microscope with a pair of tweezers so minute they were themselves like some delicate portion of her specimen's physiognomy. She would remove the butterflies' genitalia, tiny and geometrically precise as diatoms, and dip them first in glycerine, which acted as a preservative, and next into a mixture of water and alcohol. Then she observed them under the microscope. Her glasses interfered with this work—she bumped into the microscope's viewing lens—and so she switched to wearing contact lenses. In retrospect, she thought that this was probably a mistake.

At Argus College she still had no close friends, but neither was she the solitary creature she had been at home. She respected her fellow students and grew to appreciate the company of women. She could go for days at a time seeing no men besides her professors or the commuters driving past the school's wrought-iron gates.

And she was not the school's only beauty. Argus College specialized in young women of all kinds: Jane: elegant, diffident girls who studied the burial customs of Mongol women or the mating habits of rare antipodean birds; girls who composed concertos for violin and gamelan orchestra, or wrote computer programs that charted the progress of potentially dangerous celestial objects through the Oort cloud. Within this educational greenhouse, Janie was not so much orchid as sturdy milkweed blossom. She thrived.

Her first three years at Argus passed in a bright-winged blur with her butterfly specimens. Summers were given to museum internships, where she spent months cleaning and mounting specimens in solitary delight. In her senior year Janie received permission to do her own thesis project, involving her beloved shark moths. She was given a corner in a small anteroom off the zoology lab, and there she set up her microscope and laptop. There was a window in her corner, indeed there was no window in the anteroom at all, though the adjoining lab was pleasantly old-fashioned, with high-arched windows set between Victorian cabinets displaying Lepidoptera, neon-carapaced beetles, unusual tree fungi, and (she found these slightly tragic) numerous exotic finches, their brilliant plumage dimmed to dusty brown. Since she often worked late into the night, she requested and received her own set of lockers. Most evenings she could be found beneath the glare of the small halogen lamp, entering into her computer, scanning images of genetic mutations involving female shark moths exposed to dioxane, corresponding with other researchers in Melbourne and Kyoto, Siberia, and London.

The rape occurred around ten o'clock one Friday night in early March. She had locked the door to her office, leaving her laptop behind, and started to walk to the subway station a few blocks away. It was a cold, clear night, the yellow glow of the crime lights glimmering on dead grass and leafless trees an eerie autumn glow. She hurried across the campus, seeing no one, and then hesitated at Seventh Street. It was a longer walk, but safer, if she went down Seventh Street and then over to Michigan Avenue. The shortcut was much quicker

Argus authorities and the local police discouraged students from taking it after dark, Jane stood for a moment, staring across the road to where the desolate park lay; then, staring resolutely straight ahead and walking briskly, she crossed Seventh and took the shortcut.

A crumbling sidewalk passed through a weedy expanse of vacant lot, strewn with broken bottles and the spindly forms of half a dozen dusty-limbed oak trees. Where the grass ended, a narrow road skirted a block of abandoned row houses, intermittently lit by crime lights. One of the lights had been vandalized, and one had been knocked down in a car accident—the fender was still there, twisted around the lamppost. Jane picked her way carefully among shards of shattered glass, reached the sidewalk in front of the boarded-up houses, and began to walk more quickly, toward the brightly lit Michigan Avenue intersection where the subway waited.

She never saw him. He was *there*, she knew that; knew he had a face, and clothing, and afterwards she could recall none of it. Not the feel of him, not his smell; only the knife he held—awkwardly, she realized later, she probably could have wrested it from him—and a few words he spoke to her. He said nothing at first, just grabbed her and pulled her into an alley between the row houses, his fingers covering her mouth, the heel of his hand pressed against her windpipe so that she gagged. He pushed her onto the dead leaves and wadded matted windblown newspaper, yanked her pants down, ripped open her jacket, and then pulled her shirt open. She heard one of the buttons strike back and roll away. She thought desperately of what she had read once, in a Rape Awareness brochure: not to struggle, not to fight, not to do anything that might cause her attacker to kill her.

Janie did not fight. Instead, she divided into three parts. One part knelt nearby and prayed the way she had done as a child, not intently but automatically, trying to get through the storm of words as quickly as possible. The second part submitted blindly and silently to the man in the alley. And the third hovered above the other two, her hands wafting slowly up and down to keep her aloft as she watched.

"Try to get away," the man whispered. She could not see him or feel him though his hands were there. "Try to get away."

She remembered that she ought not to struggle, but from the noises he made and the way he tugged at her realized that was what aroused him. She did not want to anger him; she made a small sound deep in her throat and tried to push him from her chest. Almost immediately he groaned, and seconds later rolled off her. Only his hand lingered for a moment upon her chest. Then he stumbled to his feet—she could hear him fumbling with his zipper—and fled.

The praying girl and the girl in the air also disappeared then. Only Janie was left, yanked by her ruined clothes around her as she lurched from the alley and began to run, screaming and staggering back and forth across the road, toward the subway.

The police came, an ambulance. She was taken first to the police station and then to the General Hospital, a hellish place, starkly lit, with endless underground corridors that led to darkened rooms where solitary figures lay on narrow beds like gurneys. Her pubic hair was combed and stray hairs placed into sterile envelopes; semen samples were taken, and she was advised to be tested for HIV and other diseases. She spent the entire night in the hospital, waiting and undergoing various examinations. She refused to give the police or hospital anyone her parents' phone number or anyone else's. Just before dawn they finally released her, with

envelope full of brochures from the local Rape Crisis Center, New Hope for Women, Planned Parenthood, and a business card from the police detective who was overseeing her case. The detective drove her to her apartment in his squad car; when he stopped in front of her building she was suddenly terrified that he would know where she lived, that he would come back because he had been her assailant.

But, of course, he had not been. He walked her to the door and waited for her to go in. "Call your parents," he said right before he left.

"I will."

She pulled aside the bamboo window shade, watching until the squad car pulled away. Then she threw out the brochures she'd received, flung off her clothes and stuffed them into the trash. She showered and changed, packed a bag full of clothes and another of books. Then she called a cab. When it arrived, she directed it to the Argus campus, where she retrieved her laptop and her research on tiger moths, and then had the cab bring her to Union Station.

She bought a train ticket home. Only after she arrived and told her parents what had happened did she finally start to cry. Even then, she could not remember what the man had looked like.

She lived at home for three months. Her parents insisted that she get psychiatric counseling and join a therapy group for rape survivors. She did so, reluctantly, but stopped attending after three weeks. The rape was something that had happened to her, but it was over.

"It was fifteen minutes out of my life," she said once at group. "That's all. It's not the rest of my life."

This didn't go over very well. Other women thought she was in denial; the therapist thought Jane would suffer later if she did not confront her fears now.

"But I'm not afraid," said Jane.

"Why not?" demanded a woman whose eyebrows had fallen out.

Because lightning doesn't strike twice, Jane thought grimly, but she said nothing. That was the last time she attended group.

That night her father had a phone call. He took the phone and sat at the dining table, listening; after a moment stood and walked into his study, giving a quick backward glance at his daughter before closing the door behind him. Jane felt as though her chest had suddenly frozen, but after some minutes she heard her father's laugh; he was not, after all, talking to the police detective. When after half an hour he returned, he gave Jane another quick look, more thoughtful this time.

"That was Andrew." Andrew was a doctor friend of his, an Englishman. "He and Fred are going to Provence for three months. They were wondering if you might want to house-sit for them."

"In *London*?" Jane's mother shook her head. "I don't think—"

"I said we'd think about it."

"I'll think about it," Jane corrected him. She stared at both her parents, absently ran a finger along one eyebrow. "Just let me think about it."

And she went to bed.

She went to London. She already had a passport, from visiting Andrew with her parents.

when she was in high school. Before she left there were countless arguments with her mother and father, and phone calls back and forth to Andrew. He assured them that the flat was secure, there was a very nice reliable older woman who lived upstairs, that it would be a good thing for Janie to get out on her own again.

"So you don't get gun-shy," he said to her one night on the phone. He was a doctor, after a homeopath not an allopath, which Janie found reassuring. "It's important for you to get on with our life. You won't be able to get a real job here as a visitor, but I'll see what I can do."

It was on the plane to Heathrow that she made a discovery. She had splashed water onto her face, and was beginning to comb her hair when she blinked and stared into the mirror.

Above her eyebrows, the long hairs had grown back. They followed the contours of her brow, sweeping back toward her temples; still entwined, still difficult to make out unless she drew her face close to her reflection and tilted her head just so. Tentatively she touched a braided strand. It was stiff yet oddly pliant; but as she ran her finger along its length a *surge* flowed through her. Not an electrical shock: more like the thrill of pain when a dentist's drill touches a nerve, or an elbow rams against a stone. She gasped; but immediately the pain was gone. Instead there was a thrumming behind her forehead, a spreading warmth that trickled into her throat like sweet syrup. She opened her mouth, her gasp turning into an uncontrollable yawn, the yawn into a spike of such profound physical ecstasy that she grabbed the edge of the sink and thrust forward, striking her head against the mirror. She was conscious of someone knocking at the lavatory door as she clutched the sink and, shuddering, climaxed.

"Hello?" someone called softly. "Hello, is this occupied?" "Right out," Janie gasped. She caught her breath, still trembling; ran a hand across her face, her finger halting before she could touch the hairs above her eyebrows. There was the faintest tingling, a tremulous sensation that faded as she grabbed her cosmetic bag, pulled the door open, and stumbled into the cabin.

Andrew and Fred lived in an old Georgian row house just west of Camden Town, overlooking the Regent's Canal. Their flat occupied the first floor and basement; there was a hexagonal solarium out back, with glass walls and heated stone floor, and beyond that a stepped terrace leading down to the canal. The bedroom had an old wooden four-poster bed high with duvets and down pillows, and French doors that also opened onto the terrace. Andrew showed her how to operate the elaborate sliding security doors that unfolded from the walls, and gave her the keys to the barred window guards.

"You're completely safe here," he said, smiling. "Tomorrow we'll introduce you to Keira upstairs and show you how to get around. Camden Market's just down that way, and the way—"

He stepped out onto the terrace, pointing to where the canal coiled and disappeared beneath an arched stone bridge. "—that way's the Regent's Park Zoo. I've given you a membership—"

"Oh! Thank you!" Janie looked around delighted. "This is *wonderful*."

"It is." Andrew put an arm around her and drew her close. "You're going to have a wonderful time, Janie. I thought you'd like the zoo—there's a new exhibit there, 'The World Within' or words to that effect—it's about insects. I thought perhaps you might want to see it."

volunteer there—they have an active decent program, and you're so knowledgeable about this sort of thing."

"Sure. It sounds great—really great." She grinned and smoothed her hair back from her forehead, the wind sending up the rank scent of stagnant water from the canal, the sweetly poisonous smell of hawthorn blossom.

As she stood gazing down past the potted geraniums and Fred's rosemary trees, the sweat upon her brow trembled, and she laughed out loud, giddily, with anticipation.

Fred and Andrew left two days later. It was enough time for Janie to get over her jet lag and begin to get barely acclimated to the city, and to its smell. London had an acrid scent: of gunpowder and ashes, the softer underlying fetor of rot that oozed from ancient bricks and stone buildings, the thick vegetative smell of the canal, sharpened with urine and spilled beer. So many thousands of people descended on Camden Town on the weekend that the tube station was restricted to incoming passengers, and the canal path became almost impassable. Even late on a weekday weeknight she could hear voices from the other side of the canal, harsh London voices echoing beneath the bridges or shouting to be heard above the din of the Northern Line trains passing overhead.

