The Lustre of Lost Things

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Chapter One

Somewhere in the Fourteenth Street subway station there is a statue of a little bronze man who waits for a train that never comes. I looked forward to stopping by his bench, so that I could take the seat next to him and inspect my reflection in his shiny bald head. My mom, Lucy Lavender, always said that I was just like my dad, Walter Lavender Sr. – the same eyes and patience for listening, and that gentle way of curiosity and kindness. But no matter what surface I looked in and how hard I studied my features, I saw only my own face, bland and uncomplicated, and it was that, along with my silence, that others attributed to the dumbness of a slow, amiable boy.

I did not mind, mostly, because then I was free to observe. Without the distractions of speaking and being noticed, I could listen more closely to what people said to each other and to themselves. I could watch more carefully as the skin of the world glided and stretched, and when I was open and attentive enough, I caught glimmers of the underlying bones and gears and my understanding of the secret workings of life sharpened.

In kindergarten, the teacher read aloud the story of Helen

Keller and had us sit in the dark until our ears tingled, our fingers too, and we smelled and heard things we had overlooked. I wondered if that was what happened to me – the silence embedding itself into the crevices of my brain, forming a singular sense that reached into the borderland between the real and the imagined to discern the echoes of the imperceptible.

My whole life, my mouth had been shut and my eyes wide open, and the deeper and darker my silence became, the more I began to sense outside of it – traces of light, shifts in matter, changing undercurrents. As I grew older and it became clear to me that Lucy didn't perceive what I perceived, it was already just another part of me, and there was nothing so incredible about that.

The things I noticed were small and fleeting, easy to miss – scratches or flourishes in reality, clues that pointed the way to the larger truths buried beneath the surface, like the molten ripple along the base of a vase of lilies in danger of tipping over or, when it came to people, the disappointed hiss of something doused before it could be said. Later, at Lucy's suggestion, I began recording these truths in my notebook, so that my mind did not turn into a prison for my thoughts.

"Write down the things you pick up that the rest of us miss," she said. "That way, you won't forget a single one, and one day, you can tell me everything."

My notebook was my companion before I found Milton. It became a part of who I was – an observer, a witness. When I noticed a small detail about a person and jotted it down, I had a feeling that I was speaking and an ear was listening.

Sometimes, though, I looked down at my handwriting – unreadable to anyone who wasn't me, the letters distorted and toppling over like towers of blocks – and a bolt of rage ripped through me because these thoughts did not matter; I could not communicate them to anyone. I was trapped in my role as an observer, separated from everyone else and unable to be a part of the story.

That changed a few weeks before I turned seven. I learned that I could do *something* – that my ability to see around corners to flashes of the truth made me better at finding things. It first happened when a customer finished paying for her strawberry cheesecake profiteroles, and while Lucy printed the receipt, the woman touched her ear and discovered that her diamond earring was missing.

I hadn't yet devised my rules for finding but that time the telltale sign was an easy one to spot. As Lucy hurried around the counter and the woman crouched to sweep the floor, I noticed a delicate strand of silver trickling down her arm – a sign that she seemed to look right through. I tracked the silvery strand to where it stopped and reached forward to pluck the diamond earring caught in her sweater, and that was the beginning.

The next time I passed a flyer for a pair of missing sunglasses, I found myself lingering, copying down the information in my notebook. Soon, it wasn't just the cases that came to me by accident; I scoured the city for flyers and posted flyers of my own – LOST SOMETHING? COME TO THE LAVENDERS – and I jumped in when I saw someone searching on the subway or in the streets or in the shop.

I felt compelled to help, because I knew what it was like

to lose something too. Walter Lavender Sr. had been lost my entire life; he disappeared while co-piloting a flight en route to Bombay, and searchers toiled through the winter and into the spring, looking for the missing aircraft. They couldn't find any signs of it, or him – not by any rules of seeking and finding. Eventually that flight was pronounced his last, and he dissolved into the gray mists of the Arabian Sea.

Three days after Lucy said farewell to him she said hello to me, her heart full to bursting and the taste of tears in her mouth. I cried rarely and slept often and before Lucy knew it, I was five months old and the shop sign – wooden, smallish – went up, and it said, THE LAVENDERS, each letter gleaming a slow, rich chocolate brown. At the bottom, gold script winked in the sun like polished pennies, and it said, *little things desserterie*.

