

At the end of the hall to the left, beyond the living room, Elizabeth opened another door. "Reginald's library," she said.

Despite the light fixture at the top of the high ceiling, the room was dim and rather dreary with its reddish brown walls and green velvet drapes over the windows. A dark wooden desk with a high-backed brown leather chair stood in the centre of the floor, facing the door, and volumes of books lined the entire wall behind it, on either side of the fireplace. As Garnet became accustomed to the dark surroundings, she noticed an interesting carving in the centre of the mahogany mantel of a young man playing the harp, and above, on the mantelpiece, a hand-painted clock with silver hands.

"Except for a few changes, it's nearly the way Reginald left it," Elizabeth said. "I actually don't come in here very often. Something about this room has always made me feel uncomfortable. Maybe it's because Reginald used to spend so much time in here." Elizabeth looked up at the mirror above the mantelpiece. "There used to be a different mirror here. It was so tarnished you could hardly see yourself in it. I changed it years ago when I was trying to keep the house nice for Albert's return."

As Garnet looked at the mirror, the reflection of another face unexpectedly caught her attention. She turned her head and was drawn to a life-sized portrait that hung on the wall behind her. She went to stand before it.

In front of a midnight-blue background sat a beautiful young woman painted in tones so luminous she appeared almost lifelike. Light somehow seemed to emanate from the woman herself so that her skin glowed, and Garnet had to resist the urge to reach up and touch the canvas. Her hair was pulled back from her face, allowing coppery curls to spill onto her white shoulders. Her expression was serene, with lips parted like a rosebud about to open. In the crook of her right arm she held a spray of waxen white lilies. Her elegant gown, the same colour as her round, violet eyes, was adorned with just a fringe of beadwork and lace under the scooped neckline. And resting under her creamy white neck was a blue sapphire, the size of a small egg, with alternating diamonds and sapphires travelling up the length of the chain. Dangling from her earlobes were smaller sapphires surrounded by diamonds, and on her left hand, a ring — the same one Garnet had noticed Elizabeth wearing the day before.

Elizabeth came to stand next to Garnet. "Sofia Tate. Albert's mother. A shame I never met the woman. She died when Albert was just a baby. He looked a lot like her with the red curls. A lovely portrait, I think. Perhaps even a little intriguing. Somehow, she seems to be watching."

Garnet felt a chill run down her spine. She could almost *feel* her watching. Her eyes rested on the sapphire pendant. "Are those the jewels you mentioned?"

Elizabeth nodded. "Yes, but not the ring. It's not part of the original set. Albert gave it to me for our engagement but I never saw the necklace or earrings. Do you see this tiny sparkle?" she asked, pointing to the pendant in the picture.

Garnet nodded.

"I have always thought this detail to be interesting. The artist captured the reflection of light on the sapphire as a miniature shining star. I once read that a sapphire refuses to shine if worn by the wicked or impure. It is a symbol of truth, sincerity, and faithfulness, and its rays represent faith, hope, and destiny. They used to believe that the sapphire not only had healing powers, but that it would attract divine favour and protect the wearer from harm."

Garnet was silent for a moment as she thought about Elizabeth's words, then asked, "Why did you call the jewels 'royal'?"

"Well, that is a long story," Elizabeth replied. "Perhaps we should sit in the living room where it's more comfortable."