Those first days Janie did not venture far from the flat. She unpacked her clothes, which did not take much time, and then unpacked her collecting box, which did. The sturdy wooden box had come through the overseas flight and customs seemingly unscathed, but Janie found her heart holding her breath as she undid the metal hinges, afraid of what she'd find inside.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. Relief, not chagrin: nothing had been damaged. The small glass vial of ethyl alcohol and gel shellac were intact, and the pillboxes where she kept the tiny #2 specimens she used for mounting. Fighting her own eagerness, she carefully removed packets of archival paper; a block of Styrofoam covered with pinholes; two bottles of clear Maybelline nail polish and a small container of Elmer's Glue-All; more pillboxes, empty, and empty gelatine capsules for very small specimens; and last of all a small glass-fronted display case framed in mahogany and holding her most precious specimen: a hybrid *Celerio harmokordeschi*, the male crossbreed of the spurge and elephant hawkmoths. As long as the first specimen was of her thumb, it had the hawkmoth's typically streamlined wings but exquisitely delicate coloring, fuchsia bands shading to a soft rich brown, its thorax thick and seemingly feathered. Only a handful of these hybrid moths had ever existed, bred by the Prague entomologist Jan Pokorný in 1961; a few years afterward, both the spurge hawkmoth and the elephant hawkmoth had become extinct.

Janie had found this one for sale on the Internet three months ago. It was a former museum specimen and cost a fortune; she had a few bad nights, worrying whether it had actually been a legal purchase. Now she held the display box in her cupped palms and gazed at it raptly. Behind her eyes she felt a prickle, like sleep or unshed tears; then a slow thrumming wave crept from her brows, spreading to her temples, down her neck and through her breasts, spreading like a stain. She swallowed, leaned back against the sofa, and let the display case rest back within the larger case; slid first one hand and then the other beneath her sweater, and began to stroke her nipples. When some time later she came it was with stabbing thrusts and a thunderous sensation above her eyes, as though she had struck her forehead against the floor.

She had not; gasping, she pushed the hair from her face, zipped her jeans, and reflexively leaned forward, to make certain the hawkmoth in its glass box was safe.

Over the following days she made a few brief forays to the newsagent and greengrocer, trying to eke out the supplies Fred and Andrew had left in the kitchen. She sat in the solarium, her bare feet warm against the heated stone floor, and drank chamomile tea and claret, staring down to where the ceaseless stream of people passed along the canal path, watching the narrow boats as they piled their way slowly between Camden Lock and Little Venice, two miles to the west in Paddington. By the following Wednesday she felt bored enough, and bored enough, to leave her refuge and visit the zoo.

It was a short walk along the canal, dodging bicyclists who jingled their bells impatiently when she forgot to stay on the proper side of the path. She passed beneath several arched bridges, their undersides pleated with slime and moss. Drunks sprawled against the stone and stared at her blearily or challengingly by turns; well-dressed couples walked dogs, and there were excited knots of children, tugging their parents on to the zoo.

Fred had walked here with Janie, to show her the way. But it all looked unfamiliar now. She kept a few strides behind a family, her head down, trying not to look as though she was following them; and felt a pulse of relief when they reached a twisting stair with an arrow sign at its top.

REGENT'S PARK ZOO

There was an old old church across the street, its yellow stone walls overgrown with ivy, and down and around the corner a long stretch of hedges with high iron walls from which they came, and at last a huge set of gates, crammed with children and vendors selling balloons and banners and London guidebooks. Janie lifted her head and walked quickly past the familiar path that had led her here, showed her membership card at the entrance, and went inside.

She wasted no time on the seals or tigers or monkeys, but went straight to the newly renovated structure where a multicolored banner flapped in the late-morning breeze.

AN ALTERNATE UNIVERSE: SECRETS OF THE INSECT WORLD

Inside, crowds of schoolchildren and harassed-looking adults formed a ragged queue that trailed through a brightly lit corridor, its walls covered with huge glossy color photos of computer-enhanced images of hissing cockroaches, hellgrammites, morpho butterflies, deathwatch beetles, polyphemous moths. Janie dutifully joined the queue, but when the corridor opened into a vast sunlit atrium she strode off on her own, leaving the children and teachers to gape at monarchs in butterfly cages and an interactive display of honeybees dancing. In the corner she found a relatively quiet display at the far end of the exhibition space, a floor-to-ceiling cylinder of transparent net, perhaps six feet in diameter. Inside, buckthorn bushes and blood-red hawthorn vied for sunlight with a slender beech sapling, and dozens of butterflies flitted upward through the new yellow leaves, or sat with wings outstretched upon the beech branches. They were a type of Pieridae, the butterflies known as whites; though these were not whites at all. The females had creamy yellow-green wings, very pale, their wingspans perhaps only an inch and a half. The males were the same size; when they were at rest their flattened wings

were a dull, rather sulphurous color. But when the males lit into the air, their wings revealed vivid, spectral yellow undersides. Janie caught her breath in delight, her neck prickling with that same atavistic joy she'd felt as a child in the attic.

"Wow," she breathed, and pressed up against the netting. It felt like wings against her face, soft, webbed; but as she stared at the insects inside, her brow began to ache as with migraines. She shoved her glasses onto her nose, closed her eyes, and drew a long breath; then she took a step away from the cage. After a minute she opened her eyes. The headache had diminished to a dull throb; when she hesitantly touched one eyebrow, she could feel the entwined hairs tugging, stiff as wire. They were vibrating, but at her touch the vibrations, like the headache, dulled. She stared at the floor, the tiles sticky with contraband juice and gum; then she looked up once again at the cage. There was a display sign off to one side; she walked over to it slowly, and read.

Cleopatra Brimstone

GONEPTERYX RHAMNI CLEOPATRA

This popular and subtly colored species has a range that extends throughout the northern hemisphere, with the exception of arctic regions and several remote islands. In Europe, the brimstone is a harbinger of spring, often emerging from its winter hibernation under dead leaves to revel in the countryside while there is still snow upon the ground.

"I must ask you please not to touch the cages."

Janie turned to see a man, perhaps fifty, standing a few feet away. A net was jammed under his arm; in his hand he held a clear plastic jar with several butterflies at the bottom, apparently dead.

"Oh. Sorry," said Jane. The man edged past her. He set his jar on the floor, opened a sliding door at the base of the cylindrical cage, and deftly angled the net inside. Butterflies lifted from the yellow-green blur from leaves and branches; the man swept the net carefully across the bottom of the cage and then withdrew it. Three dead butterflies, like scraps of colored paper, drifted from the net into the open jar.

"Housecleaning," he said, and once more thrust his arm into the cage. He was slender and wiry, not much taller than she was, his face hawkish and burnt brown from the sun. His thick straight hair iron-streaked and pulled back into a long braid. He wore black jeans and a dark-blue hooded jersey, with an ID badge clipped to the collar.

"You work here," said Janie. The man glanced at her, his arm still in the cage; she could see him sizing her up. After a moment he glanced away again. A few minutes later he emptied the net for the last time, closed the cage and the jar, and stepped over to a waste bin, pulling branches and dead leaves from the net and dropping them into the container.

"I'm one of the curatorial staff. You American?"

Janie nodded. "Yeah. Actually, I—I wanted to see about volunteering here."

"Lifewatch desk at the main entrance." The man cocked his head toward the door. "They'll get you signed up and registered, see what's available."

"No—I mean, I want to volunteer here. With the insects—"

"Butterfly collector, are you?" The man smiled, his tone mocking. He had hazel eyes and a deep-set; his thin mouth made the smile seem perhaps more cruel than intended. "We get

of those."

Janie flushed. "No. I am not a *collector*," she said coldly, adjusting her glasses. "I'm doing a thesis on dioxane genital mutation in *Cucullia artemisia*." She didn't add that it was an undergraduate thesis. "I've been doing independent research for seven years now." She hesitated, thinking of her Intel scholarship, and added, "I've received several grants for my work."

The man regarded her appraisingly. "Are you studying here, then?"

"Yes," she lied again. "At Oxford. I'm on sabbatical right now. But I live near here, and I thought I might—"

She shrugged, opening her hands, looked over at him, and smiled tentatively. "Make me useful?"

The man waited a moment, nodded. "Well. Do you have a few minutes now? I've got to do something with these, but if you want you can come with me and wait, and then we can discuss what we can do. Maybe circumvent some paperwork."

He turned and started across the room. He had a graceful, bouncing gait, like a gymnast or circus acrobat: impatient with the ground beneath him. "Shouldn't take long," he called over his shoulder as Janie hurried to catch up.

She followed him through a door marked AUTHORIZED PERSONS ONLY, into the experimental laboratory, a reassuringly familiar place with its display cases and smells of shellac, camphor, acetone and ethyl alcohol. There were more cages here, but smaller ones, sheltering live specimens—pupating butterflies and moths, stick insects, leaf insects, dung beetles. The man dropped his net onto a desk, took the jar to a long table against one wall, blindingly lit by long fluorescent tubes. There were scores of bottles here, some empty, others filled with plants and tiny inert figures.

"Have a seat," said the man, gesturing at two folding chairs. He settled into one, grabbed an empty jar and a roll of absorbent paper. "I'm David Bierce. So where're you staying? Cambridge Town?"

"Janie Kendall. Yes—"

"The High Street?"

Janie sat in the other chair, pulling it a few inches away from him. The questions made her uneasy, but she only nodded, lying again, and said, "Closer, actually. Off Gloucester Road. With friends."

"Mm." Bierce tore off a piece of absorbent paper, leaned across to a stainless-steel sink, dampened the paper. Then he dropped it into the empty jar. He paused, turned to her, and gestured at the table, smiling. "Care to join in?"

Janie shrugged. "Sure—"

She pulled her chair closer, found another empty jar and did as Bierce suggested, dampening a piece of paper towel and dropping it inside.

Then she took the jar containing the dead brimstones and carefully shook one over the counter. It was a female, its coloring more muted than the males'; she scooped it up gently, careful not to disturb the scales like dull green glitter upon its wings, dropped it into the jar and replaced the top.

"Very nice." Bierce nodded, raising his eyebrows. "You seem to know what you're doing. Work with other insects? Soft-bodied ones?"

"Sometimes. Mostly moths, though. And butterflies."

"Right." He inclined his head to a recessed shelf. "How would you label that, then? ahead."

On the shelf she found a notepad and a case of Rapidograph pens. She began to write, conscious of Bierce staring at her. "We usually just put all this into the computer, of course, and print it out," he said. "I just want to see the benefits of an American education in the sciences."

Janie fought the urge to look at him. Instead she wrote out the information, making the printing as tiny as possible.

Gonepteryx rhamni cleopatra
UNITED KINGDOM: LONDON
Regent's Park Zoo
Lat/Long unknown
21.IV.2001
D. Bierce
Net/caged specimen

She handed it to Bierce. "I don't know the proper coordinates for London."

Bierce scrutinized the paper. "It's actually the Royal Zoological Society," he said. He looked at her, and then smiled. "But you'll do."

"Great!" She grinned, the first time she'd really felt happy since arriving here. "When do you want me to start?"

"How about Monday?"

