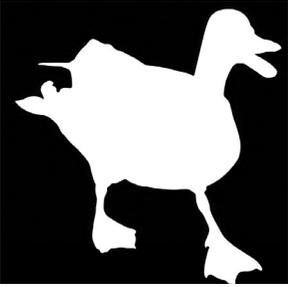


● ONLY THE  
MOON  
HOWLS

CONNIE SENIOR



Published by Bitingduck Press

ISBN 978-1-938463-49-5

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Cover image by Dena Eaton

*Iliad* quote from from the Penguin publication *THE ILLIAD* by Homer,  
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### **Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication**

Senior, Constance [1956 - ]

Only the Moon Howls/by Connie Senior—1st ed.—Altadena, CA:

Bitingduck Press, 2013

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-938463-49-5

[1. Young adult—Fiction 2. Romania—Fiction 3. Vampires—Fiction 4.  
Werewolves—Fiction] I. Title

LCCN 2012941371

*To Moon, with gratitude: this is as much yours as it is mine, and you  
never gave less than 110% in its making*



*“There are nights when the wolves are silent and only the moon howls”*  
- George Carlin





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## Prologue

**B**RING THE LANTERN OVER here.” A ball of light weaves through the darkness of a moonless night, while uncertain steps crunch the gravel path. “Yeah, that’s good. Now set it down.”

“Jeez, Toby, and you call yourself a wizard,” sniggers the boy as he places the lantern in front of a door, barely visible behind the boards nailed across its frame. “Can’t even conjure some fire.”

“Look, you little twit,” Toby retorts. “We’re here to break the ward, not waste magic on little conjuring tricks.”

Toby grasps a board and takes confident, deep breaths, while the shorter boy fidgets at the outer edges of the circle of light, the gravel whispering under his nervous feet. Restless wind murmurs through the tall pines, whose branches scrape softly against the upper windows and the roof of the dark house. It’s been fifty years since anyone lived in the house and the trees have cozied up close to the deserted building.

“Man, these wards are solid,” Toby says admiringly.

“Same as before,” giggles the other boy. “And you couldn’t break them before, either.”

“René, you have no faith in me,” Toby counters as he walks backward, one step, then two. Without taking his eyes off the door, he adds, “Caleb wouldn’t leave that goddamn kindergarten of his to come help us, but he did give me a good idea.”

He takes René by the shoulders and maneuvers him until he stands about three feet in front of the door, just outside the left-hand doorframe. Toby takes a similar position on the right.

“This is about it... There, feel it?” Toby hums appreciatively, like a starving man presented with a thick steak. René bounces his head nervously in reply.

“Caleb thinks the ward was set by two wizards, not one, so it will take two of us in just the right places to break it. Okay, move a little to the left. Feel it getting stronger?” Toby is silent for a while, turning his head slightly from side to side. “Feels like Fintonclyde’s work, like the wards around the Reserve, but not quite... someone else in there.”

“T-T-T-Toby, I don’t think I can...” René’s teeth chatter.

“Too late to back out, buddy,” Toby says. “You were the one begging come back, remember? Well, here we are and even though I know you’re a miserable excuse for a wizard, you’re going to help me blow this ward.”

“Yeah, sure,” whispers René.

“Come on.” Toby tries to rally his friend. “This is going to be so cool. No one’s ever managed to get in, not in fifty years. And it won’t be much harder than that ward on the lighthouse. Remember how we broke that? Close your eyes and try to see the lines, punch through them, okay? Ready? One...two... three—”

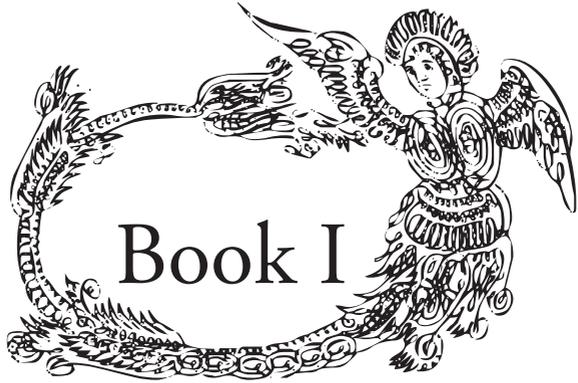
Boards crack, splinters fly, and the boys stumble backwards, blinded by searing light. A minute, perhaps an hour passes. Toby can’t be sure if the light is gone, so scrambled is his vision. He gathers his wits enough to know that he’s lying on the ground and, as his vision returns, that he’s in front of a ragged hole where the door once blocked entry.

“Shit,” he drawls, taking a long time to finish the word, stretching it out to six or seven syllables. “We did it, man!”

He rescues the lantern from under a twisted plank and gets to his feet. “Hey, René, good work.” But as he swings the lantern around, he sees he is alone amid the rubble. “René?”

The wind falls silent, but something rustles nearby: a high-pitched squeak in Toby’s ear and the rapid beating of wings. Something flies past him, but Toby cannot tell if it went into the house, or exited the house. Then he hears footsteps inside.

“Hey, René?” The silence dampens Toby’s confidence. He barrels through the shattered doorway, lantern held high, his panicked scream piercing the waiting darkness. “René! René!”



# Book I

# A World Apart





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## I. Trial at Tribulation



HERE IS HE? WHERE is Toby?"

The old man turned around slowly as the stiff Atlantic wind danced with his long gray beard. A hint of a frown, a brief glimpse of puzzlement, a glimmer of pity in his eyes, then a smile. "Caleb, I didn't expect to see you here." He walked closer, head to one side while inspecting the boy. "You've grown two inches in the last six months, if I'm not mistaken."

"Who cares about my height!" It was controlled anger, not the wind needling through his thin jacket, that caused Caleb O'Connor to shiver. "René is dead and my best friend is accused of—" His tongue tripped, fell, and refused to get up and say the word. "You think I'd stay away?"

"A tragedy," replied Clovis Fintonclyde with a wistful shake of the head. "The Cousineaus are understandably distraught, with all the difficulties they've had. Bit of a panic in the Community, people not knowing if they're going to be murdered in their beds."

"Sophia called me last night, told me about René, and said they'd taken Toby into custody. Where is he, Fintonclyde?"

"Ah, well," said the old man mildly, as if he were still tutoring a much younger Caleb in geography or the care and feeding of dragons. "There will be a trial, of course." He waved a hand toward Tribulation House, the old stone mansion that occupied this tiny island off the Maine coast.

