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Moonlight and Bloodshed

Pantalaimon, the dæmon of Lyra Belacqua, now called Lyra Silvertongue, lay along the window sill of Lyra's little study-bedroom in St Sophia's College in a state as far from thought as he could get. He was aware of the cold draught from the ill-fitting sash window beside him, and of the warm naphtha light on the desk below the window, and of the scratching of Lyra's pen, and of the darkness outside. It was the cold and the dark he most wanted just then. As he lay there, turning over to feel the cold now on his back, now on his front, the desire to go outside became even stronger than his reluctance to speak to Lyra.

'Open the window,' he said finally. 'I want to go out.'

Lyra's pen stopped moving; she pushed her chair back and stood up. Pantalaimon could see her reflection in the glass, suspended over the Oxford night. He could even make out her expression of mutinous unhappiness.

'I know what you're going to say,' he said. 'Of course I'll be careful. I'm not stupid.'

'In some ways you are,' she said.

She reached over him and slid the window up, propping it open with the nearest book.

'Don't—' he began.

'Don't shut the window, yes, Pan, just sit there freezing till Pan decides to come home. I'm not stupid at all. Go on, bugger off.'

He flowed out and into the ivy covering the wall of the college. Only the faintest rustle came to Lyra's ears, and then only for a moment. Pan didn't like the way they were speaking to each other, or rather not speaking; in fact, these words were the first they'd exchanged all day. But he didn't know what to do about it, and neither did she.

Halfway down the wall he caught a mouse in his needle-sharp teeth and wondered about eating it, but gave it a surprise and let it go. He crouched on the thick ivy branch, relishing all the smells, all the wayward gusts of air, all the wide open night around him.

But he was going to be careful. He had to be careful about two things. One was the patch of cream-white fur that covered his throat, which stood out with unfortunate clarity against the rest of his red-brown pine-marten fur. But it wasn't hard to keep his head down, or to run fast. The other reason for being careful was much more serious. No one who saw him would think for a moment that he was a pine marten: he looked like a pine marten in every respect, but he was a dæmon. It was very hard to say where the difference lay, but any human being in Lyra's world would have known it at once, as surely as they knew the smell of coffee or the colour red.

And a person apart from their dæmon, or a dæmon alone with their person nowhere in sight, was something uncanny, eldritch, impossible. No ordinary human beings could separate in that way, though reputedly witches could. The power that Lyra and Pan had was peculiar to them, and had been dearly bought eight years before in the world of the dead. Since coming home to Oxford after that strange adventure, they had told no one about it, and exercised the most scrupulous care to keep it a secret; but sometimes, and more often recently, they simply had to get away from each other.

So now Pan kept to the shadows, and as he moved through the shrubs and the long grass that bordered the great expanse of the neatly mown University Parks, feeling the night with all his senses, he made no sound and kept his head low. It had rained earlier that evening, and the earth was soft and moist under his feet. When he came to a patch of mud, he crouched down and pressed his throat and chest into it so as to conceal the treacherous patch of cream-white fur.

Leaving the Parks, he darted across Banbury Road at a moment when there were no pedestrians on the pavement, and only one distant vehicle in sight. Then he slipped into the garden of one of the large houses on the other side, and then through hedges, over walls, under fences, across lawns, making for Jericho and the canal only a few streets away.

Once he reached the muddy towpath he felt safer. There were bushes and long grass to hide in, and trees up which he could dart as quickly as a fire along a fuse. This semi-wild part of the city was the place he liked best. He had swum in every one of the many stretches of water that laced Oxford through and through – not only the canal but also the wide body of the

Thames itself and its tributary the Cherwell, as well as the countless little streams diverted from the main flows to power a mill or feed an ornamental lake, some running underground and out of sight until they emerged beneath this college wall or behind that burial ground or brewery.

At the point where one of these streams ran next to the canal with only the towpath between them, Pan crossed over a little iron bridge and followed the stream down to the great open space of the allotment gardens, with the Oxpens cattle market to the north and the Royal Mail depot beside the railway station on the western side.

The moon was full, and a few stars were visible between the racing wisps of cloud. The light made it more dangerous for him, but Pan loved the cold silver clarity as he prowled through the allotments, slipping between the stalks of Brussels sprouts or cauliflowers, the leaves of onions or spinach, making no more noise than a shadow. He came to a tool shed, and leaped up to lie flat on the hard tar-paper roof and gaze across the wide-open meadow towards the Mail depot.

That was the only place in the city that seemed awake. Pan and Lyra had come here more than once before, together, and watched as the trains came in from the north and south to stand steaming at the platform while the workers unloaded sacks of letters and parcels on to large wheeled baskets and rolled them into the great metal-sided shed, where the mail for London and the continent would be sorted in time for the morning zeppelin. The airship was tethered fore and aft nearby, swinging and swaying in the wind as the mooring lines snapped and clanged against the mast. Lights glowed on the platform, on the mooring mast, above the doors of the Royal

Mail building; railway trucks clattered in a siding, a metal door somewhere closed with a bang.

Pan saw a movement among the allotments to his right, and very slowly turned his head to look. A cat was creeping along a line of cabbages or broccoli, intent on a mouse; but before the cat could spring, a silent white shape bigger than Pan himself swooped down from the sky and seized the mouse, to fly up again out of reach of the cat's claws. The owl's wings beat in perfect silence as it made its way back to one of the trees behind Paradise Square. The cat sat down, seeming to think about the matter, and then resumed the hunt among the vegetables.

The moon was bright now, higher in the sky and almost clear of the cloud, and Pan could see every detail of the allotments and the cattle market from his vantage point on the shed. Greenhouses, scarecrows, galvanised-iron cattle pens, water butts, fences rotted and sagging or upright and neatly painted, pea-sticks tied together like naked tepees, they all lay silent in the moonlight like a stage set for a play of ghosts.

Pan whispered, 'Lyra, what's happened to us?'

There was no answer.

The mail train had been unloaded, and now it blew a brief whistle before starting to move. It didn't come out on the rail line that crossed the river southwards just past the allotments, but moved slowly forward and then slowly back into a siding, with a great clanking of wagons. Clouds of steam rose from the engine, to be whipped away in shreds by the cold wind.

On the other side of the river, beyond the trees, another train was coming in. It wasn't a mail train; it didn't stop at the depot, but went three hundred yards further on and into the railway station itself. This was the slow local train from Reading, Pan

guessed. He heard it pull up at the platform with a distant hiss of steam and muted screech of brakes.

Something else was moving.

From Pan's left, where an iron bridge crossed the river, a man was walking – or rather hurrying, with an air of furtive haste – along the riverbank where the reeds grew thickly.

At once Pan flowed down off the shed roof and ran silently towards him through onion beds and lines of cabbages. Dodging through fences and under a rusting steel water-tank, he came to the edge of the allotment grounds and stood looking through a broken fence panel at the grassy meadow beyond.

The man was moving up in the direction of the Royal Mail depot, going more and more carefully, until he stopped by a willow on the bank a hundred yards or so from the depot gate, almost opposite where Pan was crouching under the allotments fence. Even Pan's keen eyes could hardly make him out in the shadow; if he looked away for a moment, he'd lose the man altogether.

Then nothing. The man might have vanished entirely. A minute went past, then another. In the city behind Pan, distant bells began to strike, twice each: half past midnight.

Pan looked along the trees beside the river. A little way to the left of the willow there stood an old oak, bare and stark in its winter leaflessness. On the right—

On the right, a single figure was climbing over the gate of the Royal Mail depot. The newcomer jumped down, and then hurried along the riverbank towards the willow where the first man was waiting.

A cloud covered the moon for a few moments, and in the shadows Pan slipped under the fence and then bounded across

the wet grass as fast as he could go, keeping low, mindful of that owl, mindful of the man in hiding, making for the oak. As soon as he reached it he sprang up, extending his claws to catch at the bark, and propelled himself up on to a high branch from which he could see the willow clearly just as the moon came out again.

The man from the Mail depot was hurrying towards it. When he was nearly there, moving more slowly, peering into the shadows, the first man stepped out quietly and said a soft word. The second man replied in the same tone, and then they both retreated into the darkness. They were just too far away for Pan to hear what they'd said, but there was a tone of complicity in it. They'd planned to meet here.

Their dæmons were both dogs: a sort of mastiff and a short-legged dog. The dogs wouldn't be able to climb, but they could sniff him out, and Pan pressed himself even closer to the broad bough he was lying on. He could hear a quiet whisper from the men, but again could make out none of the words.

Between the high chain-link fence of the Mail depot and the river, a path led from the open meadow next to the allotments towards the railway station. It was the natural way to go to the station from the parish of St Ebbe's and the narrow streets of houses that crowded along the river near the gasworks. Looking from the branch of the oak tree, Pan could see further along the path than the men down below, and saw someone coming from the direction of the station before they did: a man on his own, the collar of his coat turned up against the cold.

Then came a 'Ssh' from the shadows under the willow. The men had seen the new arrival too.

*

Earlier that day, in an elegant seventeenth-century house near the Cathedral of St Peter in Geneva, two men were talking. They were in a book-lined room on the second floor, whose windows looked out on a quiet street in the sombre light of a winter afternoon. There was a long mahogany table set with blotters, pads of paper, pens and pencils, glasses and carafes of water, but the men were sitting in armchairs on either side of a log fire.

The host was Marcel Delamare, the Secretary General of an organisation known informally by the name of the building they occupied, the one in which this meeting was taking place. It was called *La Maison Juste*. Delamare was in his early forties, bespectacled, well-groomed, his perfectly tailored suit matching the colour of his dark grey hair. His dæmon was a snowy owl, who perched on the back of his armchair, her yellow eyes fixed on the dæmon in the other man's hands, a scarlet snake winding herself through and through his fingers. The visitor was called Pierre Binaud. He was in his sixties, austere in a clerical collar, and he was the Chief Justice of the Consistorial Court, the main agency of the Magisterium for enforcing discipline and security.