Janie hesitated: this was only Friday. "I could come in tomorrow—"

"I don't work on the weekend, and you'll need to be trained. Also they have to process a lot of paperwork. Right—"

He stood and went to a desk, pulling open drawers until he found a clipboard holding stacks of triplicate forms. "Here. Fill all this out, leave it with me, and I'll pass it on to Carolyn—she's the head volunteer coordinator. They usually want to interview you, but I'll skip them we've done all that already."

"What time should I come in Monday?"

"Come at nine. Everything opens at ten; that way you'll avoid the crowds. Use the staff entrance, someone there will have an ID waiting for you to pick up when you sign in—"

She nodded and began filling out the forms.

"All right then." David Bierce leaned against the desk and again fixed her with that almost taunting gaze. "Know how to find your way home?"

Janie lifted her chin defiantly. "Yes."

"Enjoying London? Going to go out tonight and do Camden Town with all the jobs?"

"Maybe. I haven't been out much yet."

"Mm. Beautiful American girl—they'll eat you alive. Just kidding." He straightened, stepped across the room toward the door. "I'll see you Monday then."

He held the door for her. "You really should check out the clubs. You're too young not to see the city by night." He smiled, the fluorescent light slanting sideways into his hazel eyes.

making them suddenly glow icy blue. "Bye then."

"Bye," said Janie, and hurried quickly from the lab toward home.

That night, for the first time, she went out. She told herself she would have anyway, no matter what Bierce had said. She had no idea where the clubs were; Andrew pointed out the Electric Ballroom to her, right up from the tube station, but he'd also warned her that was where the tourists flocked on weekends.

"They do a disco thing on Saturday nights—Saturday Night Fever, everyone gets all done in vintage clothes. Quite a fashion show," he'd said, smiling and shaking his head.

Janie had no interest in that. She ate a quick supper, vindaloo from the take-away down the street from the flat; then she dressed. She hadn't brought a huge amount of clothes home she'd never bothered much with clothes at all, making do with thrift-shop finds or whatever her mother gave her for Christmas. But now she found herself sitting on the edge of the four-poster, staring with pursed lips at the sparse contents of two bureau drawers. Finally she pulled out a pair of black corduroy jeans and a black turtleneck and pulled on her sneakers. She removed her glasses and for the first time in weeks inserted her contact lenses. Then she shrugged into her old navy peacoat and left.

It was after ten o'clock. On the canal path, throngs of people stood, drinking from pints of canned lager. She made her way through them, ignoring catcalls and whispered invitations, stepping to avoid where kids lay making out against the brick wall that ran alongside the canal or pissing in the bushes. The bridge over the canal at Camden Lock was clogged with several dozen kids in mohawks or varicolored hair, shouting at each other above the din of a boom box and swigging from bottles of Spanish champagne.

A boy with a champagne bottle leered, lunging at her.

"'Ere, sweetheart, 'ep youseff—"

Janie ducked, and he careered against the ledge, his arm striking brick and the bottle shattering in a starburst of black and gold.

"Fucking cunt!" he shrieked after her. "Fucking bloody *cunt!*"

People glanced at her, but Janie kept her head down, making a quick turn into the cobbled courtyard of Camden Market. The place had a desolate air: the vendors would not arrive until early next morning, and now only stray cats and bits of windblown trash moved across the shadows. In the surrounding buildings people spilled out onto balconies, drinking and calling back and forth, their voices hollow and their long shadows twisting across the courtyard. Janie hurried to the far end, but there found only brick walls, closed-up doors, and a young woman huddled within the folds of a filthy sleeping bag.

"*Couldya—couldya—*" the woman murmured.

Janie turned and followed the wall until she found a door leading into a short passage. She entered it, hoping she was going in the direction of Camden High Street. She felt like Alice trying to find her way through the garden in Wonderland: arched doorways led not into the street but headshops and brightly lit piercing parlors, open for business; other doors opened onto enclosed courtyards, dark and smelling of piss and marijuana. Finally from the corner of her eye she glimpsed what looked like the end of the passage, headlights piercing through the gloom like landing lights. Doggedly she made her way toward them.

"Ay watchowt watchowt," someone yelled as she emerged from the passage onto

sidewalk and ran the last few steps to the curb.

She was on the High Street—rather, in that block or two of curving no-man's-land which turned into Chalk Farm Road. The sidewalks were still crowded, but everyone was heading toward Camden Lock and not away from it. Janie waited for the light to change and ran across the street, to where a cobblestoned alley snaked off between a shop selling leotards and underwear and another advertising "Fine French Country Furniture."

For several minutes she stood there. She watched the crowds heading toward Camden Town, the steady stream of minicabs and taxis and buses heading up Chalk Farm Road toward Hampstead. Overhead, dull orange clouds moved across a night sky the color of charred wood; there was the steady low thunder of jets circling after takeoff at Heathrow. At last she tugged her collar up around her neck, letting her hair fall in loose waves down her back. She shoved her hands into her coat pockets, and turned to walk purposefully down the alley.

Before her the cobblestone path turned sharply to the right. She couldn't see what lay beyond, but she could hear voices: a girl laughing, a man's sibilant retort. A moment later the alley spilled out onto a cul-de-sac. A couple stood a few yards away, before a doorway with a small copper awning above it. The young woman glanced sideways at Janie, quickly looking away again. A silhouette filled the doorway; the young man pulled out a wallet. His hand disappeared within the silhouette, reemerged, and the couple walked inside. Janie waited until the shadowy figure withdrew. She looked over her shoulder and then approached the building.

There was a heavy metal door, black, with graffiti scratched into it and pale blurred graffiti where painted graffiti had been effaced. The door was set back several feet into a brick recess where there was a grilled metal slot at the top that could be slid back, so that one could peer out into the courtyard. To the right of the door, on the brick wall within the recess, was a small black plaque with a single word on it.

HIVE

There was no doorbell or any other way to signal that you wanted to enter. Janie stood there wondering what was inside; feeling a small tingling unease that was less fear than a certain knowledge that even if she were to confront the figure who'd let that other couple inside, she herself would certainly be turned away.

With a *skreek* of metal on stone the door suddenly shot open. Janie looked up, into the sharp, raggedly handsome face of a tall, still youngish man with very short blond hair and a line of gleaming gold beads like drops of sweat piercing the edge of his left jaw.

"Good evening," he said, glancing past her to the alley. He wore a black sleeveless T-shirt with a small golden bee embroidered upon the breast. His bare arms were muscular, striped with long sweeping scars: black, red, white. "Are you waiting for Hannah?"

"No." Quickly Janie pulled out a handful of five-pound notes. "Just me tonight."

"That'll be twenty then." The man held his hand out, still gazing at the alley; when Janie slipped the notes to him he looked down and flashed her a vulpine smile. "Enjoy yourself." He darted past her into the building.

Abruptly it was as though some darker night had fallen. Thunderously so, since the enforced blackness was slashed with music so loud it was itself like light: Janie hesitated, closing her eyes, and white flashes streaked across her eyelids like sleet, pulsing in time to the music. She opened her eyes, giving them a chance to adjust to the darkness, and tried to get a sense

where she was. A few feet away a blurry grayish lozenge sharpened into the window coat-check room. Janie walked past it, toward the source of the music. Immediately the slanted steeply beneath her feet. She steadied herself with one hand against the wall, following the incline until it opened onto a cavernous dance floor.

She gazed inside, disappointed. It looked like any other club, crowded, strobed with turquoise smoke and silver glitter coiling between hundreds of whirling bodies clad in colors of pink, sky blue, neon red, rainslicker yellow. Baby colors, Janie thought. There was a boy who was almost naked, except for shorts, a transparent water bottle strapped to his chest and tubes snaking into his mouth. Another boy had hair the color of lime Jell-O, his face corrugated with glitter and sweat; he swayed near the edge of the dance floor, turned to stare at Janie, then beamed, beckoning her to join him.

Janie gave him a quick smile, shaking her head; when the boy opened his arms to hug her, in mock pleading she shouted "No!"

But she continued to smile, though she felt as though her head would crack like an egg from the throbbing music. Shoving her hands into her pockets she skirted the dance floor, then pushed her way to the bar and bought a drink, something pink with no ice in a plastic cup that smelled like Gatorade and lighter fluid. She gulped it down and then carried the cup aloft before her like a torch as she continued on her circuit of the room. There was nothing else of interest, just long queues for the lavatories and another bar, numerous doors and stairwells where kids clustered, drinking and smoking. Now and then beeps and whistles like birdson insect cries came through the stuttering electronic din, whoops and trilling laughter from the dancers. But mostly they moved in near silence, eyes rolled ceiling-ward, bodies exploding into Catherine wheels of flesh and plastic and nylon, but all without a word.

It gave Janie a headache—a *real* headache, the back of her skull bruised, tender to touch. She dropped her plastic cup and started looking for a way out. She could see past the dance floor to where she had entered, but it seemed as though another hundred people had arrived in the few minutes since then: kids were standing six deep at both bars, and the area on the floor had spread, amoebalike, toward the corridors angling back up toward the street.

"Sorry—"

A fat woman in an Arsenal jersey jostled her as she hurried by, leaving a smear of sweat on Janie's wrist. Janie grimaced and wiped her hand on the bottom of her coat, then gave one last look at the dance floor, but nothing had changed within the intricate lattice of dancers and smoke, braids of glow-lights and spotlight faces surging up and down, up and down while more dancers fought their way to the center.

"Shit." She turned and strode off, heading to where the huge room curved off into relative emptiness. Here, scores of tables were scattered, some overturned, others stacked against the wall. A few people sat, talking; a girl lay curled on the floor, her head pillowed on a Boy Scouts knapsack. Janie crossed to the wall and found first a door that led to a bare brick wall, then a second door that held a broom closet. The next was dark-red, metal, official-looking: the door of door that Janie associated with school fire drills.

A fire door. It would lead outside, or into a hall that would lead there. Without hesitating she pushed it open and entered. A short corridor lit by EXIT signs stretched ahead of her, with another door at the end. She hurried toward it, already reaching reflexively for her keys to the flat, pushed the door-bar, and stepped inside.

For an instant she thought she had somehow stumbled into a hospital emergency room. There was the glitter of halogen light on steel, distorted reflections thrown back at her from curved glass surfaces; the abrasive odor of isopropyl alcohol and the fainter tinny scent of blood, metal in the mouth.

And bodies: everywhere, bodies, splayed on gurneys or suspended from gleaming metal hooks, laced with black electrical cord and pinned upright onto smooth rubber mats. She stood openmouthed, neither appalled nor frightened but fascinated by the conundrum before her: *Who did that hand fit there, and whose leg was that?* She inched backwards, pressing her back against the door and trying to stay in the shadows—just inches ahead of her ribbon of luminous bluish light streamed from lamps hung high overhead. The chiaroscuro of pale bodies and black furniture, shiny with sweat and here and there red-streaked, or browned, the mere sight of so many bodies, real bodies—flesh spilling over the edge of tabletops, too many hairs or none at all, eyes squeezed shut in ecstasy or terror and mouths open to reveal stained teeth, pale gums—the sheer *fluidity* of it all enthralled her. She felt as she had, once, pushing aside a rotted log to disclose the ant's nest beneath, masses of minute fleeing bodies, soldiers carrying eggs and larvae in their jaws, tunnels spiraling into the center of another world. Her brow tingled, warmth flushed her from brow to breast. . .