The ancient building on the cliff was officially a museum of local history with such odd hours of operation that tourists never visited. Stone sphinxes flanked the iron gates and looked out across the Atlantic with weather-beaten indifference; a rusty iron fence, leaning hard, tried to shield the building from

the spray and surf. Any visitor hardy enough to take a boat out to the remote pile of rocks would find an overgrown brick path and a jaunty yellow sign reading “Closed—We’re Sorry We Missed You!”

“Trial?” For the first time, Caleb noticed that the gates leading into the yard of the squat granite building were, for once, open; people had lined up in front of the fence and were shuffling through the gates. He felt as if a large pit had just opened up at his feet. “She didn’t mention a trial.”

Fintonclyde put a hand on Caleb’s shoulder, though it did nothing to quell the shaking. “The outside world doesn’t bother with the Community much, as you know, and sometimes, well, it’s best if we keep some of our problems to ourselves. There hasn’t been a trial since 1942. And that’s got folks upset, because we thought we’d executed the lot of them back then and sealed up Lilac House for good. But when Toby broke in, he must have let something out that killed René. Some people are wondering if Toby was in league with... what he found there.”

“How can you—” Nearly blinded with rage and confusion, Caleb stumbled, certain he would throw up. “You know Toby. He’ll do anything on a dare, the more outrageous the better, but that doesn’t mean that he would help a vampire. Because that’s what we’re talking about here, isn’t it? No one will come right out and say it, will they?”

“The Community has to take measures to protect itself,” Fintonclyde said. “Surely you can understand?”

“I understand what a kangaroo court is,” Caleb snarled. “It sounds as if you and the rest of the Community have already convicted Toby. I want to be in that miserable courtroom. I want to see Toby!”

The old man sighed, the pity briefly returning to his face. “Come along then, but I can’t guarantee you anything. It’s clear that I can’t stop you.”

They approached the iron gates. Two silly-looking men in violet chemises demanded rings, staffs, potions or metals—anything they might have on their person that could be used to cast a spell or interfere with the proceedings. Their cheerful dress annoyed Caleb, all the more so when he recalled that within the Community, violet symbolized justice. He feared there was not enough violet in the world for justice to be served that day.

At the head of the queue, a guard looked Caleb up and down, frowning. “Mr. Fintonclyde, sir, you can’t bring this...you can’t bring him inside,” the guard said with casual contempt, as if he expected Fintonclyde to leave Caleb tied to the fence like a well-trained dog.

Caleb almost turned and bolted right then. This was the reason he had left the Community and all of its prejudices six months ago.

“Marcus McNulty, I don’t know where you get your quaint notions,” Fintonclyde scolded. “This young man has every right to be inside. There is no prohibition of which I’m aware in the Community’s laws, and I helped write the 1933 amendments on trial law and the 1947 revision on *habeas corpus*.”

“Beg your pardon, sir,” the guard said, ducking his head, “but precautions have to be taken.”

“And they will be,” replied Fintonclyde. “Now, let me see, I suppose you will want this.” He turned out his pockets and handed the guard a collection of metal objects: a brass letter-opener with a dragon’s head handle, a set of rusted screwdrivers, and a handful of foreign coins.

The guard visibly cringed to touch Caleb. He ran his hand only over his back pockets, making sure they were empty. Then, with a grunt, he let them pass through the gates.

The crowd pressing to enter the immense weather-scarred doors parted around Caleb and his old teacher, not wanting to get too close. Fintonclyde didn’t seem to notice, but Caleb had a feeling that something nasty was going to happen.

Subdued whispers became a roar in the entrance hall of the courthouse, where the high curved ceilings echoed and amplified the sounds of wind, sea, and spectators. The floor was bare stone, the temperature five degrees cooler than comfortable. The somber décor in the flickering candlelight gave the impression of an underground cavern. It scared Caleb nearly to death.

Cedar doors, varnished to a deep violet, led from the entrance hall into the courtrooms. Purple, too, were the robes of the guards flanking the entry to the room. Clusters of showy, bell-shaped flowers—also purple—grew at the courtroom’s entrance, out of place with their lush cheeriness. The purple of justice? Caleb sneered silently. Toby Byron would be tried surrounded by purple, with only the judges and the witnesses in attendance.

So that was how they did it, Caleb thought with an odd sense of triumph, giving Fintonclyde a disdainful look.

“Ah, yes,” said the old wizard apologetically, seeing that Caleb was eyeing the flowers. “The wolfsbane...It’s customary, you know, to keep all Dark influence out of the courts. You’ll see they have garlic, as well—”

“I don’t care about the *garlic*,” Caleb hissed through clenched teeth. He wanted to turn and flee, but the old man held tightly to his arm. “He’s my

best friend and I'm not even allowed into the courtroom?" As much as he tried to fight it, the stench of the aconite—the queen of poisons—made him back away.

"You can see that it's out of the question for you to be a witness," Fintonclyde said gently, his gaze never wavering. "And I assure you that my testimony and Sophia's will include all of what we know. You certainly don't wish to deny under oath that Toby was capable of breaking the magical wards around the Reserve and, by extension, any ward in these parts?"

"Mistrust" and "Fintonclyde" were two words that Caleb could never have imagined stringing together, even in his mind, so this development devastated him. No one seemed capable of entertaining the slightest doubt that Toby was guilty.

His low-level seethe became a bubbling wrath as he turned his back on Fintonclyde, the noisome flowers, and the courtroom to shove his way out of the cold stone building. His mind raged not only against the old man but also against himself, his naiveté and the irony of his stubborn disbelief in the injustice on display all around him. No matter how many times they had kicked him through the years, he always came running back, wagging his tail like a golden retriever.

A light rain was falling, smelling of moss and ferns, refreshing and pure after the filthy miasma of the Community's "civilization." He knew he had to get off the island before something even more hideous happened. He had been raised as Fintonclyde's ward and read all his books, so knew perfectly well what had happened in 1942 to those accused of being vampires: They had been hanged, staked, disemboweled and their bodies burned, ashes scattered to the wind.

Caleb sprinted across the island and halted at the edge of the water, blinded by rain and tears. He was furious not only at Fintonclyde, but at himself, for running away like a coward while a bunch of crazies put a boy on "trial." He hated himself for not calling the police—and he also hated himself for not having the courage to fight them on their own terms.