'Well?' said Binaud.

'Another member of the scientific staff at the Lop Nor station has disappeared,' said Delamare.

'Why? What does your agent say about it?'

'The official line is that the missing man and his companion were lost among the watercourses, which change their position rapidly and without warning. It is a very difficult place, and anyone leaving the station must take a guide. But our agent tells me that there is a rumour that they entered the desert, which

begins beyond the lake. There are local legends about gold—'

'Local legends be damned. These people were experimental theologians, botanists, men of science. They were after the roses, not gold. But what are you saying, that one of them disappeared? What about the other?'

'He did return to the station, but set off at once for Europe. His name is Hassall. I told you about him last week, but perhaps you were too busy to hear me. My agent believes that he's carrying samples of the rose materials, and a number of papers.'

'Have we captured him yet?'

Delamare composed himself almost visibly. 'If you remember, Pierre,' he said after a moment, 'I would have had him detained in Venice. That idea was overruled by your people. Let him get to Brytain, and then follow him to discover his destination: that was the order. Well, he has now arrived there, and tonight he will be intercepted.'

'Let me know as soon as you have those materials. Now, this other matter: the young woman. What do you know about her?'

'The alethiometer—'

'No, no, no. Old-fashioned, vague, too full of speculation. Give me facts, Marcel.'

'We have a new reader, who—'

'Oh yes, I've heard of him. New method. Any better than the old one?'

'Times change, and understandings must change too.'

'What's that mean?'

'It means that we've discovered some things about the girl that were not clear before. It seems that she is under certain protections, legal and otherwise. I would like to begin by taking

down the network of defence around her, unobtrusively, quietly, one might say invisibly. And when she is vulnerable, that will be the time to take action. Until then—'

'Cautious,' said Binaud, standing up. 'Too cautious, Marcel. It's a big fault. You need to be decisive. Take action. Find her, acquire her, and bring her here. But have it your own way; I won't overrule you this time.'

Delamare rose to shake his visitor's hand and see him out. When they were alone, his dæmon flew to his shoulder and they stood at the window to watch the Chief Justice bustle away, one attendant carrying his briefcase, another holding an umbrella against the snow that had just begun to fall.

'I do dislike being interrupted,' said Delamare.

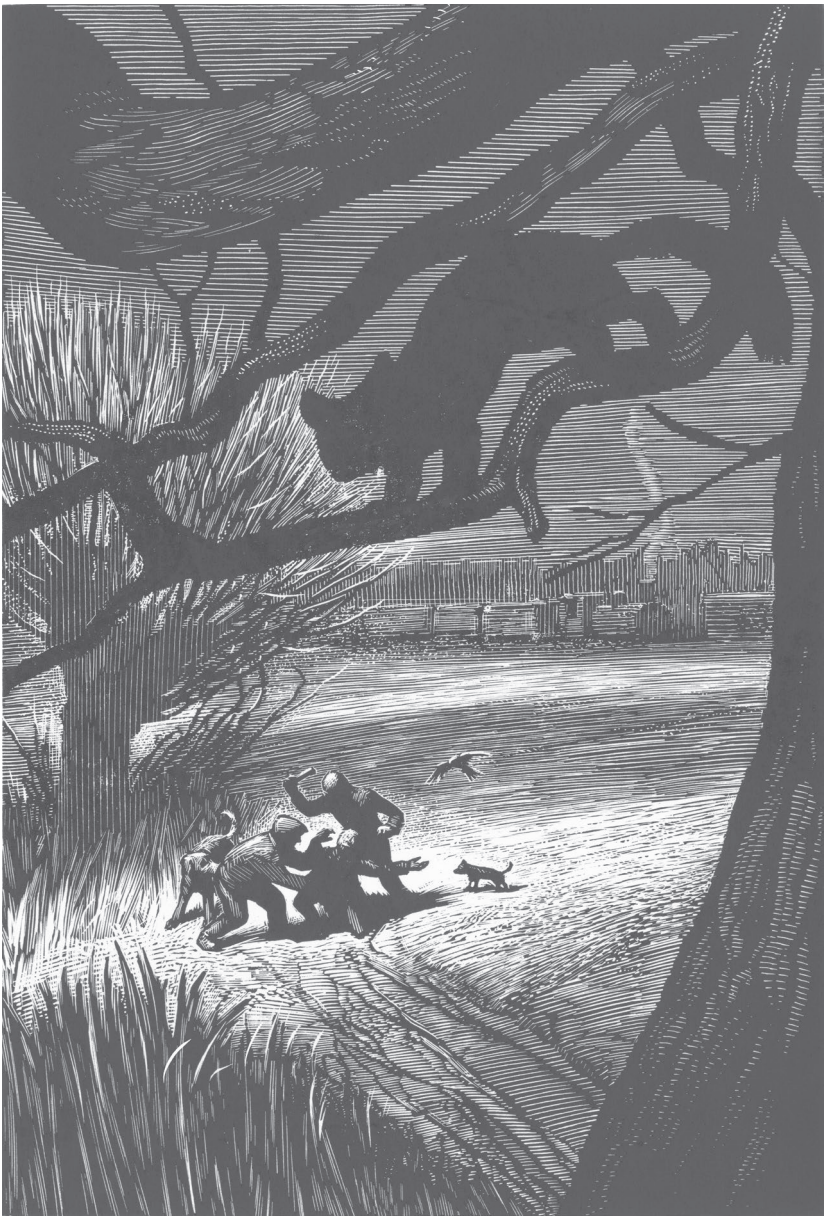
'I don't think he noticed,' said his dæmon.

'Oh, he'll be aware of it one day.'

The man coming from the railway station was moving quickly: in less than a minute he was almost at the tree, and as soon as he got there, the other men struck. One stepped out and swung a heavy stick to strike him at his knees. He dropped at once, grunting with shock, and then the other man was on him, chopping down with a short club, striking his head, his shoulders, his arms.

No one uttered a word. The victim's dæmon, a small hawk, rose into the air, crying and fluttering violently, and kept falling down as her man weakened under the blows.

But then Pan saw a flash of moonlight reflected on a knife blade, and the man from the Mail depot cried out and fell, but the other attacker struck again and again, and the victim fell still. Pan heard every blow.



The man was dead. The second man stood up and looked at his companion.

'What'd he do?' he said quietly.

'Cut my bloody hamstrings. Bastard. Look, I'm bleeding like a pig.'

The man's dæmon, the mastiff-cross, was whining and writhing on the ground beside him.

'Can you get up?' The killer's voice was thick and muffled, as if he was speaking through catarrh, and he had a Liverpool accent.

'What do you think?'

Their voices hardly rose above a whisper.

'Can you move at all?'

The first man tried to push himself up. There was another grunt of pain. The second man offered his hand, and the first managed to stand, but it was obvious that he could only use one leg.

'What we gonna do?' he said.

The moon lit them all brilliantly: the killer, and the man who couldn't walk, and the dead man. Pan's heart was thumping so hard that he thought they must be able to hear it.

'You stupid sod. Couldn't you see he was holding a knife?' said the killer.

'He was too quick—'

'You're supposed to be good at this. Get out the way.'

The first man hobbled back a pace or two. The killer bent down and picked up the dead man's ankles, and hauled the body backwards and into the rushes.

Then the killer reappeared and impatiently beckoned the other man forward.

'Lean on me,' he said. 'I got half a mind to leave you here on your own. Just a bloody liability. Now I gotta come back and deal with him meself, and that bleeding moon's getting brighter all the time. Where's his bag? Wasn't he carrying a bag?'

'He never had a bag. He never had nothing.'

'He must've done. Sod it.'

'Barry'll come back with you and help.'

'Too noisy. Too nervous. Give us your arm, come on, hurry up.'

'Oh Christ – be careful – aargh, that hurts . . .'

'Now shut up and move as fast as you can. I don't care if it hurts. Just keep your bloody mouth shut.'

The first man put his arm round the killer's shoulders, and limped along beside him as they moved slowly beneath the oak tree and back along the riverbank. Pan, looking down, saw a patch of blood on the grass, shining red in the moonlight.

He waited till the men were out of sight, and then prepared to jump down; but before he could move, something stirred in the rushes where the man's body lay, and something pale and bird-sized fluttered up, falling and flying up again, failing, dropping, but with a last burst of life making directly for Pan.

He was too frightened to move. If the man was dead . . . But this dæmon looked dead herself – so what could he do? Pan was ready to fight, to flee, to faint: but then she was right there on the branch beside him, struggling to stay there, almost falling off, and he had to reach out and catch her. She felt icy cold, and alive, but only just. The man wasn't quite dead.

'Help,' she whispered raggedly, 'help us—'

'Yes,' he said, 'yes—'

'Quickly!'

She fell off and managed to flutter down to the rushes. In a moment Pan had flowed down the trunk of the oak and bounded across towards where she'd vanished, and found the man lying there in the rushes, still just breathing, with the dæmon pressing herself against his cheek.

Pan heard her say, 'Dæmon – separate—'

The man turned his head a little and groaned. Pan heard the grating of bone against broken bone.

'Separate?' the man murmured.

'Yes – we learned to do it—'

'My lucky day. Inside pocket. Here.' He raised a hand with enormous effort and touched the right side of his jacket. 'Take it out,' he whispered.

Trying not to hurt him, and fighting the great taboo against touching another person's body, Pan nosed the jacket aside and found a leather wallet in the inside pocket.

'That's it. Take it away. Don't let them get it. It's all up to you and . . . your . . .'

Pan tugged, but the wallet wouldn't come, because the jacket was caught under the man's body, and he couldn't move; but after several seconds of difficulty, Pan got it free and pulled it out on to the ground.

'Take it right away . . . before they come back . . .'