Another world, that's what she had found then, and discovered again now.

"Out."

Janie sucked her breath in sharply. Fingers dug into her shoulder, yanked her back through the metal door so roughly that she cut her wrist against it.

"No lurkers, what the fuck—"

A man flung her against the wall. She gasped, turned to run, but he grabbed her shoulder again. "Christ, a fucking girl."

He sounded angry but relieved. She looked up: a huge man, more fat than muscle. He wore very tight leather briefs and the same black sleeveless shirt with a golden bee embroidered upon it. "How the hell'd you get in like *that*?" he demanded, cocking a thumb at her.

She shook her head, then realized he meant her clothes. "I was just trying to find my way out."

"Well you found your way in. In like fucking Flynn." He laughed: he had gold-capped teeth and gold wires threading the tip of his tongue. "You want to join the party, you know the rules. No exceptions."

Before she could reply he turned and was gone, the door thudding softly behind him. She waited, heart pounding, then reached and pushed the bar on the door.

Locked. She was out, not in; she was nowhere at all. For a long time she stood there, trying to hear anything from the other side of the door, waiting to see if anyone would come looking for her. At last she turned, and began to find her way home.

Next morning she woke early, to the sound of delivery trucks in the street and children playing on the canal path, laughing and squabbling on their way to the zoo. She sat up with a pang, remembering David Bierce and her volunteer job; then she recalled this was Saturday morning, Monday.

"Wow," she said aloud. The extra days seemed like a gift.

For a few minutes she lay in Fred and Andrew's great four-poster, staring abstracted

where she had rested her mounted specimens atop the wainscoting—the hybrid hawkmoth, a beautiful Honduran owl butterfly, *Caligo atreus*; a mourning cloak she had caught and mounted herself years ago. She thought of the club last night, mentally retracing her steps to the hi back room, thought of the man who had thrown her out, the interplay of light and shadow upon the bodies pinned to mats and tables. She had slept in her clothes; now she rolled out of bed and pulled her sneakers on, forgoing breakfast but stuffing her pocket with ten- and twenty-pound notes before she left.

It was a clear cool morning, with a high pale-blue sky and the young leaves of nettles and hawthorn still glistening with dew. Someone had thrown a shopping cart from the new Sainsbury's into the canal; it edged sideways up out of the shallow water, like a frigate shipwreck. A boy stood a few yards down from it, fishing, an absent, placid expression on his face.

She crossed over the bridge to the canal path and headed for the High Street. With every step she took the day grew older, noisier, trains rattling on the bridge behind her and voices harsh as gulls rising from the other side of the brick wall that separated the canal path from the street.

At Camden Lock she had to fight her way through the market. There were tens of thousands of tourists, swarming from the maze of shops to pick their way between scores of vendors selling old and new clothes, bootleg CDs, cheap silver jewelry, kilims, feather baskets, handcuffs, cell phones, mass-produced furniture and puppets from Indonesia, Morocco, Guyana, Wales. The fug of burning incense and cheap candles choked her; she hurried to work as a young woman was turning samosas in a vat of sputtering oil and dug into her pocket for a handful of change, standing so that the smells of hot grease and scorched chickpea beans canceled out patchouli and Caribbean Nights.

"Two, please," Janie shouted.

She ate and almost immediately felt better; then she walked a few steps to where a spike-haired girl sat behind a table covered with cheap clothes made of ripstock fabric and Jell-O shades.

"Everything five pounds," the girl announced. She stood, smiling helpfully as Janie began to sort through pairs of hugely baggy pants. They were cross-seamed with Velcro and had zippered pockets. Janie held up a pair, frowning as the legs billowed, lavender and green, blowing in the wind.

"It's so you can make them into shorts," the girl explained. She stepped around the table and took the pants from Janie, deftly tugging at the legs so that they detached. "See? Or a skirt." The girl replaced the pants, picked up another pair, screaming orange with black trim, and a matching windbreaker. "This color would look nice on you."

"Okay." Janie paid for them, waited for the girl to put the clothes in a plastic bag. "Thank you."
"Bye now."

She went out into Camden High Street. Shopkeepers stood guard over the tables spilling goods from their storefronts, heaped with leather clothes and souvenir T-shirts: MIND THE GAP, LONDON UNDERGROUND, shirts emblazoned with the Cat in the Hat toking on a cheroot. CAT IN THE HAT SMOKES BLACK. Every three or four feet someone had set up a boom box, deafening sound bites of salsa, techno, "The Hustle," Bob Marley, "Anarchy in the Disruptor," Radiohead. On the corner of Inverness and the High Street a few punks squatted in a doorway.

looking over the postcards they'd bought. A sign in a smoked-glass window said HAIRCUTS 10 £, MEN WOMEN CHILDREN.

"Sorry," one of the punks said as Janie stepped over them and into the shop.

The barber was sitting in an old-fashioned chair, his back to her, reading the *Sun*. At the sound of her footsteps he turned, smiling automatically. "Can I help you?"

"Yes please. I'd like my hair cut. All of it."

He nodded, gesturing to the chair. "Please."

Janie had thought she might have to convince him that she was serious. She had been growing her hair, well below her shoulders—the kind of hair people would kill for, she'd been hearing her whole life. But the barber just hummed and chopped it off, the *snick snick* of his shears interspersed with kindly questions about whether she was enjoying her visit and his account of a vacation to Disney World ten years earlier.

"Dear, do we want it shaved or buzz-cut?"

In the mirror a huge-eyed creature gazed at Janie, like a tarsier or one of the owlish creatures in the moths. She stared at it, entranced, and then nodded. "Shaved. Please."

When he was finished she got out of the chair, dazed, and ran her hand across her scalp. It was smooth and cool as an apple. There were a few tiny nicks that stung beneath her fingers. She paid the barber, tipping him two pounds. He smiled and held the door open for her.

"Now when you want a touch-up, you come see us, dear. Only five pounds for a touch-up."

She went next to find new shoes. There were more shoe shops in Camden Town than she had ever seen anywhere in her life; she checked out four of them on one block before deciding on a discounted pair of twenty-hole black Doc Martens. They were no longer fashionable, but they had blunted steel caps on the toes. She bought them, giving the salesgirl her old sneakers to toss into the waste bin. When she went back onto the street it was like walking on cement—the shoes were so heavy, the leather so stiff that she ducked back into the shoe shop and bought a pair of heavy wool socks and put them on. She returned outside, hesitating on the front step before crossing the street and heading back in the direction of Chalk Farm Road. There was a shop here that Fred had shown her before he left.

"Now, that's where you get your fetish gear, Janie," he said, pointing to a shop window painted matte black. THE PLACE, it said in red letters, with two linked circles beneath. The punks had grinned and rapped his knuckles against the glass as they walked by. "I've never been to you'll have to tell me what it's like." They'd both laughed at the thought.

Now Janie walked slowly, the wind chill against her bare skull. When she could make out the shop, sun glinting off the crimson letters and a sad-eyed dog tied to a post out front, she began to hurry, her new boots making a hollow thump as she pushed through the door.

There was a security gate inside, a thin, sallow young man with dreadlocks nodding at her silently as she approached.

"You'll have to check that." He pointed at the bag with her new clothes in it. She handed it to him, reading the warning posted behind the counter.

SHOPLIFTERS WILL BE BEATEN,
FLAYED, SPANKED, BIRCHED, BLED,
AND THEN PROSECUTED TO
THE FULL EXTENT OF THE LAW

The shop was well lit. It smelled strongly of new leather and coconut oil and pine-scented disinfectant. She seemed to be the only customer this early in the day, although she could see seven employees manning cash registers, unpacking cartons, watching to make sure no one didn't try to nick anything. A CD of dance music played, and the phone rang constantly.

She spent a good half hour just walking through the place, impressed by the range of merchandise. Electrified wands to deliver shocks, things like meat cleavers made of stainless steel with rubber tips. Velcro dog collars, Velcro hoods, black rubber balls and balls in various shades; a mat embedded with three-inch spikes that could be conveniently rolled up and carried with its own lightweight carrying case. As she wandered about more customers arrived, some of them greeting the clerks by name, others furtive, making a quick circuit of the shelves before darting outside again. At last Janie knew what she wanted. A set of wristcuffs and one anklecuff, both of very heavy black leather with stainless steel hardware; four adjustable nylon leashes, also black, with clips on either end that could be fastened to cuffs or loops around a post; a few spare S-clips.

"That it?"

Janie nodded, and the register clerk began scanning her purchases. She felt almost guilty for buying so few things, not taking advantage of the vast Meccano glory of all those shelves full of gleaming, somber contrivances.

"There you go." He handed her the receipt, then inclined his head at her. "Nice to see you, that—"

He pointed at her eyebrows. Janie drew her hand up, felt the long pliant hairs uncoiling like baby ferns. "Thanks," she murmured. She retrieved her bag and went home to wait for evening.

It was nearly midnight when she left the flat. She had slept for most of the afternoon, a fitful but restless sleep, with anxious dreams of flight, falling, her hands encased in metal gloves, a shadowy figure crouching above her. She woke in the dark, heart pounding, terrified in that moment that she had slept all the way through till Sunday night.

But, of course, she had not. She showered, then dressed in a tight, low-cut black shirt, pulled on her new nylon pants and heavy boots. She seldom wore makeup, but tonight, before putting in her contacts she carefully outlined her eyes with black and then chose a very dark lavender lipstick. She surveyed herself in the mirror critically. With her white skin, huge white eyes, and hairless skull, she resembled one of the Bali-nese puppets for sale in the market—beautiful but vacant, faintly ominous. She grabbed her keys and money, pulled on her nylon windbreaker, and headed out.

When she reached the alley that led to the club, she entered it, walked a few steps, then stopped halfway, and stopped. After glancing back and forth to make sure no one was coming, she detached the legs from her nylon pants, stuffing them into a pocket, and then adjusted the Velcro tabs so that the pants became a very short orange-and-black skirt. Her long legs were sheathed in black tights. She bent to tighten the laces on her metal-toed boots and hurried to the club's entrance.

Tonight there was a line of people waiting to get in. Janie took her place, fastidiously avoiding looking at any of the others. They waited for thirty minutes, Janie shivering in her nylon windbreaker, before the door opened and the same gaunt blond man appeared.

take their money. Janie felt her heart beat faster when it was her turn, wondering if he would recognize her. But he only scanned the courtyard, and, when the last of them darted in, he closed the door with a booming *clang*.

Inside, all was as it had been, only far more crowded. Janie bought a drink, orange squash with no alcohol. It was horribly sweet, with a bitter, curdled aftertaste. Still, it had cost two pence and she drank it all. She had just started on her way down to the dance floor when someone came up from behind to tap her shoulder, shouting into her ear.

"Wanna?"

It was a tall, broad-shouldered boy a few years older than she was, perhaps twenty-five, with a lean ruddy face, loose shoulder-length blond hair streaked green, and deep, very dark blue eyes. He swayed dreamily, gazing at the dance floor and hardly looking at her at all.

"Sure," Janie shouted back. He looped an arm around her shoulder, pulling her with him. His striped V-neck shirt smelled of talc and sweat. They danced for a long time, Janie moving with a calculated abandon, the boy heaving and leaping as though a dog were biting at his shins.

"You're beautiful," he shouted. There was an almost imperceptible instant of silence as the DJ changed tracks. "What's your name?"