The fact was, and he fully admitted it, that he was afraid of the Community. He didn't know what they were capable of. He didn't think his mind was even set up to grasp it. Fintonclyde had managed to teach him a few parlor tricks and ways to get around a dead flashlight battery or a leaky canoe, but they were games for children. Apart from the violence of his monthly transformation, Caleb had a poor grasp of the power that magic could wield, despite all

his mentor's efforts to teach him.

The rain had half filled his canoe, which heaved perilously under him when he jumped in. It had been Toby's boat. Toby knew all sorts of ways to make it glide against the current or even skim through the air, but Caleb was restricted to paddling madly, berating the waves with the foulest curses he knew.

He cut around the point well outside of the shore of Tribulation. The tiny hamlet was almost invisible among the pines, a single power line its only obvious connection to the outside world. Electricity had come only the year before, in 1985, and there was still no phone.

Just around the southern point was a different world. When he got to the rocky shoreline of Southwest Harbor, he tried a half-hearted spell to make the canoe jump up onto land, but only succeeded in landing himself in the water. Sputtering, shivering, and swearing, he swam to shore and hauled the boat out by its frayed rope, which he attached to an old post.

The few pedestrians in town threw him hard, cold stares, and he finally realized how distasteful he must look: a weeping teenager, drenched from head to foot.

Caleb briefly held his breath to stop the tears and tore off his soaking coat. Maine had two seasons—winter and the Fourth of July—so he was chilly in his thin jacket, cotton shirt, and jeans, but at least he looked respectable enough to pass among the first wave of hypothermic summer tourists. He smiled at a pretty woman in a sundress and heavy sweater and wondered what secrets she harbored. She had such lovely teeth; had she ever sunk them into steaming human flesh?

As he got into his rusty 1969 Datsun, he pondered his fate. What did it matter whether he killed people every month or was the most reliable, even-tempered SOB around? The results were the same. He was a freak and he would never again have any friends or family of any kind. The title of an old Jack London story flitted through his mind, and he laughed scornfully to himself as he got onto the toll road in Maine. The Call of the Wild—it appealed to his broken heart, but it was absurd. Werewolves were only wolves one, in some rare instances two, nights of the month. They would have no reason to cut themselves off from society and live in the woods.

He headed south, back to the school where he had hoped to find acceptance, or at least anonymity. It was better by far than the Community, but it had not worked out the way he had hoped. He choked with disdain as he thought of his fellow students and all their professors. It wasn't as though he

stood out as being particularly weird at MIT—that would be nearly impossible to do. His studies in astronomy offered the perfect excuse for his not working on nights of the full moon. He went his own way and so did all the others. But the banks of the Charles were no place for a werewolf to run free, and even a single night each month spent locked in his apartment took a toll on his health.

The fact was, he hated Boston: the filth, the incessant noise, the cars, the subways, the snobby people. And being so far away had kept him from seeing his friends and realizing just how much they were playing with fire. Now the best friend he'd ever had was going to be put down like a pound puppy. Even worse, his only family was content to sit and watch.

He had wanted to leave that world behind him, and so he had, secretly applying to all the top science schools when he was sixteen. When MIT gave him a scholarship, he'd found an entry to a world where technology replaced magic, and he had desperately hoped it would be a world that he could call his own.

Well, now he would be a better student of sorcery than he ever was of astronomy. He would find a place far from Cambridge where this other world was taken seriously, a world that would teach him the cunning he needed to return to the Community and face Fintonclyde fair and square.

Fintonclyde, the judge, the guards, the spectators—all of them...They would all be sorry for what happened today.



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## 1. Dog Boy

**A** WET NOSE NUDGED HIS hand. Half-awake, he murmured, “Go away, Toby.”

Hearing himself speak Toby’s name propelled Caleb into waking, and he found himself staring up into a shaggy face. He had expected to see his best friend, whimpering and panting, down on all fours doing the familiar canine impersonation— “Hey, Dog Boy, time to get up!” Instead, he faced a sheep-dog whose brown eyes were partially hidden by long brown and white fur.

The dog licked his face and then sat on its haunches, head cocked quizzically. It was a Toby look: furry, loyal, animal-loving, Toby was ironically (or appropriately) Caleb’s first and best human friend. (*What had they done to him?*)

The Charles River was framed in the stone arches of the bridge as a light rain fell, the drops blurring the surface as they landed on the water. A boat approached the bridge’s middle arch—a stocky young man with a look of intense concentration rowed a single-person scull. A shaft of morning light punched through the clouds and sparkled on the ripples of the wake spreading out behind the boat.

Caleb’s brain streamed an incontinent flood of memories. Seven was too young for a child to leave his parents, even if that was the age at which a werewolf cub’s bite became dangerous. Caleb wasn’t sure if his family had fully appreciated that, or ever really accepted the diagnosis of the condition that turned their son into a howling, biting monster one night out of the month, and a sniffling, odd-behaving little boy the rest of the time.

He himself, of course, had simply thought he was crazy. When the smelly old man in a pointy hat comes to take you away, even a seven-year-old knows that “residential treatment program” means *loony bin*.

Those first months on Dragonshead Island were so lonely and scary that nothing Fintonclyde did could convince Caleb that the Reserve was a paradise. The old man took him around in his rowboat with no oars and showed him all but the most dangerous corners of his island refuge. To this day, Caleb believed the boat was a trick, with a battery hidden somewhere, but the creatures that Fintonclyde maintained on his island were undeniably magical. An Acadian ghost whose language Caleb never comprehended staffed the lighthouse, and the inlet teemed with tiny, harmless creatures shaped like lions with fins. Billdads, which were like miniature kangaroos with hawk’s beaks and webbed feet, fished for them by the shore by slapping the water with their beaver tails.

Inside the log cabin on the island were more books than anyone could read in a lifetime. Caleb owed his academic success not to any formal training, but to nine long winters spent with the history, mathematics, science, and literature found between the damp and salty pages lurking in Fintonclyde’s study. Nothing was off-limits or forbidden, and Caleb sensed that even if he were to make inroads into the vast collection, new and exciting tomes would slip in to replace the old ones.

He had no contact with other children for almost five years. Enough people in the Community knew why he was living with Fintonclyde, so the school in Tribulation was out of the question. His wolf-form had more of a social life than his human incarnation, because under the full moon he was able to slip through the wards that kept humans away from the dangerous creatures on the island. He cavorted with manticores and legless, voracious snow wassets that were said to devour any creature hiding in the snow. He played hide and seek with goblins and trolls and talking lobsters the size of ponies. He was less afraid of a griffin than he was of the first boatload of teenagers who came spilling onto the island the July of his twelfth year.