The pale hawk-dæmon was hardly there now, just a wisp of white shadow fluttering and pressing herself to his flesh. Pan hated seeing people die, because of what happened to their dæmons: they vanished like a candle flame going out. He wanted to console this poor creature, who knew she was going to disappear, but all she wanted to do was feel a last touch of

the warmth she'd found in her man's body all their lives together. The man took a shallow, rasping breath, and then the pretty hawk-dæmon drifted out of existence altogether.

And now Pan had to carry this wallet all the way back to St Sophia's College, and Lyra's bed.

He gripped it between his teeth and pushed his way up to the edge of the rushes. It wasn't heavy, but it was awkward, and what was worse, it was saturated with the smell of another person: sweat, cologne, smokeleaf. It was being too close to someone who wasn't Lyra.

He got it as far as the fence around the allotment gardens, and then stopped for a rest. Well, he would have to take his time. There was plenty of night left.

Lyra was deep in sleep when a shock woke her up, like a sudden fall, something physical: but what? She reached for Pan, and remembered that he wasn't there: so had something happened to him? It was far from the first night she'd had to go to bed alone, and she hated it. Oh, the folly of going out by himself in that way, but he wouldn't listen, he wouldn't stop doing it, and one day they'd both pay the price.

She lay awake for a minute, but sleep was gathering around her again, and soon she surrendered and closed her eyes.

The bells of Oxford were striking two o'clock when Pan climbed in. He laid the wallet on the table, working his mouth this way and that to relieve his aching jaw before pulling out the book with which she'd propped open the window for him. He knew it: it was a novel called *The Hyperchorasmians*, and Pan thought Lyra was paying it far too much attention. He let it fall to the

floor and then cleaned himself meticulously before pushing the wallet into the bookcase and out of sight.

Then he leaped up lightly on to her pillow. In the ray of moonlight that came through a gap in the curtains he crouched and gazed at her sleeping face.

Her cheeks were flushed, her dark-gold hair was damp; those lips that had whispered to him so often, and kissed him, and kissed Will too, were compressed; a little frown hovered on her brow, coming and going like clouds in a windy sky – they all spoke of things that were not right, of a person who was becoming more and more unreachable to him, as he was to her.

And he had no idea what to do about it. All he could do was lie down close against her flesh; that at least was still warm and welcoming. At least they were still alive.

2

Their Clothes Smelled of Roses

Lyra woke up to hear the college clock striking eight. In the first few minutes of drowsy surfacing, before thought began to interfere, her sensations were delicious, and one of them was the warmth of her dæmon's fur around her neck. This sensuous mutual cherishing had been part of her life for as long as she could remember.

She lay there trying not to think, but thought was like a tide coming in. Little trickles of awareness – an essay to finish, her clothes that needed washing, the knowledge that unless she got to the hall by nine o'clock there'd be no breakfast – kept flowing in from this direction or that and undermining the sandcastle of her sleepiness. And then the biggest ripple yet: Pan and their estrangement. Something had come between them, and neither of them knew fully what it was, and the only

person each could confide in was the other, and that was the one thing they couldn't do.

She pushed the blankets away and stood up, shivering, because St Sophia's was parsimonious where heating was concerned. A quick wash in the little basin where the hot water knocked and shook the pipes in protest before condescending to appear, and then she pulled on the tartan skirt and the light grey jersey that were more or less the only clean things she had.

And all the time Pan lay pretending to sleep on the pillow. It was never like that when they were young, never.

'Pan,' she said wearily.

He had to come, and she knew he would, and he stood up and stretched and let her lift him to her shoulder. She left the room and started downstairs.

'Lyra, let's pretend we're talking to each other,' he whispered.

'I don't know if pretending's a good way to live.'

'It's better than not. I want to tell you what I saw last night. It's important.'

'Why didn't you tell me when you came in?'

'You were asleep.'

'I wasn't, any more than you were just now.'

'Then why didn't you know I had something important to tell you?'

'I did. I felt something happen. But I knew I'd have to argue to get you to tell me about it, and frankly . . .'

He said nothing. Lyra stepped out at the foot of her staircase and into the dank chill of the morning. One or two girls were walking towards the hall; more were coming away, having had

breakfast, stepping briskly out to the morning's work, to the library or to a lecture or tutorial.

'Oh, I don't know,' she finished. 'I'm tired of this. Tell me after breakfast.'

She climbed the steps into the hall and helped herself to porridge, and took her bowl to a spare place at one of the long tables and sat down. All around her, girls of her own age were finishing their scrambled eggs, or porridge, or toast, some chatting happily, some looking dull or tired or preoccupied, one or two reading letters or just eating stolidly. She knew many of them by name, some just by sight; some were friends cherished for their kindness or their wit; some just acquaintances; a small number not exactly enemies, but young women she knew she would never like, because they were snobbish or arrogant or cold. She felt as much at home in this scholastic community, among these brilliant or hard-working or gossipy contemporaries, as she did anywhere else. She should have been happy.

As she stirred some milk into her porridge, Lyra became aware of the girl opposite. She was called Miriam Jacobs, a pretty dark-haired girl, sufficiently quick and clever to get by academically without doing more work than the minimum; a little vain, but good-natured enough to let herself be teased about it. Her squirrel-dæmon Syriax was clinging to her hair, looking stricken, and Miriam was reading a letter, one hand on her mouth. Her face was pale.

No one else had noticed. As Miriam put the letter down, Lyra leaned across the table and said, 'Miriam? What is it?'

Miriam blinked and sighed as if she were coming awake, and pushed the letter down on to her lap. 'Home,' she said.

'Something silly.' Her dæmon crept on to her lap with the letter while Miriam went through an elaborate demonstration of not-caring that was wasted on her neighbours, who hadn't been watching anyway.

'Nothing I can help with?' asked Lyra.

Pan had joined Syriax under the table. Both girls could sense that their dæmons were talking, and that whatever Syriax told Pan would be in Lyra's knowledge very soon. Miriam looked at Lyra helplessly. Another moment and she might burst into tears.

Lyra stood up and said, 'Come on.'

The other girl was in that state in which any decisiveness, from anyone, is seized like a lifebelt in a rough sea. She went with Lyra out of the hall, clutching her dæmon to her breast, not asking where they were going, just following like a lamb.

'I'm sick to death of porridge and cold toast and dry scrambled eggs,' said Lyra. 'There's only one thing to do in a case like this.'

'What's that?' said Miriam.

'George's.'

'But I've got a lecture—'

'No. The lecturer's got a lecture, but you haven't and I haven't. And I want fried eggs and bacon. Come along, step out. Were you a Girl Guide?'

'No.'

'Neither was I. I don't know why I asked.'

'I've got an essay to do—'

'Do you know anyone who hasn't got an essay to do? There are thousands of young ladies and gentlemen *all* behind with

their essays. It would be bad form to be anything else. And George's is waiting. The Cadena's not open yet or we could go there. Come on, it's chilly. D'you want to get a coat?'

'Yes – just quickly then . . .'

They ran up to get their coats. Lyra's was a shabby green thing that was a little too small. Miriam's coat was of navy cashmere and fitted her perfectly.

'And if anyone says why weren't you at the lecture or the seminar or whatever, you can say that you were upset and nice Lyra took you for a walk,' Lyra said as they went out through the lodge.

'I've never been to George's,' said Miriam.

'Oh, go on. You must have.'

'I know where it is, but . . . I don't know. I just thought it wasn't for us.'

George's was a café in the Covered Market, much used by market traders and workers from round about.

'I've been going there since I was young,' said Lyra. 'I mean, *really* young. I used to hang around outside till they gave me a bun to go away.'

'Did you? Really?'

'A bun or a clout. I even worked there for a bit, washing dishes, making tea and coffee. I was about nine, I think.'

'Did your parents let— Oh God. Sorry. Sorry.'

The only thing Lyra's friends knew about her background was that her parents were people of great family on both sides who had died when she was young. It was understood that this was a source of great sorrow to Lyra and that she never talked about it, so naturally their speculation flourished. Now Miriam was mortified.

'No, I was in the care of Jordan by then,' Lyra said cheerfully. 'If they'd known, I mean if the Jordan people had known, they'd have been surprised, I suppose, but then they'd have forgotten about it and I'd have kept on going there anyway. I sort of did what I wanted.'

'Didn't anyone know what you were doing?'

'The housekeeper, Mrs Lonsdale. She was pretty fierce. I was always getting told off, but she knew it wouldn't do any good. I could be quite well-behaved when I needed to be.'

'How long were you – I mean, how old were you when— Sorry. I don't mean to pry.'

'The first thing I remember is when I was taken to Jordan for the first time. I don't know how old I was – probably just a baby. I was being carried by a big man. It was midnight and stormy with lightning and thunder and pouring rain. He was on a horse and I was wrapped up inside his cloak. Then he was banging on a door with a pistol, and the door opened and it was all warm and light inside, and then he handed me over to someone else and I think he kissed me and got on his horse and rode away. He was probably my father.'

Miriam was very impressed. In truth, Lyra wasn't sure about the horse, but she liked it.

'That's *so* romantic,' Miriam said. 'And that's the first thing you remember?'

'The very first. After that I was just . . . living in Jordan. Have been ever since. What's the first thing you remember?'

'The smell of roses,' said Miriam at once.

'What, a garden somewhere?'

'No. My father's factory. Where they make soap and things. I was sitting on his shoulders and we were in the bottling plant.

Such an intense sweet smell . . . The men's clothes used to smell of it and their wives had to wash them to get it out.'

Lyra was aware that Miriam's family was rich, and that soaps and perfumes and such things were behind their wealth; Miriam had a vast collection of scents and fragrant ointments and shampoos, and it was a favourite occupation of her friends to try out all the new ones.

Suddenly Lyra realised that the other girl was weeping. She stopped and took Miriam's arm. 'Miriam, what is it? Was it that letter?'

'Daddy's bankrupt,' Miriam said shakily. 'It's all over. That's what it is. So now you know.'

'Oh, Miriam, that's awful!'

'And we won't – they can't – they're selling the house and I'll have to leave college – they can't afford . . .'