"Cleopatra Brimstone."

The shattering music grew deafening once more. The boy grinned. "Well, Cleopatra. Want something to drink?"

Janie nodded in time with the beat, so fast her head spun. He took her hand and she raced to keep up with him, threading their way toward the bar.

"Actually," she yelled, pausing so that he stopped short and bumped up against her. "I'd rather go outside. Want to come?"

He stared at her, half-smiling, and shrugged. "Aw right. Let me get a drink first—"

They went outside. In the alley the wind sent eddies of dead leaves and newspaper flying into their faces. Janie laughed and pressed herself against the boy's side. He grinned down at her, finished his drink, and tossed the can aside; then he put his arm around her. "Do you want to go get a drink, then?" he asked.

They stumbled out onto the sidewalk, turned and began walking. People filled the street, lines snaking out from the entrances of pubs and restaurants. A blue glow surrounded the streetlights, and clouds of small white moths beat themselves against the globes; vapor and banners of gray smoke hung above the punks blocking the sidewalk. Camden Lock. Janie and the boy dipped down into the street. He pointed to a pub occupying the corner a few blocks down, a large old green-painted building with baskets of flowers hanging beneath its windows and a large sign swinging back and forth in the wind: THE END OF THE WORLD. "In there, then?"

Janie shook her head. "I live right here, by the canal. We could go to my place if you want. We could have a few drinks there."

The boy glanced down at her. "Aw right," he said—very quickly, so she wouldn't catch it in her mind. "That'd be alright."

It was quieter on the back street leading to the flat. An old drunk huddled in a doorway, cadging change; Janie looked away from him and got out her keys, while the boy stared at her restlessly, giving the drunk a belligerent look.

"Here we are," she announced, pushing the door open. "Home again, home again."

"Nice place." The boy followed her, gazing around admiringly. "You live here alone?"

"Yup." After she spoke Janie had a flash of unease, admitting that. But the boy only came into the kitchen, running a hand along the antique French farmhouse cupboard and nodding.

"You're American, right? Studying here?"

"Uh-huh. What would you like to drink? Brandy?"

He made a face, then laughed. "Aw right! You got expensive taste. Goes with the name, I guess." Janie looked puzzled, and he went on, "Cleopatra—fancy name for a girl."

"Fancier for a boy," Janie retorted, and he laughed again.

She got the brandy, stood in the living room unlacing her boots. "Why don't we go in the bedroom," she said, gesturing toward the bedroom. "It's kind of cold out here."

The boy ran a hand across his head, his blond hair streaming through his fingers. "Yeah, aw right." He looked around. "Urn, that the toilet there?" Janie nodded. "Right behind the door then . . ."

She went into the bedroom, set the brandy and two glasses on a night table, and took off her windbreaker. On another table, several tall candles, creamy white and thick as butter, were set into ornate brass holders. She lit these—the room filled with the sweet, warm scent of beeswax—and sat on the floor, leaning against the bed. A few minutes later the door opened, flushed and the boy reappeared. His hands and face were damp, redder than they had been. He smiled and sank onto the floor beside her. Janie handed him a glass of brandy.

"Cheers," he said, and drank it all in one gulp.

"Cheers," said Janie. She took a sip from hers, then refilled his glass. He drank again, slowly this time. The candles threw a soft yellow haze over the four-poster bed with its green velvet duvet, the mounds of pillows, forest-green, crimson, saffron yellow. They sat without speaking for several minutes. Then the boy set his glass on the floor. He turned to face Janie, extending one arm around her shoulder and drawing his face near hers.

"Well, then," he said.

His mouth tasted acrid, nicotine and cheap gin beneath the blunter taste of brandy. His hands sliding under her shirt was cold; Janie felt goose pimples rising across her breast, her nipples shrinking beneath his touch. He pressed against her, his cock already hard, and reached down to unzip his jeans.

"Wait," Janie murmured. "Let's get on the bed. . . ."

She slid from his grasp and onto the bed, crawling to the heaps of pillow and feather and lying beneath one until she found what she had placed there earlier. "Let's have a little fun first."

"*This* is fun," the boy said, a bit plaintively. But he slung himself onto the bed beside her, pulling off his shoes and letting them fall to the floor with a thud. "What you got there?"

Smiling, Janie turned and held up the wristcuffs. The boy looked at them, then at her, grinning. "Oh, ho. Been in the back room, then—"

Janie arched her shoulders and unbuttoned her shirt. He reached for one of the cuffs, but she shook her head. "No. Not me, yet."

"Ladies first."

"Gentleman's pleasure."

The boy's grin widened. "Won't argue with that."

She took his hand and pulled him, gently, to the middle of the bed. "Lie on your back, "

whispered.

He did, watching as she removed first his shirt and then his jeans and underwear. His lay nudged against his thigh, not quite hard; when she brushed her fingers against it he moaned softly, took her hand and tried to press it against him.

"No," she whispered. "Not yet. Give me your hand."

She placed the cuffs around each wrist, and his ankles; fastened the nylon leash to each and then began tying the bonds around each bedpost. It took longer than she had expected and was difficult to get the bonds taut enough that the boy could not move. He lay there watching his eyes glimmering in the candlelight as he craned his head to stare at her, his breath shallow and quickening.

"There." She sat back upon her haunches, staring at him. His cock was hard now, the hair on his chest and groin tawny in the half-light. He gazed back at her, his tongue pale as he licked his lips. "Try to get away," she whispered.

He moved slightly, his arms and legs a white X against a deep green field. "Can't," he said hoarsely.

She pulled her shirt off, then her nylon skirt. She had nothing on beneath. She leaned forward, letting her fingers trail from the cleft in his throat to his chest, cupping her palm over his nipple and then sliding her hand down to his thigh. The flesh was warm, the little hairs soft and moist. Her own breath quickened; sudden heat flooded her, a honeyed liquid in her mouth. Above her brow the long hairs stiffened and furled straight out to either side: when she tilted her head to the candlelight she could see them from the corner of her eyes, twin barbs black and glistening like wire.

"You're so sexy." The boy's voice was hoarse. "God, you're—"

She placed her hand over his mouth. "Try to get away," she said, commandingly this time. "*Try to get away.*"

His torso writhed, the duvet bunching up around him in dark folds.

She raked her fingernails down his chest, and he cried out, moaning "Fuck me, god, fuck me..."

"Try to get away."

She stroked his cock, her fingers barely grazing its swollen head. With a moan he continued struggling helplessly to thrust his groin toward her. At the same moment Janie gasped, a rush arrowing down from her brow to her breasts, her cunt. She rocked forward, crying out with her head brushing against the boy's side as she sprawled back across the bed. For a minute she lay there, the room around her seeming to pulse and swirl into myriad crystalline shapes, bearing within it the same line of candles, the long curve of the boy's thigh swelling up into the hollow of his hip. She drew breath shakily, the flush of heat fading from her brow; then pushed herself up until she was sitting beside him. His eyes were shut. A thread of saliva traced a furrow between mouth and chin. Without thinking she drew her face down to his, and kissed his cheek.

Immediately he began to grow smaller. Janie reared back, smacking into one of the bedposts, and stared at the figure in front of her, shaking her head.

"No," she whispered. "No, no."

He was shrinking: so fast it was like watching water dissolve into dry sand. Man-child-size, large dog, small. His eyes flew open and for a fraction of a second stared horribly

into her own. His hands and feet slipped like *mercury* from his bonds, wriggling until they hit his torso and were absorbed into it. Janie's fingers kneaded the duvet; six inches away the hole was no larger than her hand, then smaller, smaller still. She blinked, for a heart-shredding instant thought he had disappeared completely.

Then she saw something crawling between folds of velvet. The length of her middle finger, its thorax black, yellow-striped, its lower wings elongated into frilled arabesques like those of a festoon, deep yellow, charcoal black, with indigo eyespots, its upper wings a chiaroscuro of black and white stripes.

Bhutanitis lidderdalii. A native of the eastern Himalayas, rarely glimpsed: it lived at the crowns of trees in mountain valleys, its caterpillars feeding on lianas. Janie held her breath watching as its wings beat feebly. Without warning it lifted into the air. Janie cried out, falling onto her knees as she sprawled across the bed, cupping it quickly but carefully between her hands.

"Beautiful, beautiful," she crooned. She stepped from the bed, not daring to pause to examine it, and hurried into the kitchen. In the cupboard she found an empty jar, set it down and gingerly angled the lid from it, holding one hand with the butterfly against her breast. She swore, feeling its wings fluttering against her fingers, then quickly brought her other hand to the jar's mouth, dropped the butterfly inside, and screwed the lid back in place. The butterfly fluttered helplessly inside; she could see where the scales had already been scraped from its wing. Still swearing she ran back into the bedroom, putting the lights on and dragging her collection box from under the bed. She grabbed a vial of ethyl alcohol, went back into the kitchen and tore a bit of paper towel from the rack. She opened the vial, poured a few drops of ethyl alcohol onto the paper, opened the jar and gently tilted it onto its side. The butterfly slipped the paper inside, very slowly tipping the jar upright once more, until the paper had settled on the bottom, the butterfly on top of it. Its wings beat frantically for a few moments then stopped. Its proboscis uncoiled, finer than a hair. Slowly Janie drew her own hand to her brow and ran it along the length of the antennae there. She sat there staring at it until the rain leaked through the wooden shutters in the kitchen window. The butterfly did not move again.

The next day passed in a metallic gray haze, the only color the saturated blues and yellows of the *lidderdalii's* wings, burned upon Janie's eyes as though she had looked into the sun. When she finally roused herself, she felt a spasm of panic at the sight of the boy's clothes on the bedroom floor.

"Shit." She ran her hand across her head, was momentarily startled to recall she had no hair. "Now what?"

She stood there for a few minutes, thinking; then she gathered the clothes—striped V-neck sweater, jeans, socks, Jockey shorts, Timberland knockoff shoes—and dumped them into a plastic Sainsbury's bag. There was a wallet in the jeans pocket. She opened it, gazing impassively at a driver's license—KENNETH REED, WOLVERHAMPTON—and a few five-pound notes. She pocketed the money, took the license into the bathroom, and burned it, letting the ashes drop into the toilet. Then she went outside.

It was early Sunday morning, no one about except for a young mother pushing a baby in a stroller. In the neighboring doorway the same drunk old man sprawled surrounded by empty bottles and rubbish. He stared blearily up at Janie as she approached.

"Here," she said. She bent and dropped the five-pound notes into his scabby hand.

"God bless you, darlin'." He coughed, his eyes focusing on neither Janie nor the notes. "bless you."

She turned and walked briskly back toward the canal path. There were few bins in Camden Town, and so each day trash accumulated in rank heaps along the path, between streetlights, in vacant alleys. Street cleaners and sweeping machines then daily cleared away again. Like elves, Janie thought. As she walked along the canal path she dropped shoes in one pile of rubbish, tossed the sweater alongside a single high-heeled shoe in the market, stuffed the underwear and socks into a collapsing cardboard box filled with romaine lettuce, and left the jeans beside a stack of papers outside an unopened newsagent's shop. Her wallet she tied into the Sainsbury's bag and dropped into an overflowing trash bag outside Boots. Then she retraced her steps, stopping in front of a shop window filled with polyester lingerie in large sizes and boldly artificial-looking wigs: pink Afros, platinum blonde falls, black-and-white Cruella De Vil tresses.