The country’s mental health pendulum had swung from helping the mad to punishing the bad, so Fintonclyde’s island was no longer a residential treatment program but a “boot camp” designed to scare wayward adolescents straight. They arrived terrified, expecting prison-style discipline, and reacted in a myriad of ways to the wild, unsupervised freedom that Fintonclyde believed was educational.

Caleb had been angry at first when the rowdy throng invaded his privacy. Most of the kids who'd come to the program had been simple hoodlums, but mixed in with the refugees from juvenile detention were kids from the Community, sent to learn some magic from the great Fintonclyde. He could never understand the old man's motivation for taking them in, allowing them to run amok and create messes that Caleb had to clean up.

The few exceptions were as astounding as the rule. By all appearances a good-for-nothing delinquent Mainer, Toby had possessed (still did, for at least a few more hours) a spark of magical genius that made him see that true mischief wasn't spray painting and stealing cars. Magic would let him control the world around him, from atoms to whole islands.

By the time Toby left that September, Caleb had his first friend. And when Toby returned the following year with another brilliant but quirky boy and an intrepid and energetic girl, Caleb's world changed forever. He would have done anything to make himself worthy of the trio: Toby, Sophia, and René. Both of the newcomers were from within the Community, though in very different ways. René Cousineau's parents despaired of his fire-starting and hoped he'd learn enough magic to control it and live an ordinary life. Sophia Daigle, on the other hand, had renowned and powerful wizards in her family who expected her to expand her powers.

Fintonclyde could never understand how much they meant to me, Caleb thought now, gritting his teeth.

He continued to caress the dog as the sounds of traffic on Memorial Drive and of morning joggers on the footpath crept into his consciousness. Soon students would be walking or riding bicycles back and forth across the bridge, hurrying to get to class, and here he sat with his tear-stained face buried in the fur of a stray dog. After his hasty departure from MIT, he'd spent the most of the night walking along the river, up and down each side, crossing and re-crossing whichever bridge happened to be at hand. When he was too tired to walk, he'd sat under this bridge and listened to the water lapping against the bank until he'd fallen asleep. His car waited for him back on campus. He could get in it and drive until he had no money left for gas—anywhere at all—but where and why? Was there any place a werewolf would be welcome? No. Such a place did not exist.

He was free, at least. (*Toby would never be free*). He would be eighteen in two months and he could find a job, any job.

The wound was too fresh and as much as he tried, Caleb could not stop

tears from flowing. Bowing his head, he rubbed his eyes with the heel of his hand. This would do him no good. He'd need to keep his wits about him if he wanted to figure out where to go.

Abruptly, the dog pulled away, gave a short bark, and was gone. Caleb looked up in surprise. Standing before him was a little man in a rumpled overcoat. A pocket protector crammed with colored pens peeked out from his coat and gave the only indication that he might be a professor. Caleb sat up sharply, taking a deep breath to banish the tears that stung his eyes and nose. He eyed the man suspiciously, taking a long moment to recognize him. "Professor Hermann?"

"I had a time finding you, Mr. O'Connor," the man said in a soft voice, his watery blue eyes darting about. "Your car's still parked on campus, so I thought you'd be nearby, but I didn't expect you to be most of the way to Harvard."

"But...how did you...?"

"Shouting that you're a werewolf who's decided to start eating people in the Infinite Corridor," the little man chuckled mildly. "Well, that's going to draw some attention."

Caleb stared at his physics professor in disbelief. Had he really said those things last night?

"Do you mind if I sit? I've been trudging along the river for what seems like hours, though I think, really, it's much less than that."

Professor Hermann didn't wait for a reply but spread his raincoat out on the ground. He taught freshman physics, and Caleb was his best student this term, so he'd been recruited to lead tutoring sessions for the classmates who struggled with the lectures or labs. In spite of this, Caleb had rarely spoken to the professor, who preferred to communicate by leaving cryptic notes for him in the Department Office, always addressed to Mr. O'Connor. The professor looked to be in his seventies, with thinning white hair and a bald spot, now covered by a shapeless brown hat.

"As I was saying, it took a bit of work to find you," Hermann grumped as he balanced a bulging valise on a rock to keep it out of the dirt. Then he sat down, took a deep breath and continued, "Such a promising student."

"Well, make sure the story makes the rounds," Caleb replied dryly. "I'm sure it will be a joke for years."

"Yes, I daresay the students thought it was funny, just blowing off steam during finals. I wouldn't expect them to be knowledgeable in these matters,"

he explained pointedly.

“And you are?” Caleb’s curiosity was piqued, especially since Hermann seemed more curious than horrified.

Hermann laughed faintly, eyes twinkling. “I would like to explain a few things, Mr. O’Connor, if I may?”



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## 3. Holiday in Romania

**T**HREE DAYS UNTIL THE full moon, Caleb was trapped in a rainstorm in the Transylvanian Alps with a crazy old man who probably had never even seen a werewolf.

“Do you need to rest, Professor?” His companion wheezed and struggled inch his way to the plateau where Caleb stood.

“Please, Mr. O’Connor, you should call me Jonathan.” Professor Hermann took a couple of ragged breaths, then reached into his coat for the laminated map, which he handed to Caleb.

Drops from his hood trickled onto the two-dimensional mountains as Caleb bent over to read. Landmarks were difficult to see in the dense clouds that hugged the peaks, but he was sure—almost positive—that the road was twisting and turning in a way that mirrored the map.

“We should speak Romanian,” the old man added. “We both need the practice.”

“Yes...Jonathan.” Caleb still couldn’t get used to calling his former physics teacher by his first name. He shook water off the map and held it in one hand while he pointed with the other. “We are—” He struggled to switch from English to Romanian. His head buzzed with verb endings and vocabulary. “We are here, I think, because the road turned west—no, sorry, that’s not the right word—east just now after going north. We should be less than a kilometer from Stilpescu.”

“Very good. I don’t know what I should have done without you,” Hermann said pleasantly, as if they were on a bird-watching expedition in the Berkshires,

instead of slogging along a river of mud in Communist Romania. “Let us press on, then.”