She couldn't go on. Lyra held out her arms, and Miriam leaned against her, sobbing. Lyra could smell the fragrance of her shampoo, and wondered if there were roses in that too.

'Hush,' she said. 'You know there are bursaries and special funds and . . . You won't have to leave, you'll see!'

'But everything's going to change! They're having to sell everything and move to . . . I don't know . . . And Danny will have to leave Cambridge and . . . and it's all going to be horrible.'

'I bet it sounds worse than it is,' said Lyra. Out of the corner of her eye she could see Pan whispering to Syriax, and she knew he was saying just the same sort of thing. 'Course it was a shock, learning about it in a letter over breakfast. But people survive this sort of thing, honest, and sometimes things turn out much better than you think. I bet you won't have to leave college.'

'But everyone will know . . .'

'So what? It's nothing to be ashamed of. Things happen to people's families all the time and it's not their fault. If you cope with it by being brave, people will admire you for it.'

'It's not Daddy's fault, after all.'

'Course not,' said Lyra, who had no idea. 'Like they teach us in economic history – the trade cycle. Things that are too big to resist.'

'It just happened and no one saw it coming.' Miriam was fumbling in her pocket. She brought out the crumpled letter and read: '"The suppliers have simply been so unreasonable, and although Daddy has been to Latakia again and again he can't find a good source anywhere – apparently the big medical companies are buying everything up before anyone else can – there's absolutely nothing one can do – it's too awful . . .'"

'Suppliers of what?' said Lyra. 'Roses?'

'Yes. They buy them from the gardens over there and distil them or something. Attar. Attar of roses. Something like that.'

'Won't English roses do?'

'I don't think so. It has to be roses from there.'

'Or lavender. There's lots of that.'

'They— *I* don't know!'

'I suppose the men will lose their jobs,' Lyra said as they turned into Broad Street, opposite Bodley's Library. 'The men whose clothes smelled of roses.'

'Probably. Oh, it's awful.'

'It is. But you can cope with it. Now when we sit down we'll make a plan of what you can do, all the options, all the possibilities, and then you'll feel better at once. You'll see.'

In the café, Lyra ordered bacon and eggs and a pint of tea. Miriam didn't want anything except coffee, but Lyra told George to bring a currant bun anyway.

'If she doesn't eat it, I will,' she said.

'Don't they feed you in that college?' said George, a man whose hands moved faster than anyone's Lyra had ever seen, slicing, buttering, pouring, shaking salt, cracking eggs. When she was young she'd greatly admired his ability to crack three eggs at once into a frying pan with one hand, and not spill a drop of white, or break the yolk, or include a fragment of shell. One day she got through two dozen trying it herself. That had earned her a clout, which she had to admit she deserved. George was more respectful these days. She still couldn't do the egg trick.

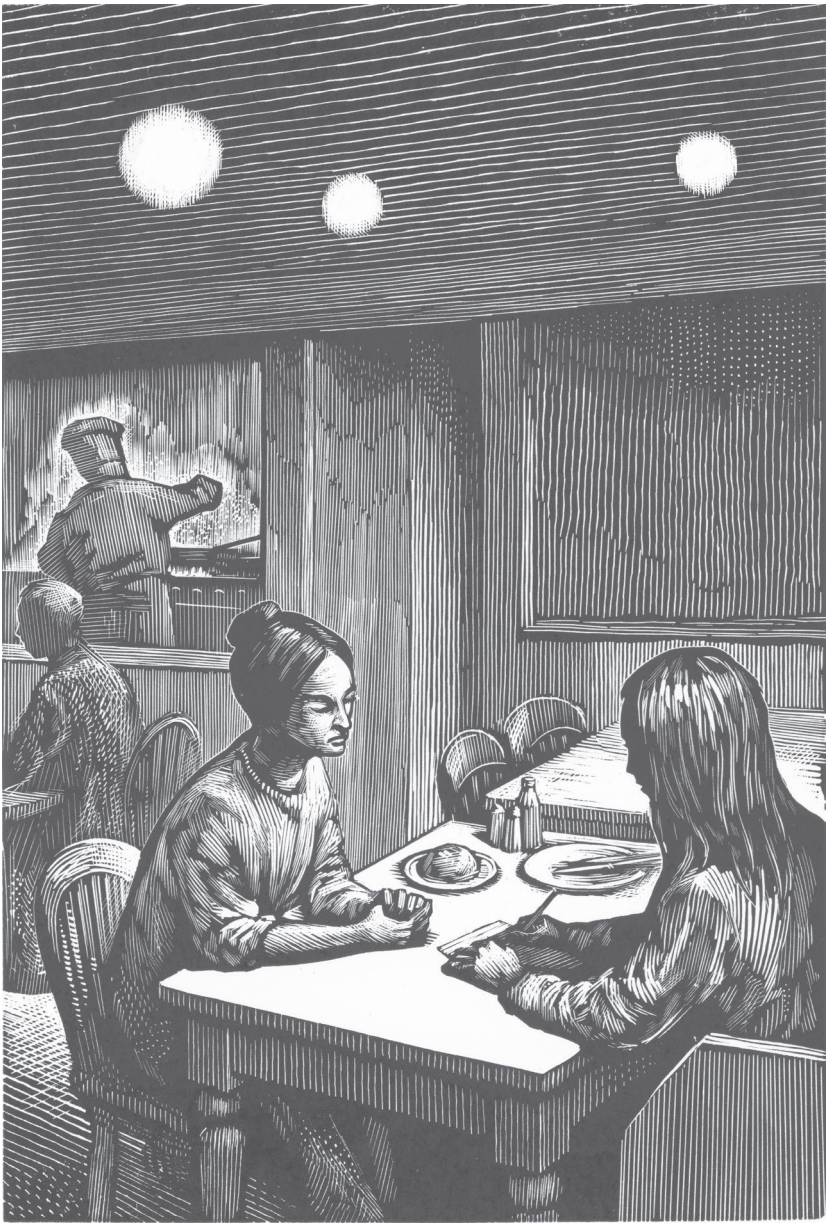
Lyra borrowed a pencil and a piece of paper from George and drew three columns, one headed *Things to do*, the next *Things to find out*, and the third *Things to stop worrying about*. Then she and Miriam, and their two dæmons, filled them in with suggestions and ideas as they ate. Miriam finished the currant bun, and by the time they'd covered the paper she was almost cheerful.

'There,' said Lyra. 'It's always a good idea to come to George's. St Sophia's breakfasts are very high-minded. As for Jordan . . .'

'I bet they're not austere like ours.'

'Socking great silver chafing-dishes full of kedgeree or devilled kidneys or kippers. Must keep the young gentlemen in the style to which they're accustomed. Lovely, but I wouldn't want it every day.'

'Thank you, Lyra,' said Miriam. 'I feel much better. You were quite right.'



'So what are you going to do now?'

'Go and see Dr Bell. Then write home.'

Dr Bell was Miriam's moral tutor, a sort of pastoral guide and mentor. She was a brusque but kindly woman; she'd know what the college could do to help.

'Good,' said Lyra. 'And tell me what happens.'

'I will,' Miriam promised.

Lyra sat there for a few minutes after Miriam had gone, chatting to George, regretfully turning down his offer of work in the Christmas vacation, finishing her pint mug of tea. But eventually came the time when she and Pan were alone again.

'What did he tell you?' she said to him, meaning Miriam's dæmon.

'What she's really worried about is her boyfriend. She doesn't know how to tell him because she thinks he won't like her if she isn't rich. He's at Cardinal's. Some kind of aristocrat.'

'So we spent all that time and effort and she didn't even tell me the thing she was worried about most? I don't think much of that,' Lyra said, gathering up her shabby coat. 'And if that's how he feels, he's not worth it anyway. Pan, I'm sorry,' she said, surprising herself as much as him. 'You were just going to tell me what you saw last night and I didn't have time to answer before.' She waved to George as they left.

'I saw someone being murdered,' he said.

3

Left Luggage

Lyra stood still. They were outside the coffee merchant's, by the entrance to the Covered Market, and the air was full of the smell of roasting coffee.

'What did you say?' she said.

'I saw two men attack another man and kill him. It was down by the allotment gardens near the Royal Mail depot . . .'

As she walked slowly out into Market Street and headed back towards St Sophia's, he told her the whole story.

'And they seemed to know about separation,' he said. 'The man who was killed and his dæmon. They could do it. She must have seen me on the branch and she flew straight up – well, with an effort, because he was hurt – and she wasn't frightened or anything, I mean, not frightened of me being alone, like most people would be. And he was the same.'

'And this wallet? Where is it now?'

'In our bookshelves. Next to the German dictionary.'

'And what was it he said?'

'He said: *Take it away – don't let them get it – it's all up to you and your*— And then he died.'

'All up to us,' she said. 'Well, we'd better have a look at it.'

They turned on the gas fire in her study-bedroom at St Sophia's, sat at the table and switched on the little anbaric lamp, because the sky was grey and the light was gloomy.

Lyra took out the wallet from the bookshelf. It was a simple one-fold wallet without a clasp, the whole thing little bigger than her palm. There had originally been a raised grain in the leather, like that of morocco, but most of that was worn away to a greasy smoothness. It might once have been brown too, but it was nearly black now, and marked in several places by Pan's gripping teeth.

She could smell it: a faint, slightly pungent, slightly spicy smell, like that of a man's cologne mixed with sweat. Pan waved a paw in front of his nose. She examined the outside carefully for any mark or monogram, but there was none.

She opened the wallet and again found it perfectly normal, perfectly ordinary. There were four banknotes, six dollars and a hundred francs in all – not a large sum. In the next pocket she found a train ticket for the return journey from Paris to Marseilles.

'Was he French?' said Pan.

'Don't know yet,' said Lyra. 'Look, here's a picture.'

From the next pocket in the wallet she took out a grubby and much-handled card attesting to the identity of the owner, with a photogram showing the face of a man of forty possibly, with black curly hair and a thin moustache.