The door was propped open; Schubert lieder played softly on 3 2. Janie stuck her head in and looked around, saw a beefy man behind the register, cashing out. He had orange lipstick smeared around his mouth and delicate silver fish hanging from his ears.

"We're not open yet. Eleven on Sunday," he said without looking up.

"I'm just looking." Janie sidled over to a glass shelf where four wigs sat on Styrofoam heads. One had very glossy black hair in a chin-length flapper bob. Janie tried it on, eyes at herself in a grimy mirror. "How much is this one?"

"Fifteen. But we're not—"

"Here. Thanks!" Janie stuck a twenty-pound note on the counter and ran from the shop. When she reached the corner she slowed, pirouetted to catch her reflection in a window. She stared at herself, grinning, then walked the rest of the way home, exhilarated and faintly dizzy.

Monday morning she went to the zoo to begin her volunteer work. She had mounted *Bhutanitis lidderdalii*, on a piece of Styrofoam with a piece of paper on it, to keep the butterfly's legs from becoming embedded in the Styrofoam. She'd softened it first, putting it in a jar with damp paper, removed it and placed it on the mounting platform, neatly spearing the thorax—a little to the right—with a #2 pin. She propped it carefully on the wainscoting beside the hawkmoth, and left.

She arrived and found her ID badge waiting for her at the staff entrance. It was a clear morning, warmer than it had been for a week; the long hairs on her brow vibrated as though they were wires that had been plucked. Beneath the wig her shaved head felt hot and moist. Her first new hairs starting to prickle across her scalp. Her nose itched where her glasses pressed against it. Janie walked, smiling, past the gibbons howling in their habitat and the pygmy hippos floating calmly in their pool, their eyes shut, green bubbles breaking around them. A little fish. In front of the insect zoo a uniformed woman was unloading sacks of meal from a golf cart.

"Morning," Janie called cheerfully, and went inside. She found David Bierce standing in front of a temperature gauge beside a glass cage holding the hissing cockroaches.

"Something happened last night, the damn things got too cold." He glanced over, handed

a clipboard, and began to remove the top of the gauge. "I called Operations but they're at fucking morning meeting. Fucking computers—"

He stuck his hand inside the control box and flicked angrily at the gauge. "You know anything about computers?"

"Not this kind." Janie brought her face up to the cage's glass front. Inside were half a dozen glossy roaches, five inches long and the color of pale maple syrup. They lay, unmoving, next to a glass petri dish filled with what looked like damp brown sugar. "Are they dead?"

"Those things? They're fucking immortal. You could stamp on one, and it wouldn't die. Believe me, I've done it." He continued to fiddle with the gauge, finally sighed, and replaced the lid. "Well, let's let the boys over in Ops handle it. Come on, I'll get you started."

He gave her a brief tour of the lab, opening drawers full of dissecting instruments, mouse traps, platforms, pins; showing her where the food for the various insects was kept in a series of small refrigerators. Sugar syrup, cornstarch, plastic containers full of smaller insects, grasshoppers and mealworms, tiny gray beetles. "Mostly we just keep on top of replacing the ones that die," David explained, "that and making sure the plants don't develop the wrong kind of fungus. Nature takes her course, and we just goose her along when she needs it. School groups are always here, constantly, but the docents handle that. You're more than welcome to talk to them, if that's the sort of thing you want to do."

He turned from where he'd been washing empty jars at a small sink, dried his hands, and walked over to sit on top of a desk. "It's not terribly glamorous work here." He reached for a Styrofoam cup of coffee and sipped from it, gazing at her coolly. "We're not even working on our Ph.D.'s anymore."

Janie shrugged. "That's all right."

"It's not even all that interesting. I mean, it can be very repetitive. Tedious."

"I don't mind." A sudden pang of anxiety made Janie's voice break. She could feel her face growing hot, and quickly looked away. "Really," she said sullenly.

"Suit yourself. Coffee's over there; you'll probably have to clean yourself a cup, though." He cocked his head, staring at her curiously, and then said, "Did you do something different with your hair?"

She nodded once, brushing the edge of her bangs with a finger. "Yeah."

"Nice. Very Louise Brooks." He hopped from the desk and crossed to a computer set up in the corner. "You can use my computer if you need to, I'll give you the password later."

Janie nodded, her flush fading into relief. "How many people work here?"

"Actually, we're short-staffed here right now—no money for hiring and our grant's run out. It's pretty much just me and whoever Carolyn sends over from the docents. Sweet old ladies, mostly; they don't much like bugs. So it's providential you turned *up*, Jane."

He said her name mockingly, gave her a crooked grin. "You said you have experience with mounting? Well, I try to save as many of the dead specimens as I can, and when there's a slow day, which there never are, I mount them and use them for the workshops I do with schools that come in. What would be nice would be if we had enough specimens that I could give some to the teachers, to take back to their classrooms. We have a nice Web site and might be able to work up some interactive programs. No schools are scheduled to come in on Monday's usually slow here. So if you could work on some of *those*—" He gestured to where several dozen cardboard boxes and glass jars were strewn across a countertop. "—that w

be really brilliant," he ended, and turned to his computer screen.

She spent the morning mounting insects. Few were interesting or unusual: a number of brown hairstreaks, some Camberwell beauties, three hissing cockroaches, several brimstone. But there was a single *Acherontia atropos*, the death's-head hawkmoth, the pattern of gray brown and pale yellow scales on the back of its thorax forming the image of a human skull. Its proboscis was unfurled, the twin points sharp enough to pierce a finger: Janie touched it gingerly, wincing delightedly as a pinprick of blood appeared on her fingertip.

"You bring lunch?"

She looked away from the bright magnifying light she'd been using and blinked in surprise. "Lunch?"

David Bierce laughed. "Enjoying yourself? Well, that's good, makes the day go faster. Lunch!" He rubbed his hands together, the harsh light making him look gnomelike, his sharp features malevolent and leering. "They have some decent fish and chips at the stall over by the cats. Come on, I'll treat you. Your first day."

They sat at a picnic table beside the food booth and ate. David pulled a bottle of ale from his knapsack and shared it with Janie. Overhead scattered clouds like smoke moved southwestward. An Indian woman with three small boys sat at another table, the boys tossing bread at seagulls that swept down, shrieking, and made the smallest boy wail.

"Rain later," David said, staring at the sky. "Too bad." He sprinkled vinegar on his haddock and looked at Janie. "So did you go out over the weekend?"

She stared at the table and smiled. "Yeah, I did. It was fun." "Where'd you go? The Elephant Ballroom?"

"God, no. This other place." She glanced at his hand resting on the table beside her. He had long fingers, the knuckles slightly enlarged; but the back of his hand was smooth, the same brown as the *Acherontia's* wingtips. Her brows prickled, warmth trickling from them. She drank water. When she lifted her head she could smell him, some kind of musky soap, the bittersweet ale on his breath.

"Yeah? Where? I haven't been out in months, I'd be lost in Camden Town these days."

"I dunno. The Hive?"

She couldn't imagine he would have heard of it—far too old. But he swiveled on the bench, his eyebrows arching with feigned shock. "You went to *Hive*? And they let you in?"

"Yes," Janie stammered. "I mean, I didn't know—it was just a dance club. I just—dance."

"Did you." David Bierce's gaze sharpened, his hazel eyes catching the sun and sending an icy emerald glitter. "Did you."

She picked up the bottle of ale and began to peel the label from it. "Yes."

"Have a boyfriend, then?"

She shook her head, rolled a fragment of label into a tiny pill. "No." "Stop that." His hand closed over hers. He drew it away from the bottle, letting it rest against the table edge. She swallowed: he kept his hand on top of hers, pressing it against the metal edge until she felt her scored palm began to ache. Her eyes closed: she could feel herself floating, and see a distance of feet below her own form, slender, the wig beetle-black upon her skull, her wrist like a stalk. Abruptly his hand slid away and beneath the table, brushing her leg as he stooped to retrieve his knapsack.

"Time to get back to work," he said lightly, sliding from the bench and slinging his bag

his shoulder. The breeze lifted his long graying hair as he turned away. "I'll see you there."

Overhead the gulls screamed and flapped, dropping bits of fried fish on the sidewalk. She stared at the table in front of her, the cardboard trays that held the remnants of lunch, and watched as a yellow jacket landed on a fleck of grease, its golden thorax swollen with moisture as it began to feed.

She did not return to Hive that night. Instead she wore a patchwork dress over her jeans and Doc Martens, stuffed the wig inside a drawer, and headed to a small bar on Inverness Street. The fair day had turned to rain, black puddles like molten metal capturing the amber glow of traffic signals and streetlights.

There were only a handful of tables at Bar Ganza. Most of the customers stood on the sidewalk outside, drinking and shouting to be heard above the sound of wailing Spanish songs. Janie fought her way inside, got a glass of red wine, and miraculously found an empty stool alongside the wall. She climbed onto it, wrapped her long legs around the pedestal, and sipped her wine.

"Hey. Nice hair." A man in his early thirties, his own head shaved, sidled up to Janie's stool. He held a cigarette, smoking it with quick, nervous gestures as he stared at her. He tilted his cigarette toward the ceiling, indicating a booming speaker. "You like the music?"

"Not particularly."

"Hey, you're American? Me, too. Chicago. Good bud of mine, works for Citibank, he told me about this place. Food's not bad. Tapas. Baby octopus. You like octopus?"

Janie's eyes narrowed. The man wore expensive-looking corduroy trousers, a rumpled jacket of nubby charcoal-colored linen. "No," she said, but didn't turn away.

"Me neither. Like eating great big slimy bugs. Geoff Lanning—"

He stuck his hand out. She touched it, lightly, and smiled. "Nice to meet you, Geoff."

For the next half hour or so she pretended to listen to him, nodding and smiling brilliantly whenever he looked up at her. The bar grew louder and more crowded, and people began eyeing Janie's stool covetously.

"I think I'd better hand over this seat," she announced, hopping down and elbowing her way to the door. "Before they eat me."

Geoff Lanning hurried after her. "Hey, you want to get dinner? The Camden Brasserie's up here—"

"No thanks." She hesitated on the curb, gazing demurely at her Doc Martens. "But would you like to come in for a drink?"

He was very impressed by her apartment. "Man, this place'd probably go for a half million easy! That's three quarters of a million American."

He opened and closed cupboards, ran a hand lovingly across the slate sink. "Nice hardwood floors, high-speed access—you never told me what you do."

Janie laughed. "As little as possible. Here—"

She handed him a brandy snifter, let her finger trace the back of his wrist. "You look like a kind of an adventurous sort of guy."

"Hey, big adventure, that's me." He lifted his glass to her. "What exactly did you have in mind? Big-game hunting?" "Mmm. Maybe."

It was more of a struggle this time, not for Geoff Lanning but for Janie. He lay complacently in his bonds, his stocky torso wriggling obediently when Janie commanded. Her head ached from the cheap wine at Bar Ganza; the long hairs above her eyes lay sleek against her skull, and did not move at all until she closed her eyes and, unbidden, the image of D. H. Lawrence's hand covering hers appeared. "Try to get away," she whispered.

"Whoa, Nellie," Geoff Lanning gasped.

"Try to get away," she repeated, her voice hoarser.