Caleb watched the old man stump on ahead of him while he folded the map. Once he had put the map away, he caught up in a few long strides. This wasn’t his idea of the walking tour of Europe that Jonathan Hermann had originally suggested. Caleb wondered, as he did with increasing frequency, where the old man was taking them, and to what end.

It was the summer of 1986, and Romania was a closed country in the grip of a dictator. Crossing the border in an official capacity was simply not the way to go about it—whether you were a wizard or a harmless old physics professor. Caleb had followed his mentor over a frontier post in Hungary, at a location that Hermann had termed “unchartable.” When Caleb asked whether magic was involved, Professor Hermann simply said that the Communists concealed things better than sorcerers ever could.

There was no magic in their means of transportation. Nothing but their own two feet had carried them from the Hungarian border all the way to the Transylvanian Alps. Spring had not yet melted the snow from the mountain passes, causing the pair to spend extra days in the low-lying town of Rosu, waiting for the roads to clear. Caleb had pressed for details: Why must they visit the mountain village of Stilpescu and the castle on the promontory above? He had been ignored or hushed throughout the journey, even when Hermann ushered him into an old bookshop. As they sat down at a small table, Jonathan told Caleb he was never again to speak English.

Caleb couldn’t catch the name of the wizened old proprietor, who handed them a chipped bottle of deep purple glass and made each take a long swig. To chase the bitter taste, the proprietor gave them sweetened black tea. He talked with them for hours, and Caleb was astounded to find Romanian words flooding his mind as he listened. Finally, he and Jonathan began to speak.

“A Polyglot Potion,” Professor Hermann explained once he, too, had absorbed enough vocabulary. “It allows you to acquire language the way children do—naturally, free of accent, though of course with practice.”

“So you can practice by telling me—” Caleb began, but was waved into silence as the bookseller began again with tales of local history that Hermann seemed to think they needed to know.

Caleb leaned back in resignation and dedicated himself to listening. He had signed up for this adventure, and he had nothing to go back to.

Soon the structure of the grammar began to flow smoothly off his tongue,

although the potion frequently made him dizzy and gave him headaches. By the following week, after they left the city and began to scale the mountains, his head was clearer and he felt almost fluent.

It was impossible to escape the chill, even in mid-June. Rain fell straight down, or sideways, or sometimes in several directions at once. No matter how much they swathed themselves in hats, scarves, and raincoats, they found themselves soaked to the skin. The old man did not complain, but with each passing day he had an increasingly more difficult time matching Caleb's pace. Caleb urged him along, anxious to get the professor settled in a safe place before the full moon. The waxing gibbous moon tugged at his insides despite the thick, gray blanket that cloaked the sky.

They both felt immense relief when a bone-jarring gust of wind momentarily pushed aside a fog bank to reveal a collection of houses and the glimpse of a red church roof up ahead.

"We're almost there," Caleb yelled to the lagging professor. He stopped and waited for Hermann to join him, taking his arm and pointing to the vague outlines of buildings. The little man nodded, his eyes—the only part of his face visible within the scarves and hat—tired but alert. They didn't speak again until they found shelter in the village.

The warmth and scents inside the baker's shop almost drove Caleb mad after eight hours in the cold, dank rain. The waitress bustled about, setting their cloaks and scarves to dry near a fire while her husband cut them large slices of steaming brown bread. They sat around a wooden table with mugs of tea, bread, and honey.

"Out in weather like this," the baker was saying. "You speak pretty good, but you're not from these parts, are you?"

They did not try to hide the fact that they were foreigners. Despite their continually improving Romanian, they had the accents of the city, having acquired the language there. The baker seemed to accept them, but he was suspicious of their plan to travel on to the castle.

"I've not seen that old man who lives there," he said, "but he sends his servant down for supplies. If you ask me, it was a bad idea, him coming back to that castle. Better to leave well enough alone."

Caleb looked at him quizzically, but before he could frame a suitable question, the baker's wife chimed in, "The village has enough troubles with werewolves prowling and the things that live in the Petrosna Caves." She

shuddered, not wanting to name her fears. “And Castle Argehezi as well, home to...”

“Hush, woman!” her husband said sharply. “No need to bring up the past.” He shook his head in trepidation. “These men will see for themselves soon enough.” He seemed to consider them insane but harmless. If they wanted to go and get themselves killed, that was their own business. He gave them beds for the night, and shared what he knew about how to find the path to the castle on an old, water-stained map.

Weak sunlight cast feeble shadows in the village square as they set out the next morning. Caleb had held his tongue while they packed and said their goodbyes to the baker and his wife. He didn’t say anything as they crossed the little square in the village, the locals silently staring at the crazy foreigners. By the time the village was well behind them, hidden in the misty folds of its alpine valley, the words in Caleb’s mouth were a river about to overflow its banks, burst the dam, and drown everything in its path.

“Prof—Jonathan,” he said with forced calm, trying to squelch his mounting exasperation and irritation. The rain had ebbed to a light drizzle, and they had stopped to rest by the side of the track. As they shared some of the bread the baker had given to them, Caleb demanded answers. “It’s time you told me where we’re going. Every time I’ve asked, you’ve changed the subject or told me to wait. I’m not taking another step toward that castle until I know what I’m in for.”

With just the two of them under the broody sky, Professor Hermann finally allowed himself to speak.

“You might well wonder why I asked you to be my traveling companion this summer,” he began.

Caleb chortled at the understatement, but simply nodded his woolswathed head, afraid that anything he might say would make the old man clam up once more.

“I have observed you,” the old man continued, “with the other students and have noted how well you’ve done in my classes. I observed a few other things as well. How you are invariably absent the day after the full moon, for example, and how you always return with your face and hands covered with scratches.”

“I go hiking,” Caleb responded in his best tone of scientific scorn.

“Yes, yes,” murmured Hermann as if it scarcely mattered. “You in turn may have wondered what I am doing teaching at a place like MIT.”

This was a hard question to answer politely. Even as a freshman, Caleb had heard all the stories. “You don’t do research,” he replied cautiously, “which is a bit odd.”

“Yes. The younger faculty consider me quite beneath their notice.” Hermann laughed faintly, eyes twinkling. “I earned my position in a less conventional way: I did a favor for the dean, and was rewarded with a permanent lectureship. You wouldn’t happen to recall the name of the previous Dean of Science, by chance?”