That first afternoon, Lucy propped the door open and planted her feet in the doorway, smiling bravely as she waited. This was the shop she'd dreamed up with Walter Lavender Sr., the shop she'd opened with every last cent from their savings and the settlement, and as she hiked me higher on her hip, she must have thought, with a hope that felt as crushing as desperation, that this might be a new beginning.

For me, that was the start of everything: the two of us in the door frame, the empty shop beyond. My eyes were gray pools, searching even then, my toes curled into tiny question marks. Perhaps I was still keeping an eye out for the namesake I'd never met, long after everyone else had given up.

Over the years, Lucy told me stories of Walter Lavender Sr. and I gulped them down whole like grapes, one by one, but there was one I savored most because it felt more like a

memory than a story, like it had been carried with me from one world to the next – a vivid split-second impression of the heavens churning and constellations turning and I am swirling, kicking, and a deep voice rumbles across my sky and my swirling slows so that I can listen. It was the last story he told to Lucy, to me, before leaving on that flight, and I asked Lucy to recount it over and over.

Once upon a time, there was a boy who never imagined he could fly very far. He lived close to here, across the East River, in a tenement over the subway tracks next to a pawnshop and a liquor store. Every day after dinner he went down to a spot on the beach, and one day someone else happened to be there first.

The woman reminded the boy of a wild mermaid, lounging there with crystals of salt and seaweed tangled in her hair, and although she wasn't, that's what she became in his recollections in the years to come. He minded his own business at first, walking until the Atlantic touched his toes and he couldn't go any farther.

The mermaid watched him looking out over the waves and sketched a picture of him, not as he was but as she saw that he could be. She called him over and he said he had no money. She framed the picture and gave it to him as a gift, that little picture of a plane winging over the water, and in the little window of the little plane was a boy with chipmunk cheeks from smiling.

Before, he'd felt trapped in a life that was not meant for him. But in those wings, he saw a way to escape. Ever after, when he walked from his home to the beach and stopped at the water's edge, instead of seeing an end, he saw how there could be a beginning.

The boy grew older and when he left home to follow his dream of flying, it felt like he was arriving instead, into a place that was all his own. He went on to journey across many lands and oceans and mountains, and he wanted to thank the mermaid but couldn't find her again, and later he lost the portrait she drew to inspire him. But he never forgot about the power of an act of kindness to change someone's life.

"So, little guy, that's it for now," he had told me in Lucy's belly. "I have to go, but don't you forget it's only for a little while. Do you know that airports have beacons, and you can see them from incredible distances? I'll look for the light to find my way back, and before you know it, I'll be here to meet you. Cross my heart, so don't be sad."

I hadn't yet found traces of him in my reflection or anywhere else out there, but I had read that the world was full of strange and miraculous things – seas that burned and healed your sores, and springs that bubbled and steamed in glaciers, and trees that twisted and walked on water. Since there was no evidence and no one knew for certain what had happened to Walter Lavender Sr., I made a light of my own, a beacon for him to follow home. I used a mason jar, and I

put it in the window and refilled the oil and replaced the wick and tended to the flame, even as the days became years.

But I also prepared myself for the other way his story could end, where he could no longer return and knock on the door. I monitored the paper and the mailbox for new developments, and I also reread old reports and gathered stories about him from Lucy, collecting as much information as I could and poring over it for clues on where to look and what to look for. That way, I would be able to recognize the sign when I saw it – the one that would mean he was not returning.

Lost things could be found; Walter Lavender Sr. did not just disappear, and until I knew for certain what had happened to him, he was at once searching for the way back and already gone.

Over the years, when he did not return and I did not find any clues that pointed to him, I began to wonder whether he did not want to be found. Maybe he was embarrassed of me, because I was not like him and also not like most people who talked without thinking, just opening their mouths to release a volley of words like arrows. All I could do was hope that wasn't it – that he knew I was learning the one lesson he left me, about kindness and changing lives.

For Lucy, the months after opening the shop were even worse than the months after Walter Lavender Sr.'s disappearance. The emptiness around her seemed to grow large and larger still – the floor echoing, the ceiling cavernous – and a slow fall turned into a winter that saw few holiday sales, just record-breaking low temperatures

and relentless snowfall. The doors froze over and ice crystals formed on Lucy's scarf like a bitter beard as she shoveled the sidewalk and scraped the shop windows, and in our apartment upstairs she swaddled me in blankets and put on both of her coats and lowered the heat to get by, and we waited for the storm to pass.