"Oh." The man whimpered softly. "Jesus Christ, what—oh, my God, *what*—"

Quickly she bent and kissed his fingertips, saw where the leather cuff had bitten into his pudgy wrist. This time she was prepared when with a keening sound he began to twist upon the bed, his arms and legs shriveling and then coiling in upon themselves, his shaven head withdrawing into his tiny torso like a snail within its shell.

But she was not prepared for the creature that remained, its feathery antennae a trembling echo of her own, its extraordinarily elongated hind spurs nearly four inches long. "What?" she gasped.

She didn't dare touch it until it took to the air: the slender spurs fragile as icicles, scattering their saffron tips curling like Christmas ribbon, its large delicate wings saffron with slate-blue and scarlet eyespots, and spanning nearly six inches. A Madagascan moon moth, one of the loveliest and rarest silk moths, and almost impossible to find as an intact specimen.

"What do I do with you, what do I do?" she crooned as it spread its wings and lifted from the bed. It flew in short sweeping arcs; she scrambled to blow out the candles before it could get near them. She pulled on a bathrobe and left the lights off, closed the bedroom door, hurried into the kitchen, looking for a flashlight. She found nothing, but recalled Andrew telling her there was a large torch in the basement.

She hadn't been down there since her initial tour of the flat. It was brightly lit, with long neat cabinets against both walls, a floor-to-ceiling wine rack filled with bottles of champagne and vintage burgundy, compact washer and dryer, small refrigerator, buckets and brooms waiting for the cleaning lady's weekly visit. She found the flashlight sitting on top of the refrigerator, a container of extra batteries beside it. She switched it on and off a few times, then glanced down at the refrigerator and absently opened it.

Seeing all that wine had made her think the little refrigerator might be filled with champagne. Instead it held only a long plastic box, with a red lid and a red biohazard sticker on the top. Janie put the flashlight down and stooped, carefully removing the box and setting it on the floor. A label with Andrew's neat architectural handwriting was on the top.

DR. ANDREW FILDERMAN

ST. MARTIN'S HOSPICE

"Huh," she said, and opened it.

Inside there was a small red biohazard waste container and scores of plastic bags filled with disposable hypodermics, ampules, and suppositories. All contained morphine at various dosages. Janie stared, marveling, then opened one of the bags. She shook half a dozen morphine ampules into her palm, carefully reclosed the bag, put it back into the box, and returned the box to the refrigerator. Then she grabbed the flashlight and ran upstairs.

It took her a while to capture the moon moth. First she had to find a killing jar large enough and then she had to very carefully lure it inside, so that its frail wing spurs wouldn't

damaged. She did this by positioning the jar on its side and placing a gooseneck lamp directly behind it, so that the bare bulb shone through the glass. After about fifteen minutes, the insect landed on top of the jar, its tiny legs slipping as it struggled on the smooth curved surface. Another few minutes and it had crawled inside, nestled on the wad of tissues Janie had placed there, moist with ethyl alcohol. She screwed the lid on tightly, left the jar on its side, and waited for it to die.

Over the next week she acquired three more specimens. *Papilio demetrius*, a Japanese swallowtail with elegant orange eyespots on a velvety black ground; a scarce copper, scarce at all, really, but with lovely pumpkin-colored wings; and *Graphium agamemnon*, a Malaysian species with vivid green spots and chrome-yellow strips on its somber brown wings. She'd ventured away from Camden Town, capturing the swallowtail in a private room in an SM club in Islington and the *Graphium agamemnon* in a parked car behind a noisy pub in Crouch End. The scarce copper came from a vacant lot near the Tottenham Court Road tube station very late one night, where the wreckage of a chain-link fence stood in for garden bedposts. She found the morphine to be useful, although she had to wait until immediately after the man ejaculated before pressing the ampule against his throat, aiming for the carotid artery. This way the butterflies emerged already sedated, and in minutes died with no damage to their wings. Leftover clothing was easily disposed of, but she had to be more careful with wallets, stuffing them deep within rubbish bins, when she could, or burying them in her trash bags and then watching as the waste trucks came by on their rounds.

In South Kensington she discovered an entomological supply store. There she bought mounting supplies and inquired casually as to whether the owner might be interested in purchasing some specimens.

He shrugged. "Depends. What you got?"

"Well, right now I have only one *Argema mittrei*." Janie adjusted her glasses and glanced around the shop. A lot of morphos, an Atlas moth: nothing too unusual. "But I might be getting another, in which case . . ."

"Moon moth, eh? How'd you come by that, I wonder?" The man raised his eyebrows. Janie flushed. "Don't worry, I'm not going to turn you in. Christ, I'd go out of business. Obviously I can't display those in the shop, but if you want to part with one, let me know. I'm always scouting for my customers."

She began volunteering three days a week at the insect zoo. One Wednesday, the night she'd gotten a gorgeous *Urania kilns*, its wings sadly damaged by rain, she arrived to find David Bierce reading that morning's *Camden New Journal*. He peered above the newspaper and frowned.

"You still going out alone at night?"

She froze, her mouth dry, turned, and hurried over to the coffee-maker. "Why?" she asked, fighting to keep her tone even.

"Because there's an article about some of the clubs around here. Apparently a few people have gone missing."

"Really?" Janie got her coffee, wiping up a spill with the side of her hand. "What happened?"

"Nobody knows. Two blokes reported gone, family frantic, that sort of thing. Probably

runaways. Camden Town eats them alive, kids." He handed the paper to Janie. "Although one of them was last seen near Highbury Fields, some sex club there."

She scanned the article. There was no mention of any suspects. And no bodies had been found, although foul play was suspected. ("*Ken would never have gone away without notifying us or his employer. . . .*")

Anyone with any information was urged to contact the police.

"I don't go to sex clubs," Janie said flatly. "Plus those are both guys."

"Mmm." David leaned back in his chair, regarding her coolly. "You're the one who's been hitting Hive your first weekend in London."

"It's a *dance* club!" Janie retorted. She laughed, rolled the newspaper into a tube, and bit her lip as she patted him gently on the shoulder. "Don't worry. I'll be careful."

David continued to stare at her, hazel eyes glittering. "Who says it's you I'm worried about?"

She smiled, her mouth tight as she turned and began cleaning bottles in the sink.

It was a raw day, more late November than mid-May. Only two school groups were scheduled; otherwise the usual stream of visitors was reduced to a handful of elderly women who shook their heads over the cockroaches and gave barely a glance to the butterflies before shuffling on to another building. David Bierce paced restlessly through the lab on his way to clean the cages and make more complaints to the Operations Division. Janie cleaned and mounted two stag beetles, their spiny legs pricking her fingertips as she tried to force them through their glossy chestnut-colored shells. Afterwards she busied herself with straightening up the clutter of cabinets and drawers stuffed with requisition forms and microscopes, components, and dissection kits.

It was well past two when David reappeared, his anorak slick with rain, his hair tufted beneath the hood. "Come on," he announced, standing impatiently by the open door. "Let's go for lunch."

Janie looked up from the computer where she'd been updating a specimen list. "I'm not very hungry," she said, giving him an apologetic smile. "You go ahead."

"Oh, for Christ's sake." David let the door slam shut as he crossed to her, his sneaker leaving wet smears on the tiled floor. "That can wait till tomorrow. Come on, there's a fucking thing here that needs doing."

"But—" She gazed up at him. The hood slid from his head; his gray-streaked hair hung loose to his shoulders, and the sheen of rain on his sharp cheekbones made him look carved from oiled wood. "What if somebody comes?"

"A very nice docent named Mrs. Eleanor Feltwell is out there, *even as we speak*, in the unlikely event that we have a single visitor."

He stooped so that his head was beside hers, scowling as he stared at the computer screen. A lock of his hair fell to brush against her neck.

Beneath the wig her scalp burned, as though stung by tiny ants; she breathed in the vapid, acrid smell of his sweat and something else, a sharper scent, like crushed oak-leaf litter or fresh-sawn wood. Above her brows the antennae suddenly quivered. Sweetness coated her tongue like burnt syrup. With a rush of panic she turned her head so he wouldn't see her face.

"I—I should finish this—"

"Oh, *just fuck* it, Jane! It's not like we're *paying* you. Come on, now, there's a good girl."

He took her hand and pulled her to her feet, Janie still looking away. The bangs of his

cheap wig scraped her forehead, and she batted at them feebly. "Get your things. Why don't you ever take days off in the States?"

"All right, all right." She turned and gathered her black vinyl raincoat and knapsack, peered on the coat, and waited for him by the door. "Jeez, you must be hungry," she said crossly.

"No. Just fucking bored out of my skull. Have you been to Ruby in the Dust? No? I'll go with you then, let's go—"

The restaurant was down the High Street, a small, cheerfully claptrap place, dim in the afternoon, its small wooden tables scattered with abandoned newspapers and overflowing ashtrays. David Bierce ordered a steak and a pint. Janie had a small salad, nasturtium blossoms strewn across pale green lettuce, and a glass of red wine. She lacked an appetite lately, living on vitamin-enhanced, fruity bottled drinks from the health food store and baked goods from a Greek bakery near the tube station.

"So." David Bierce stabbed a piece of steak, peering at her sideways. "Don't tell me you really haven't been here before."

"I haven't!" Despite her unease at being with him, she laughed, and caught her reflection in the wall-length mirror. A thin plain young woman in shapeless Peruvian sweater, jeans, bad haircut, and ugly glasses. Gazing at herself she felt suddenly stronger, invisible. She tilted her head and smiled at Bierce. "The food's good."

"So you don't have someone taking you out to dinner every night? Cooking for you? I thought you American girls all had adoring men at your feet. Adoring slaves," he added dryly. "I mean slave girls, I suppose. If that's your thing."

"No." She stared at her salad, shook her head demurely, and took a sip of wine. It made her feel even more invulnerable. "No, I—"

"Boyfriend back home, right?" He finished his pint, flagged the waiter to order another, and turned back to Janie. "Well, that's nice. That's very nice—for him," he added, and gave a harsh laugh.

The waiter brought another pint, and more wine for Janie. "Oh really, I better—"

"Just drink it, Jane." Under the table, she felt a sharp pressure on her foot. She was wearing her Doc Martens today but a pair of red plastic jellies. David Bierce had planted his heel firmly atop her toes; she sucked in her breath in shock and pain, the bones of her foot crackling as she tried to pull it from beneath him. Her antennae rippled, then stiffened. A heat burst like a seed inside her.

"Go ahead," he said softly, pushing the wineglass toward her. "Just a sip, that's right—"

She grabbed the glass, spilling wine on her sweater as she gulped at it. The vicious pressure on her foot subsided, but as the wine ran down her throat she could feel the heat thrusting into the air, currents rushing beneath her as the girl at the table below set down her wineglass with trembling fingers.

"There." David Bierce smiled, leaning forward to gently cup her hand between his. "This is better than working. Right, Jane?"

He walked her home along the canal path. Janie tried to dissuade him, but he'd had a pint by then; it didn't seem to make him drunk but coldly obdurate, and she finally gave in. The rain had turned to a fine drizzle, the canal's usually murky water silvered and softly gleaming in the twilight. They passed few other people, and Janie found herself wishing someone

would appear, so that she'd have an excuse to move closer to David Bierce. He kept close to the canal itself, several feet from Janie; when the breeze lifted she could catch his oaky scent again, rising above the dank reek of stagnant water and decaying hawthorn blossoms.