Caleb was about to reply that he didn’t, but the name sprang unbidden to his mind, the way all Romanian proper nouns now did. “Of course, Dean Arghezi—Castle Arghezi? Our old dean is the one who...?” He stopped himself, afraid of being disrespectful.

Every MIT physics student knew the rumors and fanciful tales about Dean Arghezi, and the drama surrounding his last day was no exception. He was mysterious and weird and the students loved him, but the faculty had long balked at his eccentric behavior, and they had finally confronted him about an especially odd demand that they wear silver crucifixes at all times. Right in the middle of the fall term, he had stormed into the University president’s office, yelling that he’d had it, he quit. He’s rather return to Romania to hunt vampires than spend another moment in that abominable university. Since then, no administrator’s portrait was safe from being disfigured with capes, stakes, and fangs.

“But that was a joke, right?” Caleb persisted. “Dr. Arghezi didn’t actually move to Romania, did he?”

“Indeed he did,” Hermann replied, sounding pleased. “To do precisely as he promised. And now it is time for me to do him another favor.”

“The favor you did him involved a vampire?” Caleb had to swallow a snort of derisive laughter.

“Unlike most people,” Hermann continued placidly, “you might not be surprised to learn that there are and always have been vampires in academia. It’s the late hours and the exposure to an ever-changing stream of the young and naïve that attracts them, I suppose. This particular vampire caused some problems in the upper administration when he began to, er, recruit, if you know what I mean.”

“Is that what you wanted me for?” Caleb realized, sarcasm creeping into his voice. “Caleb O’Connor, vampire killer?”

Hermann was unfazed. “Did you know that the blood of a werewolf is toxic to vampires? Drives them mad, in fact.”

“I’ve never even seen—I mean I wouldn’t even recognize—” Caleb stopped, aware of the magnitude of the lie he was about to tell. How many hours had he and his friends spent talking about hunting vampires in Maine? It had been a way to occupy rainy afternoons—but except for Toby, none of them had actually done it.

Caleb stalked away from the old man, suddenly unable to look him in the face. The tormenting thoughts returned: If only he’d made Toby see sense, if only he’d been there with him, instead of holed up in his poky basement apartment in Cambridge, doing calculus problems, if only....

Caleb pivoted to face Jonathan Hermann. “Why would I want anything to do with vampires? One of my best friends died, and another took the blame for maybe letting out a vampire. It was never proved, but he was executed by a gang of fake wizards because of it.”

“Ah, so that’s what happened? Now I understand, I think. Those wizards believed they were protecting their Community.” Professor Hermann sighed and stood, gripping his walking stick for balance. “Protecting all of us against an abomination, a soulless evil that fled these very mountains to seek its fortune in the New World.”

Caleb shivered, hoping the old man was telling him a tall tale. “And I suppose you hunted down this...thing?”

“Not I,” Hermann said mildly. “I heard about the vampire after it had been sealed up—for good, they thought at the time. But I’ve hunted a few in my younger days.”

Caleb couldn’t suppress a guffaw. “And that’s why MIT hired you to be a monster hunter?”

“Every school should have one.” With a wry smile, Hermann reached into his cloak and pulled out a handwritten note. “Read this.”

Caleb unfolded the letter, then read quickly as the paper began to dissolve in the rain.

*My dearest friend Jonathan,  
I write in haste, although I do not wish to neglect inquiring after your health and fortunes. I seek someone to assist me in the dangerous work of keeping the home of my family secure. I believe you know the skills that will be of most use to me. Alas that the best schools in Romania are long closed! If you could perhaps make*

*discreet inquiries with some of my old colleagues, I would be eternally grateful. I hope that they may know of some suitable candidate. Payment will not be an issue. I hope to receive your reply promptly, as my need is great.*

*Yours,  
Alexandru Aughezi*

Caleb thrust the note back at Hermann as though it were a hot poker. “You’re not thinking that I could—what do you know about my ‘skills’?”

“I have taught many scientists and I have trained many wizards,” Hermann replied mildly, allowing the paper to fall apart in his hands and scatter to the wind. “In either case, many of them were more foolish than you appear to be.”



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## 4. Interview with a Vampire-Hunter

**C**ASTLE ARGHEZI APPEARED AT first sight to be just another outcropping of the mountains, made of blocks of the same gray stone and draped in wisps of last winter's snowdrifts. Yet as it came into view, there was a regularity, a purposefulness, that marked it as a work of humans. A single tower rose above the two-story wall surrounding the castle, like an arm raised up to puncture the heavens. They could see no more than that until they passed through the massive iron gates.

Before they could call out or ring a bell, a dour man opened the gates for them. Although Professor Hermann called him by name and addressed him in Romanian, Michael said little as he led them across a muddy yard to the main building. The building also had two stories, although the windows of the upper floor were dark. A vaulted roof still flecked with snow, suggested a large hall in the center of the building,

Michael employed a series of gestures incomprehensible to Caleb to open a massive oak door and usher them into a cold stone hall. A few smoky torches lit the way to a broad stone staircase curving up into darkness. Michael took their packs, but advised them tersely to leave their coats on until they reached the Great Hall. They followed him there, accompanied only by the clipped sounds of their boots on the hard stone.

After the dimly lit corridors, the Great Hall was an explosion of color and warmth. Caleb blinked, stopping to let his eyes adjust and to cope with the rush of smells assaulting his half-frozen nose. The hall had a high vaulted ceiling crisscrossed with massive beams, which cast twisted shadows upward. Rugs in maroon and white lay scattered on the stone floor. Tapestries covered

the walls with swirls of greens, browns, and reds, giving relief from the endless gray stone. There was little furniture in evidence—an enormous wooden table, half a dozen chairs of different sizes and shapes, a couple of smaller low tables. The decorations were dwarfed by the high ceiling suspended above the uncertain and unquantifiable darkness.

Judging from the odors, this room served as a kitchen for the castle. Caleb's eyes (and nose) were drawn to a huge stone fireplace at the far end of the hall. The tall man standing before it when they entered swiftly turned and strode the length of room, a smile of greeting on his long, angular face. He wore a cloak of deep red that swirled about his heels as he walked.

"Jonathan!" he cried out in English, seizing his friend's hands and then embracing him warmly. "You decided to pay me a visit. Excellent! I apologize for my lack of response to your letters. We have had certain meteorological conditions that impeded all of our usual mechanisms of communication, ordinary and magical alike. But I am pleased that you came. Things will be easier to explain in person. . . . Oh, Jonathan! It is good to be home. One can't go back entirely. . . . but I had missed this place, and it is my home once again." His English was dramatic but flawless.