Then, one very late night in January, a stranger stumbled upon our doorstep.

That was where Lucy always started the story of the shop's new beginning, when she led new customers through the tour of the shop. In the winter dark, some way from midnight and morning, she woke and saw that it was snowing.

She approached the window and hovered over the hushed street, hardly daring to make a sound for fear of shattering something important. Her breath fogged the glass. She cleared it with a swipe of her hand and noticed a shadow moving under the shop awning.

She pressed her forehead against the window and felt the cold bite as she realized that the shadow was a woman, trying to build a trash-bag shelter around a footstool piled with canvases. A gust of wind rattled the windowpane, tipping over the canvases below, and the woman lumbered after them as they slid across the black ice, her braid swaying with the movement. She knelt to pick up the last canvas and a taxi turned onto the street, its headlights sweeping low across her so that Lucy caught a glimpse of the drawing.

A plane, coasting over the waves.

Lucy's breath seemed to freeze and expand in her chest. She had never seen the portrait from Walter Lavender Sr.'s story; it had been lost a long time ago, but she thought it

would probably look just like that. The water rippled with reflected light, casting a glare across the plane's windshield – or it could've been the pilot's smile, shining bright as the sun.

The headlights faded and the window fogged over again and Lucy's exhaustion returned, clouding her mind, and she decided to let it be. I stirred and she hummed "Auld Lang Syne" until I quieted. I went back to sleep but she could not. She was thinking about Walter Lavender Sr. and the story that meant so much to him, about how he found his wings and the mermaid he didn't get a chance to thank.

His mermaid was an artist too, and Brighton Beach was just forty minutes away on the B train. Lucy kept returning to the lost portrait and thinking, *What if that's her?*, and thinking again, *That's not possible*, and then she reconsidered that too, and thought, *Why not?* – and what did it matter, really, if it was or was not, now that she had seen?

When she returned to the window, she noticed how the woman's braid, long and heavy, swung as she worked. To Lucy, it looked just like a fish tail.

She took me down to the shop and turned on the lights and opened the door, and a honeyed light poured out onto the sidewalk.

"There's room for three," Lucy said in invitation, but the woman hesitated, not quite ready to trust her good fortune.

So Lucy left the door open and carried me into the kitchen. With her one free hand she melted dark chocolate in a saucepan and whisked in milk and cornstarch, and over the slow simmer and the hush of blue flame she heard a door shutting, a chair scraping, and she let out a breath. When the hot chocolate was thick enough to coat the back of a spoon,

she added a pinch of salt and a dash of vanilla, and then she joined the woman at the front of the shop.

They sat at a table together and drank from bowl-cups and watched the blizzard blow through the emptied streets. The hot chocolate seemed to course through Lucy's arms and surely the woman's too, until their veins grew strong and thick as vines and it was good to be there and alive, to see the ruthless beauty of the night freezing over into a stark dawn.

That day there were no customers, and Lucy was glad for the company even though the woman didn't speak as she sketched and smudged in a leather book. At closing time, she gave Lucy the book, and at the sight of the first page, Lucy's heart stirred and the hairs on the back of her neck stood straight up. She closed the book and said, "This is too much," but the woman told Lucy to take it. It was a gift. It was a story – the woman's own, that she did not want to go untold.

Lucy turned the pages, moved, and by the time she looked up to thank the woman, she had slipped out without a word. That moment would stay with Lucy: the woman looking up to reveal her face, her eyes incandescent in the haze of twilight, and the book in her outstretched hand.

Lucy put the book on a shelf and locked up the shop, and the next day she rose before dawn to mix and flavor her batters in the usual way, unaware that the shop had changed. It didn't take long, though; she checked the first batches and all thoughts of testing the centers and trimming the edges fled because what she saw was unbelievable – unmistakable.

The shop came alive that very morning. The desserts yawned awake after they baked or rested, as if the ovens and refrigerators had sighed hot and cold and breathed life into them except it was the Book driving the magic, assuming its place at the heart of the shop, at the center of my world.

"Then," Lucy liked to tell her enraptured audiences, "like flicking on a switch, people started coming in. The ones who could look past the surface and see a little magic."