'That's him,' Pan said.

The card had been issued by His Majesty's Foreign Office to Anthony John Roderick Hassall, who was a British citizen, and whose birthdate showed him to be thirty-eight years old. The dæmon-photogram displayed a small hawk-like bird of prey. Pan gazed at the pictures with intense interest and pity.

The next thing she found was a small card she recognised, because she had one identical to it in her own purse: it was a Bodleian Library card. Pan made a small noise of surprise.

'He must have belonged to the university,' he said. 'Look, what's that?'

It was another card, this one issued by the university Department of Botany. It certified Dr Roderick Hassall as a member of staff of the Department of Plant Sciences.

'Why would they want to attack him?' Lyra said, not expecting an answer. 'Did he look rich, or was he carrying something, or what?'

'They did say . . .' said Pan, trying to remember. 'One of them – the killer – he was surprised that the man wasn't carrying a bag. It sounded as if they'd been expecting him to. But the other man, the one who'd been wounded, wasn't interested in thinking about that.'

'*Was* he carrying a bag? Or a briefcase, or a suitcase, or anything?'

'No. Nothing.'

The next paper she found was much folded and re-folded, and reinforced with tape along the creases. It was headed LAISSEZ-PASSER.

'What's that?' said Pan.

'A kind of passport, I think . . .'

It had been issued by the Ministry of Internal Security of the Sublime Porte of the Ottoman Empire, at Constantinople. It said in French, English and Anatolian that Anthony John Roderick Hassall, botanist, of Oxford, Brytain, was to be allowed to travel through the realms of the Ottoman Empire, and that the authorities were to give him assistance and protection whenever needed.

'How big is the Ottoman Empire?' said Pan.

'Enormous. Turkey and Syria and Lebanon and Egypt and Libya and thousands of miles east as well. I think. Wait, here's another . . .'

'And one more behind that.'

The other two documents had been issued by the Khanate of Turkestan, including the regions of Bactria and Sogdiana, and the prefecture of Sin Kiang in the Celestial Empire of Cathay. They said much the same thing, in much the same way, as the laissez-passer from the Ottoman Empire.

'They're out of date,' said Lyra.

'But the Sin Kiang one is earlier than the Turkestan one. That means he was coming from there, and it took him . . . three months. It's a long way.'

'There's something else in here.'

Her fingers had found another paper hidden in an inside pocket. She tugged it out and unfolded it to find something quite different from the rest: a leaflet from a steamship company advertising a cruise to the Levant on a vessel called the SS *Zenobia*. It was issued by the Imperial Orient Line, and the English-language text promised *A world of romance and sunshine*.

'*A world of silks and perfumes*,' Pan read, '*of carpets and sweetmeats, of damascened swords, of the glint of beautiful eyes beneath the star-filled sky . . .*'

'*Dance to the romantic music of Carlo Pomerini and his Salon Serenade Orchestra*,' Lyra read, '*thrill to the whisper of moonlight on the tranquil waters of the Mediterranean . . .* How can moonlight whisper? *An Imperial Orient Levantine Cruise is the gateway to a world of loveliness . . .* Wait, Pan, look.'

On the back there was a timetable showing the dates of arrival and departure at various ports. The ship would leave London on Thursday April 17 and return to Southampton on Saturday May 23, calling at fourteen cities en route. And someone had circled the date Monday May 11, when the *Zenobia* called at Smyrna, and drawn a line from that to the scribbled words *Café Antalya, Süleiman Square, 11 a.m.*

'An appointment!' said Pan.

He sprang from the table to the mantelpiece and stood, paws against the wall, to scrutinise the calendar that hung there.

'It's not this year – wait – it's next year!' he said. 'Those are the right days of the week. It hasn't happened yet. What are we going to do?'

'Well . . .' said Lyra, 'we really ought to take it to the police. I mean, there's no doubt about that, is there?'

'No,' said Pan, jumping back on to the table. He turned the papers round to read them more closely. 'Is that everything in the wallet?'

'I think so.' Lyra looked through it again, pushing her fingers down into the pockets. 'No – wait – there's something here . . . A coin?'

She turned the wallet upside down and shook it. It wasn't a coin that fell out, but a key with a round metal tag attached to it, bearing the number 36.

'That looks like . . .' said Pan.

'Yes. We've seen one of those . . . We've had one of those. When was it?'

'Last year . . . The railway station . . .'

'Left luggage!' Lyra said. 'He put something in a left luggage locker.'

'The bag they thought he ought to be carrying!'

'It must be still there.'

They looked at each other with wide eyes.

Then Lyra shook her head. 'We should take this to the police,' she said. 'We've done what anyone would have done, we've looked to see who it belonged to and – and . . .'

'Well, we could take it to the Botanic Garden. The Plant Sciences place. They'd know who he was.'

'Yes, but we know that he was killed. So it's really a matter for the police. We've got to, Pan.'

'Mm,' he said. 'Spose so.'

'But there's no reason why we shouldn't copy a few things. The dates of his journey, the appointment in Smyrna . . .'

She wrote them down.

'Is that everything?' he said.

'Yes. I'll try and get them all back in the right places, and then we'll go to the police station.'

'Why are we doing this? Really? Copying these things down?'

She looked at him for a moment and then turned back to the wallet. 'Just being curious,' she said. 'It's none of our

business, except that we know how it came to be there in the rushes. So it is our business.'

'And he did say it was all up to us. Don't forget that.'

She turned off the fire, locked the door, and they set off for the main police station in St Aldate's, with the wallet in her pocket.

Twenty-five minutes later, they were waiting at a counter while the duty sergeant dealt with a man who wanted a fishing licence, and who wouldn't accept that it was the river authority that issued them, and not the police. He argued at such length that Lyra sat down on the only chair and prepared to wait till lunchtime.

Pan was sitting on her lap, watching everything. When two other policemen came out of a back office and stopped to talk by the counter, he turned to look at them, and a moment later Lyra felt his claws dig into her hand.

She didn't react. He'd tell her what it was about in a moment, and so he did, flowing up to her shoulder and whispering:

'That's the man from last night. That's the killer. I'm certain of it.'

He meant the taller and heavier of the two policemen. Lyra heard the man say to the other, 'No, it's overtime, completely legitimate. All done by the book. There's no doubt about it.'

His voice was unpleasant, harsh and thick-sounding. He had a Liverpool accent. At the same moment, the man who wanted the fishing licence said to the duty sergeant as he turned away, 'Well, if you're sure, I've got no choice. But I'll want it in writing.'

'Come back this afternoon, and my colleague who'll be on the desk then will give you a document all about it,' said the sergeant, winking at the other two.

'All right, I will. I'm not giving up.'

'No, don't do that, sir. Yes, miss? How can I help you?'

He was looking at Lyra, and the other two policemen were watching.

She stood up and said, 'I don't know if I've come to the right place, but my bicycle was stolen.'

'Yes, this is the right place, miss. Fill in this form and we'll see what we can do.'

She took the paper he handed her and said, 'I'm in a bit of a hurry. Can I bring it back later?'

'Any time, miss.'

Her enquiry not being very interesting, he turned away and joined the conversation about overtime. A moment later, Lyra and Pan were out in the street again.

'Well, what do we do now?' said Pan.

'Go to the left luggage place, of course.'

But Lyra wanted to see the riverbank first. As they walked across Carfax and down towards the castle, she went over the story with Pan again, each of them being so scrupulously polite and attentive to the other that it was almost painful. Everyone else Lyra could see in the streets or the shops, everyone she'd spoken to in the Market, was perfectly at ease with their dæmon. The café-owner George's dæmon, a flamboyant rat, sat in the breast pocket of his apron passing sardonic comments on everything around her, just as she'd done when Lyra was a small child, completely content with

George as he was with her. Only Lyra and Pan were unhappy with each other.

So they tried very hard. They went to the allotment gardens, and looked at the gate in the high fence around the Royal Mail depot where the second attacker had climbed over, at the path from the railway station that the victim had come along.

It was a market day, and as well as the sound of railway cars being shunted in the sidings, and the noise of someone using a drill or a grinder to repair a machine in the Royal Mail building, Lyra heard the mooing of cattle from the pens in the distance. There were people everywhere.

'Someone might be watching us,' she said.

'I suppose they might.'

'So we'll just wander along as if we're daydreaming.'

She looked around slowly. They were standing in the area between the river and the allotments, a roughly tended open meadow where people strolled or picnicked in the summer, or bathed from the riverbank, or played football. This part of Oxford wasn't home territory for Lyra, whose allegiance had lain mostly with the urchins of Jericho half a mile north. She had fought many battles with the gangs from around here, from St Ebbe's, in the days before she went to the Arctic and left her world altogether. Even now, a young woman of twenty, educated, a student of St Sophia's, she felt an atavistic fear of being in enemy territory.

She set off slowly, crossing the grass to the riverbank, trying to look as if she were doing anything other than looking for a murder site.

They stopped to look at a train loaded with coal coming slowly down from their right towards the wooden bridge over the river. Trains never crossed it fast. They heard the trundle of

the coal trucks over the bridge, and watched the train swing away to the left on the branch line that made for the gasworks, and into the siding next to the main building where the furnaces roared day and night.

Lyra said, 'Pan, if they hadn't attacked him, where was he going? Where does the path lead to?'

They were standing at the southern edge of the allotments, where Pan had been when he first saw the men hide under the willow. The two trees were exactly ahead of them as they looked towards the river, about a hundred yards away. If the man hadn't been attacked, the path would have taken him further along the bank, where the river curved round to the left. Without discussing it, Lyra and Pan moved slowly that way to see where he would have gone.

The path made directly along the bank towards a footbridge over the stream, which in turn led to the narrow streets of back-to-back houses around the gasworks, and the parish of St Ebbe's proper.

'So that's where he was going,' said Pan.

'Even if he didn't know it. Even if he was only following the path.'

'And that's where the other man must have come from – the one who didn't come from the Mail depot.'