Alexandru Arghezi stood a head taller than Caleb, made even taller by his thick black hair, graying at the sides. His face was hard, although it softened when he smiled, as he did now. Dark glittering eyes took in Hermann and his young companion as he helped them off with their coats, hats, and gloves. Michael appeared as if from thin air to help take off their muddy boots, and then disappeared with the whole sodden lot as silently as he'd appeared.

Arghezi fixed his gaze on Caleb, staring at him intently for a moment, which prompted Jonathan to say, "Alec, may I present—" he stopped and began again, this time in Romanian. "This is Caleb O'Connor."

"For thirty years you've been telling me that you would learn my language, Jonathan. I see that it took extreme measures to make that happen." Alexandru laughed and patted his old friend on the shoulder. The smile stayed on his lips as he turned to Caleb and shook his hand, but the dark eyes were calculating and mirthless. "You must be a scholar, if my friend Professor Hermann recommends you."

Caleb stood awkwardly, embarrassed by the description, since he fervently wanted to leave behind scholarship and all it represented. Not wanting to reveal his discomfort, he met the man's probing gaze and answered in Romanian, "School is over for me. I am. . . looking for another line of work."

Alexandru barked a sharp laugh and dropped Caleb's hand. Clapping both guests on the back, he said, "Come, enjoy the fire. I know you must be chilled."

All three sat at the massive wooden table, bathed in firelight. As Mihail (as he was called in Romanian) served dinner, the two old friends talked of people and events unfamiliar to Caleb. Alexandru explained that Mihail had been a devoted Argezi servant for decades, and he had even accompanied Alexandru to America to look after him. Now Mihail cooked for him and tended to the sheep, goats, and chickens they kept in the spacious stable all winter long.

Mihail was an excellent cook, and Caleb was ravenous. He wolfed down second and third helpings of mutton stew while the two old men chattered. As he listened to Alexandru's stories, Caleb gazed around the enormous room. The castle was almost four hundred years old, occupied by the Argezi family for over three hundred of those years. The murky recesses of the rafters reminded Caleb of the great dome at MIT. He wasn't sure why, since the ceiling of the grand entrance to campus was nothing like the vault above him. Perhaps it was the feeling of being dwarfed by the high, curved ceiling that had been built, brick by brick, by the hands of men, and yet was grander and more permanent than the life of any one individual.

During the meal, Professor Hermann grew less animated. The days of trudging in the chill air had caught up with him, and he sneezed and coughed violently while trying to hold up his end of the conversation with his old friend. After dinner, the two travelers sank into high-backed chairs pulled around the fire in a semicircle. The stone mantelpiece loomed in front of them, taller even than Alexandru, who stood next to it as he poured them each a glass of wine.

"The wine cellars here were untouched during my absence." He held the decanter up, and firelight streamed through the blood-red wine. "Although many creatures inhabited the castle, none had the slightest taste for wine. I am quite grateful for that. This 1927 Cockburn would be worth at least five hundred dollars in Boston."

Caleb, who avoided drinking parties and knew nothing of wine, examined the ruby depths of his glass. He couldn't conceive of paying as much money for the contents of a bottle as he had for his car, but he knew that the wine was fragrant and musty at the same time. To his left, Hermann had barely touched his glass; he had fallen asleep in the lumpy leather armchair, the firelight giving his face a fevered look.

“You are—or were—a student in astrophysics, Caleb,” Alexandru remarked.

“What?” Caleb had drifted off, entranced by the firelight and unaware of the strength of the wine and the depth of his own exhaustion. “Yes, that’s right. Jonathan must have told you,” he finished uncertainly.

Alexandru dismissed this with an elegant wave of his hand. “Clovis told me of your plans to go to MIT before I left the States.”

“My guardian? You know him?”

How could he have been so naïve as to think that Alexandru wouldn’t have known Clovis Fintonclyde? The man had entertained visitors from all over the world when Caleb was a boy: Native American shamans, priestesses of voodoo from the Caribbean, mystics who’d arrive heavily cloaked, speaking languages that Caleb couldn’t identify.

“Oh, I know him very well indeed. We have...collaborated...It is astrophysics that protects this castle, you know. The power of Jupiter, Saturn, and the moon combine to create wards against monsters, humans, even animals. The cow barn is constructed entirely from a moonward.” Alexandru paused, as if ready to say more, and then shook his head. Instead of continuing, he leaned over and poured more wine into Caleb’s glass, then set the decanter down. He took a seat next to the fire in a tall wooden chair with ornately carved back and arms.

“I wonder,” Alexandru pondered, “why an adoptee of Fintonclyde’s, who I assume has some of the old wizard’s talents and inclinations, decides to depart suddenly with no notice to the Community. And now you are here to seek, as you say, another line of work...” In the light of the fire his eyes gleamed as he regarded his guest.

Caleb wondered whether Alexandru had any inkling of what he had brought into the castle that night. The heady wine seemed to have stolen away his normal inhibitions, or perhaps saying it in a foreign language blunted the impact. Either way, he explained, “I wished to leave school, America, everything because Fintonclyde and his cronies blamed my best friend for something he didn’t do. I was not even allowed to testify at the trial because I am a werewolf.”

Alexandru Arghezi said nothing; only a faint narrowing of his eyes betrayed any emotion in his otherwise unreadable face. From behind Caleb, came a muffled cry and the sound of glass shattering.

Mihail, who had been clearing the table, had dropped a wineglass on the

stone floor. In confusion, Caleb turned to see a look of terror and revulsion on the servant's face, a look he knew well and often saw in his troubled dreams.

"That will do, Mihail," Arghezi commanded sharply. With evident concern, he softened his tone and said, "I will clean up the rest. Please take Mr. Hermann to his bed."

The servant approached cautiously, eyeing Caleb as if he might leap up and bite at any moment. Mihail's face was now an emotionless mask, the trepidation pushed beneath the surface like fish under the ice of a winter pond. Keeping as far from Caleb as could, he gently helped Hermann to his feet and supported the stumbling old man out of the hall. Only when the footsteps were completely gone did Alexandru speak again.

"You must forgive Mihail. Werewolves killed both his parents when he was six years old. He has been with our family ever since." His tone was concerned, but otherwise casual, which both surprised and confused Caleb. "Returning here was not pleasant for him."