Customers talked and word spread, but people also had their routines and their lists and the Herculean weight of a hundred worries and fears bearing down on their shoulders, so not everyone came looking, and not everyone who looked found the shop, and not everyone who found the shop had been looking.

The initial finding was a mystifying thing. Neither of us could decipher what sort of logic the shop followed; all I knew for sure was that sometimes, when a particular person came by and they were looking and discovering and probably a little hungry, the shop decided that it wanted to be found. Before signing the lease, Lucy learned from the landlord – an energetic man with ink-stained hands and a hairy face – that the building had been around since the nineteenth century, protecting the secrets of smugglers and lovers and underground protesters, and it made sense to me that the shop would understand that in order to survive, it would need to know how to hide and how to be found.

The shopfront was small and plain, a solid gray-blue that your eyes wanted to skip past. But on the right day, when you finally saw it, you'd step through the door and take in the brass trimmings and the saucer chandeliers, the

black-and-white checkered tiles and the gleaming glass cases, and you would be transported.

Inside the shop, it smelled like whipped butter and light and sugar, and a happy breeze seemed always to be dancing through. Dazzling mirrored displays encased little desserts like gems, and dark polished surfaces were offset by battered accents collected by Lucy on her early travels with Walter Lavender Sr., here a dappled giraffe carved from a jacaranda tree in South Africa, there an embroidered scroll arrayed with the colors of Tibetan folklore.

But the most extraordinary thing was that something happened in the slice of time when the vols-au-vent baked in the oven or waited to be dressed, because when they appeared finally in the displays, stuffed with fig mascarpone cheese and outfitted with chocolate whiskers and ears and tails – before they were chosen and eaten, the undersized treats sniffed endearingly at each other and squeaked and sometimes stood on their hind legs and bounced.

It wasn't just the mice, either, that awoke with distinct personalities. There were lime custard tartlets topped with sour cream that struck poses in the mirror behind the display, admiring their pleated key lime skirts, and there were amaretti biscuits that hovered over whirlpool coffee cups and every so often dipped themselves enticingly into the ever-steaming liquid, and pear and ginger upside-down cakes that flipped forward and back into layouts and tucks, and crispy rice squares that snapped and popped when they stretched lazily like cats.

There were rum-infused black-and-white penguin cookies that waddled and tipped over each other and competitive

chestnut tortes that galloped across the display and trampled the molasses pecan cinnamon rolls, which glided sedately along, and there were desserts with other unique qualities, too: pumpkin five-spice ice-cream bombes that didn't melt until you ate them and wedges of salted-butter country apple galette that trickled into your knotted muscles to relax them and towering squares of fizzy angel food cake that rendered you just a bit lighter and monogrammed petits fours that reminded you of the places you came from and lemon verbena chiffon cupcakes that freshened you up and chilled lychee puddings that slowed time and made you breathe deeper.

Naturally, our customers crowded around the desserts, drawn in by the lively displays, but they also gathered over the display near the window, which contained only an inconspicuous leather book – slim, with seven pages that were heavy and yellowing and loosening from the spine like old teeth.

It was *the* Book, the gift left for Lucy because of her kindness. Returning customers knew how important it was and that was why they gathered to look at it, displayed in its case, open to the first page: "It was a dark and stormy night," against a wintry hand-painted sky alive with wild stars and tumbling ribbons of light and whorls of wind and whimsy, and spread below it was the city, darkly alluring and diamond-sharp, made of steel and water and concrete, a labyrinth of streets and reflections and shadows that dared you, with each shifting, multiplying line, to look for an end.

Before I turned two, it was easy to believe that everything had worked out. Walter Lavender Sr. was not there, but

when I opened my eyes they were just like his, tracking closely the sounds of life – heeled footsteps approaching or the kettle whistling or the hinges squeaking. Yet something about me was different anyway. It was just emerging, barely noticeable.

There was no way for Lucy to peer into my brain, into the neon-bright streams winding through its passages, and pick out the sets of signals that twisted down deviating or truncated pathways, becoming lost and arriving at different times in my jaw and lips and tongue or never arriving at all.

The first pediatrician patted Lucy's hand and said, "Not to worry, dear. Even Einstein didn't talk until he was three."

The second pediatrician shrugged and said, "He's a late bloomer. Boys are like that, you know."

Months passed and I did not speak or even babble. The neurologist suggested autism and the preschool teacher said, "Give it time," and the developmental pediatrician said, "Intellectual disability." There were blood tests and brain scans and evaluations and checklists, and finally there was the speech pathologist saying, "Speech disorder – some standard speech therapy will do the trick."