They crossed over the bridge to approach her flat by the street. At the front sidewalk Janie stopped, smiled shyly, and said, "Thanks. That was nice."

David nodded. "Glad I finally got you out of your cage." He lifted his head to appraise the row house. "Christ, this where you're staying? You split the rent with someone?"

"No." She hesitated: she couldn't remember what she had told him about her living arrangements. But before she could blurt something out he stepped past her to the front door, peeking into the window and bobbing impatiently up and down.

"Mind if I have a look? Professional entomologists don't often get the chance to see how quality live."

Janie hesitated, her stomach clenching; decided it would be safer to have him in rather than continue to put him off.

"All right," she said reluctantly, and opened the door.

"Mmmm. Nice, nice, very nice." He swept around the living room, spinning on his heels, making a show of admiring the elaborate molding, the tribal rugs, the fireplace mantel with its thick ecclesiastical candles and ormolu mirror. "Goodness, all this for a wee thing like you. You're a clever cat, landing on your feet here, Lady Jane."

She blushed. He bounded past her on his way into the bedroom, touching her shoulder. She had to close her eyes as a fiery wave surged through her and her antennae trembled.

"Wow," he exclaimed.

Slowly she followed him into the bedroom. He stood in front of the wall where the specimens were balanced in a neat line across the wainscoting. His eyes were wide, his mouth open in genuine astonishment.

"Are these *yours*?" he marveled, his gaze fixed on the butterflies. "You didn't actually collect them—?"

She shrugged.

"These are incredible!" He picked up the *Graphium agamemnon* and tilted it to catch the pewter-colored light falling through the French doors. "Did you mount them, too?"

She nodded, crossing to stand beside him. "Yeah. You can tell, with that one—" She pointed at the *Urania leilus* in its oak-framed box. "It got rained on."

David Bierce replaced the *Graphium agamemnon* and began to read the labels on the others.

Papilio demetrius

UNITED KINGDOM: LONDON

Highbury Fields, Islington

7.V2001

J. Kendall

Isopa katinka

UNITED KINGDOM: LONDON

Finsbury Park
09.V2001
J. Kendall

Argema mittrei
UNITED KINGDOM: LONDON
Camden Town
13.IV2001
J. Kendall

He shook his head. "You screwed up, though—you wrote *London* for all of them." He turned to her, grinning wryly. "Can't think of the last time I saw a moon moth in Camden Town."

She forced a laugh. "Oh—right."

"And, I mean, you can't have actually *caught* them—"

He held up the *Isopa katinka*, a butter-yellow Emperor moth, its peacock's-eyes russet and jet-black. "I haven't seen any of these around lately. Not even in Finsbury."

Janie made a little grimace of apology. "Yeah. I meant, that's where I found them—where I bought them."

"Mmmm." He set the moth back on its ledge. "You'll have to share your sources with me. I can never find things like these in North London."

He turned and headed out of the bedroom. Janie hurriedly straightened the specimens on the table, her hands shaking now as well, and followed him.

"Well, Lady Jane." For the first time he looked at her without his usual mocking arrogance. His green-flecked eyes bemused, almost regretful. "I think we managed to salvage some of the day."

He turned, gazing one last time at the flat's glazed walls and highly waxed floors, the imported cabinetry and jewel-toned carpets. "I was going to say, when I walked you home last night, you needed someone to take care of you. But it looks like you've managed that on your own."

Janie stared at her feet. He took a step toward her, the fragrance of oak-mast and hickory filling her nostrils, crushed acorns, new fern. She grew dizzy, her hand lifting to find him, but he only reached to graze her cheek with his finger.

"Night then, Janie," he said softly, and walked back out into the misty evening.

When he was gone she raced to the windows and pulled all the velvet curtains, then tore the wig from her head and threw it onto the couch along with her glasses. Her heart was pounding, her face slick with sweat—from fear or rage or disappointment, she didn't know. She yanked off her sweater and jeans, left them on the living room floor and stomped into the bathroom. She stood in the shower for twenty minutes, head upturned as the water sluiced the smells of bracken and leaf-mold from her skin.

Finally she got out. She dried herself, let the towel drop, and went into the kitchen. Abruptly she was famished. She tore open cupboards and drawers until she found a half-full jar of lavender honey from Provence. She opened it, the top spinning off into the sink, and frantically spooned honey into her mouth with her fingers. When she was finished she grabbed a j-

lemon curd and ate most of that, until she felt as though she might be sick. She stuck her head into the sink, letting water run from the faucet into her mouth, and at last walked, surfeited, into the bedroom.

She dressed, feeling warm and drowsy, almost dreamlike; pulling on red-and-yellow-striped stockings, her nylon skirt, a tight red T-shirt. No bra, no panties. She put in her contacts, then examined herself in the mirror. Her hair had begun to grow back, scant velvety stubble, bluish in the dim light. She drew a sweeping black line across her eyelid, on a whim took the liner and extended the curve of each antenna until they touched her temples. She painted her lips black as well and went to find her black vinyl raincoat.

It was early when she went out, far too early for any of the clubs to be open. The rain had stopped, but a thick greasy fog hung over everything, coating windshields and shop windows, making Janie's face feel as though it were encased in a clammy shell. For hours she wandered through Camden Town, huge violet eyes turning to stare back at the men who watched her, dismissing each of them. Once she thought she saw David Bierce, coming out of Ruby in the Dusty Rose when she stopped to watch him cross the street saw it was not David at all but someone much younger, his long dark hair in a thick braid, his feet clad in knee-high boots. He crossed High Street, heading toward the tube station. Janie hesitated, then darted after him.

He went to the Electric Ballroom. Fifteen or so people stood out front, talking quietly. The man she'd followed joined the line, standing by himself. Janie waited across the street, until the door opened and the little crowd began to shuffle inside. After the long-haired young man entered she counted to one hundred, crossed the street, paid her cover, and went inside.

The club had three levels; she finally tracked him down on the uppermost one. Even on this rainy Wednesday night it was crowded, the sound system blaring Idris Mohammed and Jimi Hendrix. Cliff was standing alone near the bar, drinking bottled water.

"Hi!" she shouted, swaying up to him with her best First Day of School Smile. "Want to dance?"

He was older than she'd thought—thirtyish, still not as old as Bierce. He stared at her, puzzled, and then shrugged. "Sure."

They danced, passing the water bottle between them. "What's your name?" he shouted.

"Cleopatra Brimstone."

"You're kidding!" he yelled back. The song ended in a bleat of feedback, and they were panting, back to the bar.

"What, you know another Cleopatra?" Janie asked teasingly.

"No. It's just a crazy name, that's all." He smiled. He was handsomer than David Bierce, his features softer, more rounded, his eyes dark brown, his manner a bit reticent. "I'm Tom Raybourne. Tom."

He bought another bottle of Pellegrino and one for Janie. She drank it quickly, trying to keep up with his measure. When she finished she set the empty bottle on the floor and fanned herself with her hand.

"It's hot in here." Her throat hurt from shouting over the music. "I think I'm going to take a walk. Feel like coming?"

He hesitated, glancing around the club. "I was supposed to meet a friend here. ..." he said, frowning. "But—"

"Oh." Disappointment filled her, spiking into desperation. "Well, that's okay. I guess."

"Oh, what the hell." He smiled: he had nice eyes, a more stolid, reassuring gaze than Bierce. "I can always come back."

Outside she turned right, in the direction of the canal. "I live pretty close by. Feel like coming in for a drink?"

He shrugged again. "I don't drink, actually."

"Something to eat then? It's not far—just along the canal path a few blocks past Canal Lock—"

"Yeah, sure."

They made desultory conversation. "You should be careful," he said as they crossed the bridge. "Did you read about those people who've gone missing in Camden Town?"

Janie nodded but said nothing. She felt anxious and clumsy—as though she'd drunk too much, although she'd had nothing alcoholic since the two glasses of wine with Doc Bierce. Her companion also seemed ill at ease; he kept glancing back, as though looking for someone on the canal path behind them.

"I should have tried to call," he explained ruefully. "But I forgot to recharge my mobile."

"You could call from my place."

"No, that's all right."

She could tell from his tone that he was figuring how he could leave, gracefully, as soon as possible.

Inside the flat he settled on the couch, picked up a copy of *Time Out* and flipped through it, pretending to read. Janie went immediately into the kitchen and poured herself a glass of brandy. She downed it, poured a second one, and joined him on the couch.

"So." She kicked off her Doc Martens, drew her stockinged foot slowly up his leg, from his knee to thigh. "Where you from?"

He was passive, so passive she wondered if he would get aroused at all. But after a while they were lying on the couch, both their shirts on the floor, his pants unzipped and his penis stiff, pressing against her bare belly.

"Let's go in there," Janie whispered hoarsely. She took his hand and led him into the bedroom.

She only bothered lighting a single candle before lying beside him on the bed. His eyes were half-closed, his breathing shallow. When she ran a fingernail around one nipple he made a small surprised sound, then quickly turned and pinned her to the bed.

"Wait! Slow down," Janie said, and wriggled from beneath him. For the last week she'd had the bonds attached to the bedposts, hiding them beneath the covers when not in use. Now she grabbed one of the wrist-cuffs and pulled it free. Before he could see what she was doing she was around his wrist.

"Hey!"

She dived for the foot of the bed, his leg narrowly missing her as it thrashed against the covers. It was more difficult to get this in place, but she made a great show of giggling and stroking his thigh, which seemed to calm him. The other leg was next, and finally she slipped from the bed and darted to the headboard, slipping from his grasp when he tried to grab her shoulder.

"This is not consensual," he said. She couldn't tell if he was serious or not.

"What about this, then?" she murmured, sliding down between his legs and cupping his

penis between her hands. "This seems to be enjoying itself."

He groaned softly, shutting his eyes. "Try to get away," she said. "Try to get away."

He tried to lunge upward, his body arcing so violently that she drew back in alarm. His bonds held; he arched again, and again, but now she remained beside him, her hands on his cock, his breath coming faster and faster and her own breath keeping pace with it, her heart pounding and the tingling above her eyes almost unbearable.

"Try to get away," she gasped. "Try to get away—"

When he came he cried out, his voice harsh, as though in pain, and Janie cried out as well, squeezing her eyes shut as spasms shook her from head to groin. Quickly her head dipped to kiss his chest; then she shuddered and drew back, watching.

His voice rose again, ended suddenly in a shrill wail, as his limbs knotted and shriveled like burning rope. She had a final glimpse of him, a homunculus sprouting too many legs. Then on the bed before her a perfectly formed *Papilio krishna* swallowtail crawled across the rumpled duvet, its wings twitching to display glittering green scales amidst spectral washes of violet and crimson and gold.

"Oh, you're beautiful, beautiful," she whispered.

From across the room echoed a sound: soft, the rustle of her kimono falling from its hooks. The door swung open. She snatched her hand from the butterfly and stared, through the doorway into the living room.

In her haste to get Thomas Raybourne inside she had forgotten to latch the door. She scrambled to her feet, naked, staring wildly at the shadow looming in front of her, its features taking shape as it approached the candle, brown and black, light glinting across its face.

It was David Bierce. The scent of oak and bracken swelled, suffocating, fragrant, cut by the bitter odor of ethyl alcohol. He forced her gently onto the bed, heat piercing her breasts and thighs, her antennae bursting out like quills from her brow and wings exploding everywhere around her as she struggled fruitlessly.

"Now. Try to get away," he said.