Caleb realized he was gripping his fragile wineglass tightly, and hastily set it down. He did not know what to say. He felt at once the bitter anger of Mihail's rejection alongside his own memories of being bitten as a small child. The event stood out clearly in his mind, though he had trouble recalling the terror he must have felt.

"Near Amherst, yes?" Alexandru asked thoughtfully, fingertips together at his chin.

Stammering slightly, Caleb told him the name of the little town where he and his parents had lived. "It was over thirteen years ago, when...I was only four. I remember very little."

"Werewolves are not common in New England, not at all. Thirteen years ago...let me think. Ah, Crispin Whitehead, that was the name."

No words could express the confusion Caleb felt at that moment. What was Alexandru saying? He knew the werewolf responsible? Blindly he closed his hand around the glass next to his chair and brought it to his lips, choking on the strong, sweet wine.

"How? You knew—?" he croaked finally.

"We had a federally funded program to track many creatures, including werewolves," came the matter-of-fact reply. "Your government at work, eh? Of course, the general public knew nothing about the program...or the creatures we were tracking. There were never that many on the East Coast, and they tended to be rather territorial. Whitehead was a difficult case. Hmmm.

Emigrated from Britain—kicked out is more like it. He was well spoken, a good chess player, but quite without remorse. He was warned, but...”

“And what happened to him?” asked Caleb timidly, simultaneously fearing and hoping that he already knew the answer. Although the wolf had changed his life so profoundly, he remembered him with something akin to sympathy, somewhere in that corner of his mind where emotions and smells blended. A male, middle-aged... in some ways his father.

Alexandru sighed, releasing his hands in a gesture of futility. “I caught him, caught him in the act. He killed a family of three in the Berkshires. He had been warned, after all.”

There was silence, punctuated only by the crackle of the fire. Caleb did not have to ask for further details.

“Clovis Fintonclyde took you in a couple of years later,” continued Alexandru. “Quite extraordinary.”

“As far as I know, I am the only—the only one of us that he...” Caleb astonished himself by being able to speak at all.

Alexandru rose and paced in front of the fire with his hands clasped behind his back. Caleb had quite given up trying to understand his host. “Not the first that he took in, but certainly the first he attempted to civilize. I was opposed to his little experiment at first, so much so that Clovis and I did not speak for almost ten years. And yet it could prove useful...” He seemed to be speaking to himself more than having a conversation. Abruptly he turned to face Caleb, still clenching his wineglass.

“You are not afraid of other werewolves, I take it?”

“I have never met another one since I was bitten,” Caleb confessed, “but I don’t suppose I would be afraid.”

“And vampires? I doubt you’ve met any of those,” Alexandru stated harshly.

“Some people say that a vampire caused my two best friends’ deaths—” Caleb began, but was cut short by a glare from Alexandru telling him to get to the point. “But no. I was not there.”

The fire filled in the silence that lengthened between them with a soft hissing. When Caleb did not elaborate, Arghezi raised an elegant eyebrow and continued. “In the West, they talk about vampires and Transylvania and it’s a joke. I heard it so often from bureaucrats and even wizards who should know better. But here it is nothing to laugh about. The Undead call to us... and their song is hard to resist.” He sank back into his chair and propped his chin on one hand, staring fixedly at Caleb. “Vampires drove my family out of

this castle fifty years ago. They occupied it for many years, according to people in the village...no one knows how long. By the time I returned last year, they were gone...they'd been gone for fifteen or twenty years." He did not sound pleased to have missed them, either. "But I will find them."

Caleb began to rouse himself from the torpor of the wine. "Your letter said that you needed help. Is this what you meant, driving vampires from the castle?"

"The castle is quite secure," rumbled Alexandru proudly. "Apart from the planetary wards, traps are set here and there, as well. No—vampires cannot return to this castle, not while I am master of it. But, outside the castle, things are still very bad. For three hundred years, my family has been responsible for keeping this area of the mountains safe. The people in the village below live in fear and that is not right. I have a responsibility to them as well as to myself." He sighed deeply and continued, "But I am not a young man any more, Caleb. I cannot do this alone."

"You would trust a werewolf?" Caleb asked.

"Clovis Fintonclyde trusted you."

Caleb stared down into his wine again, thinking of another question that had nagged him since he had heard it from Hermann "Is it true that vampires don't—that the blood of...of my kind is harmful to them?"

The older wizard laughed sharply. "Yes. Blood from most any mammal sustains vampires. But the blood of a werewolf gives them a kind of dementia, a bit like rabies. They foam at the mouth and are rendered completely insane, sometimes for years. Around here, I expect that vampires have learned to avoid the local werewolf population."

"And if a werewolf is bitten by a vampire?" asked Caleb hesitantly.

Alexandru shrugged. "No vampire will bite you more than once, and it takes three bites before the victim becomes one himself." He grew thoughtful. "I am assuming, of course, that the three-bite rule applies to werewolves. Some say that you become vampires more easily than do ordinary mortals..."

This was finally too much for Caleb, who found that the room began to spin slowly, even though he hadn't moved from his chair. He got to his feet unsteadily, saying, "I'm not sure that I—" He stopped and clutched the chair. Alexandru rose swiftly and took one arm, guiding him out of the hall. Once out of the oppressive heat and flickering firelight, Caleb's head cleared and the chill of the stone passageways refreshed him.

He had no idea where they were going. His host guided him through the drafty entrance hall and into a wide corridor. As they shuffled slowly, Alexandru raised his hand and conjured a bobbing ball of cool yellow flame that floated several feet in front of them. They were surrounded on both sides by ornate frames, each with a little gold plaque glinting on the bottom proclaiming the name of an Arghezi ancestor. As they traversed the long, dark passageway, Caleb noticed that the subjects of the portraits became more modern in appearance and the dates on the plaques more recent. Near the end, his eye caught Alexandru's name along with another: *Alexandru and Mircea Arghezi*, read the gold rectangle. Caleb stopped and looked at the grim and unsmiling younger version of his host next to a younger boy who, even under the layer of grime over the oils, looked beautiful.

Alexandru tugged at Caleb's arm sharply. "Come. You should be in bed."

The final portrait puzzled Caleb the most, but Alexandru hurried him off without giving him a chance to ask questions. The carved gold frame held only charred shreds of canvas, with no hint of what the portrait had once been like. *Ana Maria Arghezi*, read the plaque.