So I started attending therapy sessions three times a week with ten other kids and a therapist who looked terrified and resigned at the same time.

"Fish," she would say, holding up a flash card.

Fish, I told myself, and the group chorused, "Fish," and I heard myself say, "Shh."

"Again," said the speech therapist.

Fish, I reminded myself, and the voice in my mind said, Fish, but in the same moment I heard, "Fih."

This was accompanied by the disembodied feeling of being torn in two, my mind humming underwater with a voice that was loud and close and *mine*, while hearing at the same instant the sounds that were flattened and shapeless – distant, *other*. My brain shouted, Fish, *FISH*, and the outside voice that was and was not mine honked, "Fuhhh."

Progress was slow, laborious, but at least it was there. One afternoon, after three years of silence and an ocean of lost words, I woke from a nap and somewhere in my brain, as signals flared and flew, one stream of signals banked and connected and I opened my mouth and gurgled, suddenly, "Dada?"

Lucy dropped the sugar corkscrew she was holding and let out a breath that lasted a long time.

Even with the apparent progress, the sporadic words, connections failed to come easily and saying nothing remained the easiest of all. The right diagnosis came eventually but by then I was eight, and comfortable in my silence. Dr Winkleberker looked young and distinguished, and I called her Doc because her full name was a series of jumbled vowels and consonants, impossible for me to say. She only had to interact with me for five minutes before she put her pen down and looked Lucy square in the eye and said, "He knows exactly what he wants to say, but his muscles aren't listening."

She explained that our brains formed pathways to transmit signals for everything we did, but for signals to be successfully sent and received, all the pathways involved had to be fully intact. When they were, talking happened seamlessly, unconsciously. But my pathways were deviant –

missed connections, short circuits – and so my muscles did not hear my brain, and they did not know how to produce the sounds I wanted.

She called it a motor speech disorder, and we learned that my group therapy sessions were good for children with stutters or lisps but not for me. Those were years that I could not get back, Doc said, but new pathways were constantly being formed and old ones rerouted as new connections were forged and strengthened through the right kind of repetition, so we should try, of course, and expect what was realistic and hope for the best.

Lucy tried to wait until we were home but halfway through the subway ride she found herself sinking in a slick of guilt, and she started to cry.

There was no wailing or sobbing, just tears the size of quarters and half-dollars pattering onto the floor. For two days she cried and made meringues, and on the third day she put away the mixer and dried her eyes. She told me that I was more than she could ever want and she loved me more than I could ever imagine, and then she recounted my favorite story, about the boy who met a mermaid and escaped his oceanside prison.

As the years passed, it was no longer just the two of us standing in the door frame. Flora puttered across the shop, wiping the tiled floor smooth, and our golden retriever, Milton, plunged into the crowds, whipping his tail joyfully, punishingly, against everyone's legs, and José biked past the window, heading out for a delivery.

He made all the deliveries except the special Sunday ones because those belonged to me. They were for our most

devoted customers who had been with us from the start, like Mrs Ida Bonnet, who had not forgotten any of her three children and six grandchildren even though they had begun to forget her. On one particular Sunday ten months ago, I was headed out on a delivery to her and it could have been any other Sunday, but it was not exactly the same. It was the twelfth anniversary of the shop's opening and it was also when my story – *this* story – began.

Up until last year, my stories always belonged to someone else. Walter Lavender Sr. had his story and so did Lucy and so did everyone who lost things, and they were a million points of light in my solitary darkness: these stories like stars, illuminating the silent nights.

But for the first time in my thirteen years, I have a story of my own to tell and I am the one who will tell it, and it began on that particular Sunday ten months ago.

So there I am: waiting at West Fourth Street for the A train to arrive and carry me to Fourteenth, and I'm scuffing my red canvas high-tops against the platform with Mrs Ida Bonnet's delivery box balanced in one hand. The box is layered with sweet vanilla wafers with sea-salted caramel filling, a new product Lucy developed to commemorate the anniversary, and I am careful not to jostle the wafers because they are delicate and because a whiff will fill my nose and chest with a pleasant nostalgic ache and there is no time for that when I have a job to complete.