'You could get to anywhere from there,' Lyra said. 'All those tangled old streets in St Ebbe's, and then St Aldate's and Carfax . . . Anywhere.'

'But we'll never find it. Not by guessing.'

They both knew why they were talking like this, at the end of the footbridge over the stream. Neither of them wanted to go and look at the place where the man had been killed.

'We ought to, though,' she said, and he said, 'Yes. Come on.'

They turned back and wandered along the bank of the river, making for the willow and the oak, where rushes grew thickly and the path was muddy. Lyra looked casually all around, but there was no one sinister or threatening: just some children playing by the stream further back, a few men working their allotments, and an elderly couple on the path ahead walking arm-in-arm and carrying shopping bags.

They passed the old couple, who smiled and nodded when Lyra said, 'Good morning,' and then they were under the oak tree. Pan leaped up from Lyra's shoulder and showed her where he'd lain along the branch, and then sprang down again and flowed along the grass towards the willow.

She followed him, looking for signs of a struggle on the ground, but seeing only grass and trampled mud that was no different from the rest of the path.

'Anyone coming?' she said to Pan.

He jumped up to her shoulder and looked around. 'A woman with a small child and a shopping bag coming over the footbridge. No one else.'

'Let's look in the rushes. About here, was it?'

'Yes. Right here.'

'And he pulled the dead man down to the water?'

'In among the rushes, but not all the way down. Not when I was watching, anyway. He probably came back later and did that.'

Lyra stepped off the path and down the slope where the rushes grew. They were tall, and the slope was steep, and only six feet or so from the path she was invisible from anywhere in the meadow. It was hard to keep her footing and her shoes

would be ruined, but she found her balance and crouched down low and looked around carefully. Some of the rushes had been bent over, their stems broken, and something had been pulled down over the mud, something that might easily have been the size of a man.

But there was no sign of a body.

'We can't lurk about here too long,' she said, clambering out. 'We really will look suspicious.'

'Station, then.'

As they walked along the path next to the Mail depot they heard the great bell of Cardinal's College tolling eleven, and Lyra thought of the lecture that she should be attending just then, the last of the term. Annie and Helen would be there, though, and she could borrow their notes; and perhaps that good-looking shy boy from Magdalen would be sitting at the back, as before, and perhaps this time she could have gone to sit right next to him and see what happened; and everything would go back to normal. Except that as long as that locker key was in her pocket, nothing would be normal.

'It used to be you who was impulsive,' said Pan, 'and me who kept holding you back. We're different now.'

She nodded. 'Well, you know, things change . . . We could wait, Pan, and go back to St Aldate's when that policeman goes off duty. Like this evening, about six maybe. They can't all be in a conspiracy with him. There must be someone honest there. This isn't . . . this isn't just shoplifting. This is murder.'

'I know. I saw it.'

'And maybe by doing this we'd be helping the murderer get away with it. By interfering with the investigation. That can't be right.'

'That's another thing,' he said.

'What?'

'You used to be optimistic. You used to think that whatever we did would turn out well. Even after we came back from the north, you used to think that. Now you're cautious, you're anxious . . . You're pessimistic.'

She knew he was right, but it wasn't right that he should speak to her accusingly, as if it was something to blame her for.

'I used to be young,' was all she could find to say.

He made no response.

They didn't speak again till they reached the railway station. Then she said, 'Pan, come here,' and he leaped up at once into her hands. She put him on her shoulder and said quietly, 'You're going to have to look out behind. Someone might be watching.'

He turned round and settled as she climbed the steps to the entrance. 'Don't go straight to the lockers,' he murmured. 'Go and look at the magazines first. I'll see if there's anyone just hanging about watching.'

She nodded and turned left inside the station doors and wandered over to the bookstall. While she flicked through one magazine after another, Pan looked at all the men and women queuing for tickets, or sitting at tables drinking coffee, or checking the timetables, or asking something at the enquiry desk.

'Everyone seems to be doing something,' he said quietly. 'I can't see anyone who's just hanging about.'

Lyra had the locker key ready in her pocket. 'Shall I go?' she said.

'Yes, go on. But don't hurry. Just walk naturally. Look at the time or the departures and arrivals board or something . . .'

She replaced the magazine and turned away from the bookstall. It seemed to her that a hundred pairs of eyes could have been watching, but she tried to look nonchalant as she sauntered across the floor to the other end of the booking hall, where the left-luggage lockers stood.

'All right so far,' said Pan. 'No one's watching. Just do it now.'

Locker number 36 was at waist height. She turned the key and opened the door, and found a battered canvas rucksack inside.

'Hope it's not too heavy,' she murmured, and lifted it out, leaving the key in the door.

It was heavy, but she swung it over her right shoulder with no difficulty.

'I wish we could do what Will did,' she said.

He knew what she meant. Will Parry had a power of becoming invisible that had astonished the witches of the north, who used to vanish from sight in the same way: by reducing what was interesting about themselves until they were almost unnoticeable. He had practised it all his life, in order to avoid being spotted by people such as police officers and social workers, who might have asked what this boy was doing out of school, and started to make enquiries that would have ended by separating him from his beloved mother, who was troubled by all kinds of unreal fears and obsessions.

When Will had told Lyra about the way he'd had to live, and how difficult it had been to remain unobserved, firstly she'd been astonished that anyone could live in such a solitary way, and secondly she had been moved by his courage, and thirdly she wasn't surprised at all that the witches esteemed his skill so highly.

She wondered, as she did so often, what he was doing now, and whether his mother was safe, and what he looked like these days . . . And Pan murmured, 'Good so far. But go a little bit faster. There's a man on the station steps looking at us.'

They were on the station forecourt already, where taxis and buses set down passengers and picked them up. Thinking about Will, Lyra had hardly noticed how far they'd come.

'What's he look like?' she said quietly.

'Big. Black woolly hat. Dæmon looks like a mastiff.'

She moved a little faster, making for Hythebridge Street and the centre of the city.

'What's he doing?'

'Still watching . . .'

The quickest way back to Jordan would have been the straightest, of course, but that was also the most dangerous, because she'd be visible all the way along Hythebridge Street and then George Street.

'Can he still see us?' she said.

'No – the hotel's in the way.'

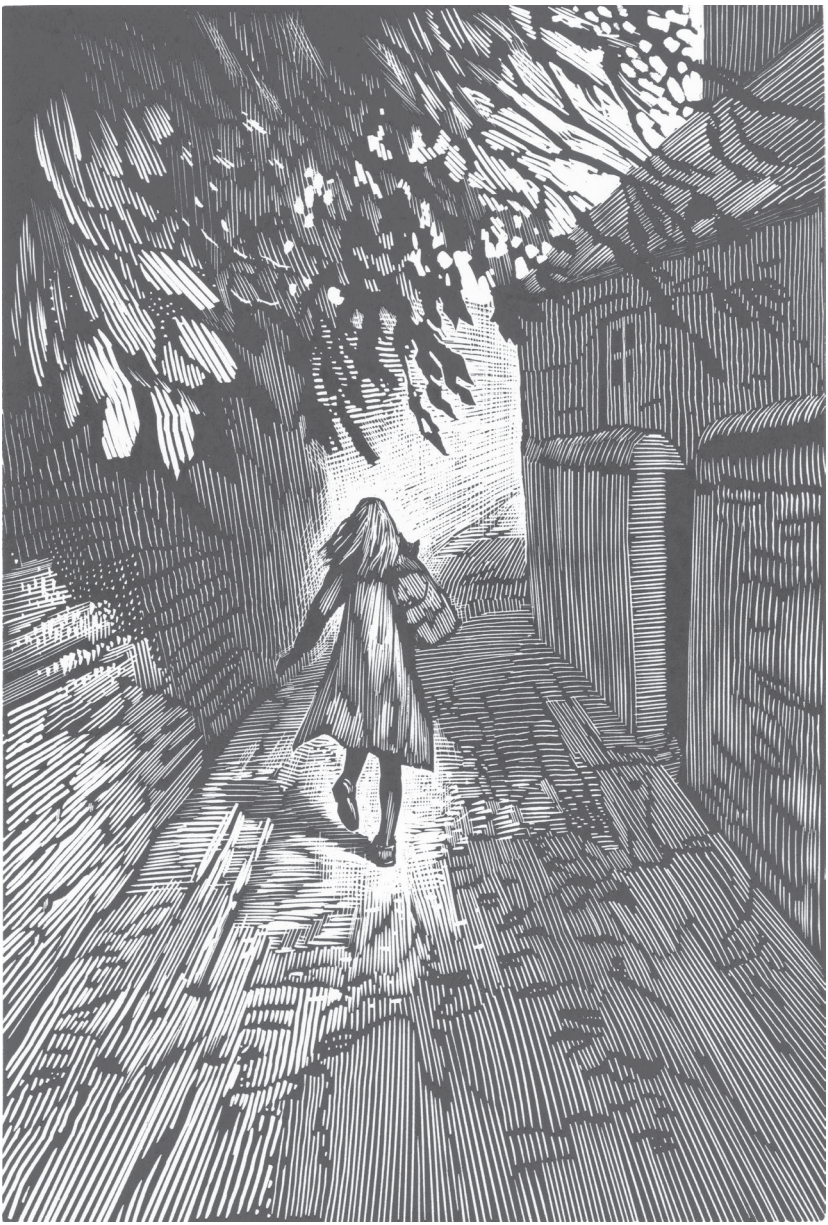
'Then hold on tight.'

'What are you—'

She suddenly darted across the road and ducked under the railings around the coal wharves, where the canal boats came to unload. Ignoring the men who stopped to watch, she ran round the steam crane, behind the Canal Board building, and out across the narrow street into George Street Mews.

'Can't see him,' said Pan, craning his neck to look.

Lyra ran on into Bulwarks Lane, a pathway between two high walls no further apart than her own outstretched hands. She was out of sight entirely here: no one to help if she ran into



trouble . . . But she came to the end of the lane, and turned sharp left along another mews that ran behind St Peter's Oratory and then out into New Inn Hall Street, which was busy with shoppers.