The platform is empty, which means that I have just missed the previous train, and I pull out my notebook and lay it open on top of the delivery box and pass the time by watching other people trickle in. I see a woman in yoga

pants drinking a bottle of green mud, and a fair family of four speaking rapid French, and two young men carrying portfolios, wearing suits, sharp and fresh-faced. There is no sun to cast shadows here but I see bruised smudges following them, mimicking their confident movements.

PROUD BROADCAST OF EXHAUSTION AND IMPORTANCE, I add in my notebook.

Someone pushes past me and I slip my notebook back into my pocket and look up. The boy's shirt is rumpled and the buttons are in the wrong buttonholes, which means that an extra button flaps against his Adam's apple, and a plume of distress rises over him as he rips off hunks of tape and slaps flyers onto every other green column.

MISSING!

That is my cue. I tear off a flyer and hurry after the frantic boy, bracing my arms in front of me so the delivery box does not bounce. When I catch up to the boy he is picking up some flyers he dropped. His black hair sticks to his forehead in stringy waves; in the pictures on the flyers fanned out on the platform, he is wearing a short-sleeved button-down shirt again but his hair is slicked back from his forehead with gel.

MISSING! BEAUTIFUL BASSOON, MAPLE.

In the picture, he is holding a bassoon that is almost as big as he is although he is taller and older than I am. In the picture, he looks whole. I pick up a few flyers and we stand up

together, and I take a focused breath and steel my thoughts.

"I find lost things," I say. The words sound straight enough, almost perfect and paced normally, because it is the phrase I am most familiar with and the first phrase I practiced with Doc.

Since then, I have used it countless times, and it is how I always introduce myself in a new case and the only way I can introduce myself at all. The musician doesn't say anything in response but I can tell by the recognition in his eyes that he has understood.

I give him a card for The Lavenders and again with great care I gesture at the delivery box and say, "Not now. Tomorrow after school?" and hold up four fingers. His eyebrows pinch skeptically but two or three rumples on his shirt relax as he nods, and the train announces itself in a screech of wind and juddering metal.

During five years of finding, I have learned that everyone loses things, musicians and non-musicians alike – the elderly when they forget and the young when they don't pay attention and the middle-aged when there are too many things to do. In the things they look for, parts of people turn clear as glass and you can see into them and what they are made of and how they live, without needing to exchange so many words. There was the long-ago transplant who lost a piece of Maine driftwood, and there was also the man with lupus who lost an unused barber kit and the tattooed biker who lost a picture of his grandmother and the teenager with scarred wrists who lost *George and Martha*.

I keep finding because it is a way for me to be part of something bigger, even if it is only for a while. Whether it is

for a LOST CAMERA IN NIKON BAG, SENTIMENTAL FAMILY PHOTOS, or a RUNAWAY CAT, TOUGH SWEETIE WITH A SPOT UNDER HER RIGHT EYE, or a MISSING HEIRLOOM, BUTTONS AND BADGES FROM THE CIVIL WAR, people are willing to share pieces of their lives with me, and when I patch these scraps of information together I catch a glimpse of who they are.

Usually when I speak, people have trouble understanding and before I can finish one sentence they are already turning their toes away, shuttering their ears, assuming that whatever I have to say will not be worth listening to. But finding is different, because of the meaning that drives it – the lost thing. It makes people want to hear me and knowing this makes it possible for me to speak. With just a few phrases, two or three questions, I will know enough to understand someone, because people only bother looking for the things that matter. There is also something that forms when a lost thing is returned, a feeling of belonging like coming home to the shop except with finding it is something I have created. In those moments, I do not miss my voice so much.

Beyond that, I have discovered some rules in the course of my finding, and this is the one that keeps the rest in motion: the more you persist in searching, the more likely you are to stumble across something unexpected. In looking for someone else's lost thing, I am also looking for mine – some sign that will lead me to Walter Lavender Sr., and tell me what happened to him.

At Fourteenth Street I take an extra moment to join the little bronze man at his bench, leaning over his round head and picking off some bubblegum stuck to his cartoon bag of money. Outside, the city is cool and shiny-bright as a coin.

Mrs Ida Bonnet is accustomed to my silence and my steady gaze; she does not say much, and I hear the ticking of the clock and the wafer snapping dry and crisp between her teeth like a small bone. The room fills with the gentle ache of vanilla and the sound of the sea, and she closes her eyes and lays a wrinkled hand over her heart and smiles at the memory of things I cannot see.