'So far so good,' said Pan.

Across the street, and into Sewy's Lane next: a dank little alley next to the Clarendon Hotel. A man was filling a large dustbin, and taking his time over it, with his lumpish sow-dæmon sprawled on the ground beside him gnawing a turnip. Lyra leaped over her, causing the man to start backwards and drop the cigarette out of his mouth.

'Oy!' he cried, but she was already out into the Cornmarket, the main shopping street of the city, crowded with pedestrians and delivery vehicles.

'Keep looking,' Lyra said, nearly out of breath.

She darted across the road and down an alley next to the Golden Cross Inn, which led to the Covered Market.

'I'm going to have to slow down,' she said. 'This is bloody heavy.'

She walked at a normal pace through the market, watching everyone ahead as Pan was watching behind, and trying to slow her breathing down. Only a short way now: out into Market Street, then left into Turl Street, only fifty yards away, and there was Jordan College. Less than a minute to go. Controlling every muscle, she strolled calmly along to the lodge.

Just as they entered, a figure stepped out of the door into the porter's room.

'Lyra! Hello. Have you had a good term?'

It was the burly, red-haired, affable Dr Polstead, the historian, who was not someone she wanted to talk to. He'd left Jordan

some years before and moved to Durham College, across Broad Street, but no doubt he had business that occasionally brought him back here.

'Yes, thank you,' she said blandly.

A group of undergraduates came through at the same moment, on their way to a class or a lecture. Lyra ignored them, but they all looked at her, as she well knew they would. They even fell silent as they went past, as if they were shy. By the time they'd gone through, Dr Polstead had given up waiting for any fuller response from Lyra, and turned to the porter, so she left. Two minutes later she and Pan were in her little sitting room at the top of Staircase One, where she puffed out her cheeks with relief, dropped the rucksack on the floor, and locked the door.

'Well, we're committed now,' said Pan.

4

The College Silver

'What went wrong?' demanded Marcel Delamare.

The Secretary General was standing in his office at *La Maison Juste*, and the person he was addressing was a casually dressed young man, dark-haired, slim, tense and sulky, who was leaning back on a sofa with his legs stretched out and his hands in his pockets. His hawk-dæmon glared at Delamare.

'If you employ bunglers . . .' said the visitor.

'Answer the question.'

The young man shrugged. 'They messed it up. They were incompetent.'

'Is he dead?'

'Seems like it.'

'But they didn't find anything. Was he carrying a bag, a case of some sort?'

'Can't see that sort of detail. But I don't think so.'

'Then look again. Look harder.'

The young man waved a hand languidly as if shooing the idea away. He was frowning, his eyes half closed, and there was a faint sheen of sweat on his white forehead.

'Are you unwell?' said Delamare.

'You know how the new method affects me. It puts a severe strain on the nerves.'

'You are paid very well to put up with that sort of thing. In any case I've told you not to use this new method. I don't trust it.'

'I'll look, yes, all right, I'll look, but not now. I need to recover first. But I can tell you one thing: there was someone watching.'

'Watching the operation? Who was that?'

'No idea. Couldn't tell. But there was someone else there who saw it all.'

'Did the mechanics realise?'

'No.'

'That's all you can tell me about it?'

'That's all I know. All it's possible to know. Except . . .'

He said no more. The Secretary General was used to this mannerism, and kept his patience. Eventually the young man went on:

'Except I think maybe it could have been her. That girl. I didn't see her, mind. But it could have been.'

He was looking closely at Delamare as he said that. His employer sat at the desk and wrote a sentence or two on a piece of headed paper before folding it and capping his fountain pen.

'Here you are, Olivier. Take this to the bank. Then have some rest. Eat properly. Keep up your strength.'

The young man opened the paper and read it before putting it in his pocket and leaving without a word. But he'd noticed something he'd seen before: at the mention of the girl, Marcel Delamare's mouth trembled.

Lyra put the rucksack down on the floor and sank into the old armchair.

'Why did you hide when Dr Polstead came through?' she said.

'I didn't,' said Pantalaimon.

'You did. You shot under my coat as soon as you heard his voice.'

'I just wanted to be out of the way,' he said. 'Let's open this and have a look.' He was peering closely at the rucksack, and lifting the buckles with his nose. 'It's certainly his. Same smell. Not the sort of cologne that Miriam's father makes.'

'Well, we can't do it now,' she said. 'We've got twenty minutes to get back to St Sophia's and see Dr Lieberson.'

It was a meeting that each undergraduate had with her tutor near the end of term: an appraisal, a warning to work harder, a commendation for good work done, suggestions for vacation reading. Lyra had never missed such a meeting yet, but if she didn't hurry . . .

She got up, but Pan didn't move.

'We'd better hide this,' he said.

'What? No one comes in here! It's perfectly safe.'

'Seriously. Think of the man last night. Someone wanted this enough to kill him for it.'

Lyra saw the point, and pulled back the worn carpet. Under the floorboards there was a space where they'd hidden things

before. It was a tight squeeze, but they got the rucksack in and pulled the carpet back. As Lyra ran downstairs she heard the Jordan clock chime for eleven forty-five.

They made it with a minute to spare, and had to sit hot and red-faced through Dr Lieberson's appraisal. Apparently Lyra had worked well and was beginning to understand the complexities of Mediterranean and Byzantine politics, though there was always the danger of thinking that a superficial mastery of the events was as good as a fundamental understanding of the principles at work underneath. Lyra agreed, nodding hard. She could have written it herself. Her tutor, a young woman with severely cut blonde hair and a goldfinch-dæmon, looked at her sceptically.

'Make sure to do some reading,' she said. 'Frankopan's good. Hughes-Williams has a very good chapter on Levantine trade. Don't forget—'

'Oh, trade, yes. Dr Lieberson, the Levantine trade – sorry to interrupt – did it always involve roses and perfumes and things like that?'

'And smokeleaf, since it was discovered. The great source of rose oil, attar of roses, in medieval times was Bulgaria. But the trade from there suffered from the Balkan wars and the duties the Ottoman Empire imposed on traffic through the Bosphorus, and besides, the climate was changing a little and the Bulgarian rose growers found it harder to cultivate the best sort of plants, so gradually the trade moved further east.'

'Do you know why it might be suffering now?'

'Is it?'

Lyra told her briefly about Miriam's father and his problem with obtaining the supplies for his factory.

'That's interesting,' said Dr Lieberson. 'History's not over, you see. It's happening all the time. The problem today would mainly be regional politics, I imagine. I'll look into it. Have a good vacation.'

The end of the Michaelmas term was marked by a number of ritual occasions, which varied from college to college. St Sophia's took a narrow-eyed view of ritual in general, and with an air of 'If we really must' produced a slightly better dinner than usual when celebration was unavoidable. Jordan, on the other hand, held a Founder's Feast of great splendour and culinary excess. Lyra had always looked forward to the Founder's Feast when she was younger, not because she was invited (she wasn't) but because of the chance it gave her to earn a few guineas polishing the silver. This task had become a tradition of its own and, after a quick lunch with some friends at St Sophia's (during which Miriam seemed to have cheered up a great deal), Lyra hurried to the pantry at Jordan, where Mr Cawson the Steward was getting out the dishes, the bowls, the plates, the goblets, and the large tin of Redvers' powder.

The Steward was the senior servant in charge of all the college ceremonies, the great dinners, the silver, the Retiring Room and all its luxuries. Lyra had once been more terrified of Mr Cawson than of anyone else in Oxford, but recently he'd begun to show signs of quite unsuspected humanity. She sat at the long table with its green baize cloth, and dabbed a damp cloth into the tin of powder and polished bowls and dishes and goblets until their very surfaces seemed to swim and dissolve in the naphtha lamplight.

'Good going,' said Mr Cawson, turning a bowl over between his palms and scrutinising the flawless gleam.

'What's it all worth, Mr Cawson?' she said, taking up the very biggest dish, a shallow platter fully two feet across with a bowl-shaped depression in the centre.

'Priceless,' he said. 'Irreplaceable. You couldn't buy anything like this now, because they don't make 'em any more. They've lost the skill. That one,' he said, looking at the great dish Lyra was polishing, 'that's three hundred and forty years old and as thick as two guineas. There's no money value that would make any sense in connection with that. And,' he said, sighing, 'this Feast is probably the last time we shall use it.'

'Really? What's it for?'

'You've never attended a full Feast, have you, Lyra?' the old man said. 'Dined in Hall any number of times – High Table often enough – but never a full Feast, am I right?'

'Well, I wouldn't be invited,' said Lyra piously. 'It wouldn't be right. I'd never be allowed in the Retiring Room afterwards, never mind anything else.'

'H'mm,' said Mr Cawson, without any expression at all.

'So I've never seen what this big plate's for. Is it for truffles, at dessert?'

'Try and put it down.'

Lyra laid it on the baize, and because of its rounded bottom, the dish tipped over and lay awkwardly to one side.

'It looks uncomfortable,' she said.

'Because it's not for putting down, it's for carrying. It's a rosewater dish.'

'Rosewater?' Lyra looked up at the old man, suddenly more curious.

'That's it. After the meat, and before they change places for dessert, we take around the rosewater dishes. Four of 'em, and this is the finest. It's for gentlemen and their guests to dab their napkins in, rinse their fingers, whatever takes their fancy. But we can't get the rosewater any more. We've got enough for this Feast, and that's it.'

'Whyever can't you get it? They grow roses everywhere. The Master's garden is full of roses! Surely you could make some rosewater? I bet I could. I bet it's not hard to do.'

'Oh, there's no shortage of English rosewater,' said the Steward, lifting down a heavy flask from a shelf above the door, 'but it's thin stuff. No body to it. The best comes from the Levant, or beyond. Here – sniff this.'

He took the stopper out of the flask. Lyra bent over the open vessel, and found the concentrated fragrance of every rose that had ever bloomed: a sweetness and power so profound that it moved beyond sweetness altogether and out of the other side of its own complexity into a realm of clear and simple purity and beauty. It was like the smell of sunlight itself.

'Oh!' she said. 'I see what you mean. And this is the very last of it?'

'The very last I could get hold of. I think Mr Ellis, the Chamberlain at Cardinal's, has a few bottles left. But he guards himself close, Mr Ellis. I shall try to wheedle my way into his affections.'

Mr Cawson's tone was so dry that Lyra was never sure to what extent he was joking. But this rosewater business was too interesting to leave alone.

'Where did you say it came from, the good stuff?' she said.

'The Levant. Syria and Turkey in particular, so I understand; there's some way they can detect the difference between them, but I never could. Not like wine, not like Tokay or porto – there's a wealth of tastes in every glass, and once you know your way round 'em, there's no mistaking one vintage for another, far less one kind of wine for a different one. But you've got your tongue and your taste buds involved with wine, haven't you? Your whole mouth's involved. With rosewater you're just dealing with a fragrance. Still, I'm sure there's some that could tell the difference.'

'Why is it getting scarce?'

'Greenfly, I expect. Now, Lyra, have you done 'em all?'

'Just this candlestick to go. Mr Cawson, who's the supplier for the rosewater? I mean, where do you buy it from?'

'A firm called Sidgwick's. Why are you suddenly interested in rosewater?'

'I'm interested in everything.'

'So you are. I forgot. Well, you better have this . . .' He opened a drawer and took out a tiny glass bottle no bigger than Lyra's little finger, and gave it to her to hold. 'Pull the cork out,' he said, 'and hold it steady.'

She did, and Mr Cawson, with the utmost care and the steadiest hand, filled the tiny bottle from the flask of rosewater.

'There you are,' he said. 'We can spare that much, and since you're not invited to the Feast and you're not allowed in the Retiring Room, you might as well have it.'

'Thank you!' she said.

'Now hop it, go on. Oh – if you want to know about the Levant and the east and all that, you better ask Dr Polstead over at Durham.'

'Oh yes. I could. Thank you, Mr Cawson.'

She left the Steward's pantry and wandered out into the winter afternoon. Unenthusiastically she looked across Broad Street at the buildings of Durham College; no doubt Dr Polstead was in his rooms, no doubt she could cross the road and knock on the door and no doubt he'd welcome her, full of bonhomie, and sit her down and explain all about Levantine history at interminable length, and within five minutes she'd wish she hadn't bothered.

'Well?' she said to Pan.

'No. We can see him any time. But we couldn't tell him about the rucksack. He'd just say take it to the police, and we'd have to say we couldn't, and . . .'

'Pan, what is it?'

'What?'

'There's something you're not telling me.'

'No, there isn't. Let's go and look in the rucksack.'

'Not now. That'll keep. We've got proper work to do, don't forget,' Lyra reminded him. 'If we make a start on it today there'll be that much less to do later on.'

'Well, let's take the rucksack with us, at least.'

'No! Leave it where it is. It's perfectly safe. We'll be back here for the vacation soon, and if it's with us at St Sophia's you'll be nagging me to look at it all the time.'

'I don't nag.'

'You should hear yourself.'

When they got back to St Sophia's Pan pretended to go to sleep while Lyra checked the references in her final essay and thought again about the rucksack; and then she put on her last clean dress and went down to dinner.

Over the boiled mutton some friends tried to persuade her to come with them to a concert in the Town Hall, where a young pianist of striking good looks was going to play Mozart. This would normally have been tempting enough, but Lyra had something else in mind, and after the rice pudding she slipped away, put on her coat, and went down to Broad Street and into a pub called the White Horse.

It wasn't usual for a young lady to go into a pub on her own, but Lyra in her present mood was far from being a lady. In any case, she was looking for someone, and pretty soon she found him. The bar in the White Horse was small and narrow, and in order to be sure the person she was looking for was there, Lyra had to shove her way through the evening crowd of office workers as far as the little snug at the back. In term time it would have been packed with undergraduates, because unlike some other pubs the White Horse was used by both the town and the gown, but the year was winding down and the students wouldn't be seen again till mid-January. But Lyra wasn't gown now: this evening she was town, exclusively.

And there in the snug was Dick Orchard, with Billy Warner and two girls whom Lyra didn't know.

'Hello, Dick,' she said.

His face brightened, and it was a good-looking face. His hair was black and curly and glossy; his eyes were large, with brilliant dark irises and clear whites; his features were well defined, his skin healthy and golden; it was the sort of face that would look good in a photogram, nothing blurred or smudged about it; and besides, there was a hint of laughter, or at any rate amusement, behind every expression that flitted over it. He wore a blue-and-white spotted handkerchief around his throat,

in the gyptian style. His dæmon was a trim little vixen, who stood with pleasure to greet Pan; they had always liked each other. When Lyra was nine, Dick had been the leader of a gang of boys who hung around the market, and she had admired him greatly for his ability to spit further than anyone else. Much more recently, she and he had had a brief but passionate relationship and, what was more, parted friends. She was genuinely pleased to find him there, but of course would never show it, with other girls watching.

'Where you been then?' Dick said. 'En't seen you for weeks.'

'Things to do,' she said. 'People to see. Books to read.'

'Hello, Lyra,' said Billy, an amiable boy who had been following Dick around since they were in elementary school. 'How you doing?'

'Hello, Billy. Is there room for me there?'

'Who's this?' said one of the girls.

They all ignored her. Billy moved up along the bench and Lyra sat down.

'Hey,' said the other girl. 'What you doing butting in?'

Lyra ignored her too. 'You're not still working in the market, Dick?' she said.

'No, sod that for a lark. Heaving spuds around, piling cabbages up. I'm working at the Mail depot now. What you drinking, Lyra?'

'Badger,' she said, inwardly delighted. She'd been right about his job.

Dick got up and squeezed out past one of the girls, who protested, 'What you doing, Dick? Who's she?'

'She's my girlfriend.'

He looked at Lyra with a lazy sort of smile in his eyes, and she looked back, bold and calm and complicit. Then he was gone, and the girl picked up her handbag and went after him, complaining. Lyra hadn't looked at her once. The other girl said, 'What'd he call you? Laura?'

'Lyra.'

Billy said, 'This is Ellen. She works in the telephone exchange.'

'Oh, right,' said Lyra. 'What you doing now, Billy?'

'I'm with Acott's in the High Street.'

'Selling pianos? I didn't know you could play the piano.'

'I can't. I just move 'em. Like tonight, there's a concert at the Town Hall, and they got a lousy piano there, so they hired one from us, a good 'un. Took three of us to move it, but you get what you pay for. What you up to? You done your exams yet?'

'Not yet.'

'What exams? You a student?' said the girl.

Lyra nodded. Dick came back with a half-pint of Badger Ale. The other girl had gone.

'Oh, a half. Thank you for my half-pint, Dick,' said Lyra. 'If I'd known you were short of money I'd have asked for a glass of water.'

'Where's Rachel?' said the girl.

Dick sat down. 'I didn't get you a pint because there was this article in the paper,' he said. 'It says women shouldn't drink all that much at once, it's too strong for 'em, it sends 'em mad with strange lusts and desires.'

'Too much for you to cope with, then,' Lyra said.

'Well, I could manage, but I was just thinking of the innocent bystanders.'

'Has Rachel gone?' said the girl, trying to peer through the crowd.

'You're looking very gyptian tonight,' Lyra said to Dick.

'You got to show off your best features, en't you,' he said.

'Is that what you call 'em?'

'You remember my grandad's gyptian. Giorgio Brabandt. He's good-looking too. He'll be in Oxford later this week – I'll introduce you.'

'I'm fed up with this,' the girl said to Billy.

'Ah, come on, Ellen . . .'

'I'm going with Rachel. You can come or not, as you like,' she said, and her starling-dæmon flapped his wings on her shoulder as she got up.

Billy looked at Dick, who shrugged; so Billy got up as well.

'See you, Dick. Cheers, Lyra,' he said, and followed the girl out through the crowded bar.

'Well, fancy that,' said Dick. 'We're all alone.'

'Tell me about the Mail place. What is it you do?'

'It's the main sorting office for the south of England. Stuff comes in on the mail trains – in sealed sacks – and we open them and sort the post into regions. Then we take it back out in boxes, different colours for different regions, and load 'em on to other trains, or on the zeppelin for London.'

'And that goes on all day?'

'All day and night. Round the clock. What you want to know for?'

'I got a reason. Maybe I'll tell you, maybe I won't. What shift are you on?'

'Nights this week. I'll be starting at ten tonight.'

'Is there a man who works there – a big hefty man – who was working on Monday night, yesterday night, and who hurt his leg?'

'That's a peculiar question. There's hundreds of people working there, specially this time of year.'

'I suppose so . . .'

'But as it happens I think I know who you mean. There's a big ugly bugger by the name of Benny Morris. I heard off someone earlier today that he'd hurt his leg falling off a ladder. Pity it wasn't his neck. Funny thing is he was working last night, first part of the shift anyway, then he cleared off partway through. At least, no one saw him after about midnight. Then this afternoon I hear he's broken his leg, or summing like that.'

'Is it easy to get out of the depot without anyone knowing?'

'Well, you couldn't get out the main gate without someone seeing you. But it's not hard to jump over the fence – or to get through. What's going on, Lyra?'

Dick's dæmon Bindi had jumped lightly up on the bench beside him, and was watching Lyra with bright black eyes. Pan was on the table near Lyra's elbow. They were both following the conversation closely.

Lyra leaned in and spoke more quietly. 'Last night, after midnight, someone climbed out the depot over the gate by the allotments, and walked along by the river and joined another man who was hiding among the trees. Then a third man came along the path from the station, and they attacked him. They killed him and hid his body down among the rushes. It wasn't there this morning because we went to look.'

'How d'you know that?'