

SHARDS OF GLASS



1

Raven loved glass. When foraging through garbage at the edge of the warrens, it was the glass pieces she loved best. She handled them with care—she'd cut herself a few times, and once her hand got so swollen she could barely move her fingers—but there was nothing like glass. She'd found one piece that was, jagged edges and all, almost three inches across. She'd been so lucky.

Some of the kids in the warrens would gather glass and take it to glassmakers, where—at the back door, in the various alleys—they could sell the bits and pieces. She'd been allowed into a shop once—a young apprentice had let her sneak in—and she'd watched glass melt, had seen bottles created from it, liquid becoming something harder with the passage of time.

She hadn't stolen anything, but even so, she'd never been allowed in again.

Today, she was waiting for rain. When glass and water collided, the water did interesting things. Or the glass did. Or the light through the glass. Most of the people in the warrens who were a threat didn't like the rain. The trick was to hide until rain was certain to fall, and then leave the hiding place before others crowded into it, seeking shelter.



Besides, maybe if it rained hard enough, she would see Robin.

Robin was her only friend, and he had disappeared. She hadn't seen him for a long time. No one had seen him, although it had taken her a while to get up the courage to ask. People were just as likely to kick her as answer, but she was used to being kicked, and they mostly did it to make her go away, not to cause her pain.

There was the old woman by the well—the one with the pipe and the eye patch and the terrible temper—the grey crow. That's what Robin called her sometimes.

Raven weighed the broken piece of glass before tucking it into a dirty cloth and hiding it in her pouch. She'd picked up some garbage from the other side of the warrens' border—a couple of tin pieces, a pocked, carved wooden horse that had seen better days—because no one talked to the grey crow without having *something* to offer.

None of this would be worth much for barter or trade, but Raven sometimes ran errands for people outside of the warrens, as well. Not often anymore. She didn't like to talk much—she wasn't good at it. Robin had been much better. Raven suspected that the old woman had *liked* Robin, which was an odd thought, because the grey crow didn't like anyone.

But that made her safer: she hated everyone equally. None of the gangs in the area were stupid enough to tangle with her—although maybe they'd tried when the old woman was unimaginably young. She wore the eye patch for a reason. She had friends—some old, like she was, some younger—but they didn't seem to take *orders* from her. They passed news and information; sometimes she even smiled when they did.

Raven had never liked her smile, so it was good that she so seldom showed it.

“You, bird girl,” the grey crow barked. Raven had not yet approached her; she'd lingered on the edge of the crowd that often gathered by the well. In crowds, there was a bit of safety,



although in truth not much; if someone wanted to hit her, no one would interfere as long as they didn't try to kill her. Maybe not even then.

Raven hastened to reach the old woman's side, because that one-eyed frown was etched deeper than usual.

"Where's the bird boy been?"

Raven's shoulders fell.

"You haven't seen him around, eh? Wait, is that why you're here? You managed to dig up some courage?" She laughed. Raven tried to smile although she didn't understand the joke. The laughter left the old woman's voice and face as she studied Raven. "Girl, what's my name?"

"Your name?" Raven was confused.

"Yeah, my name. I have one. Your friend used it from time to time. Never heard you say it, though." She glanced at Raven's hands, and the bits and pieces of gathered metal. "I have no use for that, but—good girl, to understand that you have to bring something to the table."

There was no table here, but Raven nodded anyway.

"I won't take it amiss that you've brought garbage, but I want something else today before I'll listen to your questions."

Raven tensed. Had the old woman noticed her piece of glass? Is that what she wanted? She froze, greed warring with greed—for glass, for Robin. They were perfectly balanced, and she struggled with them until the old woman rapped the top of her head with a fist.

"You don't have Robin so *pay attention*, bird girl. Are you listening this time?"

Raven paled. She'd been listening, but the thinking part had overwhelmed the words. It wasn't safe. She had to pay attention. "Y-yes."

"Good. I won't repeat it again. I want you to say my name. Say my name, and I'll answer any question you want to ask today." The fist was withdrawn and the old woman crossed her



arms, leaning back against the wall. “But it’s a one-time offer, and it’s good only until the sun sets.”

“Grey Crow?”

The woman snorted. Raven could have said *One Eye*, but knew that wasn’t what she wanted, either.

Raven walked to the wall against which the old woman was leaning; she then crouched, bending her knees and bowing her head so that her forehead touched them. She curved her arms around her shins, rocking.

The Old Woman was what most people called her, if they were far enough away she couldn’t hear. Everyone knew two things: avoid her when she was deadly silent, and be respectful when she could hear you. Raven had never understood names well—they didn’t carry information. Even her own name was like a verbal gesture, something meant to catch her attention. It wasn’t who she was.

Robin called her Raven. Robin said that was her name. He said his own name—Robin—was a bird’s name, and he thought Raven was better than Crow. She couldn’t remember being called anything else; only Robin used her name. The grey crow called them both birds.

What’s your name? Robin had asked, the second time they met.

She’d considered the question. *Person?*

Robin’s expression made clear that this wasn’t the correct answer.

I’m a person.

Yes—but that’s not your name.

What is this? She held up a piece of glass.

Glass.

She nodded. *That’s its name. It’s what it is.*

But Robin hadn’t accepted that answer. He explained that a name was what a specific person was called. His name was Robin. He was a person, yes, but he was a person *named* Robin.



She must have a name. He told her he didn't mind if she didn't want to share it.

She didn't mind sharing, but she had nothing to offer him—she couldn't remember being a person named something. She told him some of the things she'd been called, and that made him very unhappy. He insisted that she must have had a name. If she did, she didn't remember it. He asked about parents, and she didn't remember those, either—although she knew other people had them.

She knew it was safer to have parents—but she understood that parents were not things that appeared simply because they were wanted. Parents were adults, and some were not happy to have children. Many of those children were abandoned. Most died. Some didn't.

She didn't.

She knew how to watch. She didn't want anything from the strangers she could see, and she avoided them. She could; she knew the warrens' alleys and yards better than anyone. Robin sometimes hid with her. He was often afraid.

Raven was seldom afraid because fear would change nothing.

But...she was afraid that she would never see Robin again. Wasn't that fear? She puzzled over it. She wanted to find Robin, if Robin was still alive. And to find Robin, she'd come to the old woman with the eye patch. That's right. She was supposed to be finding the old woman's name.

She crouched in the woman's shadow, watching those shadows move, attached to feet. She watched them shorten, and then watched them begin to lengthen. It was sun's light that did that, although outside of the warrens there were lights on poles in the streets that also cast shadows, like tiny moons raised partway to the sky by people's hands.

No, no. Name. She had to think of the name. She watched people walk by and hoped that someone would approach the old woman, that someone would call her by the name Robin



would have known. But she couldn't remember Robin using a name, because most people didn't. If they knew you, if you knew them, the name was unsaid; if you didn't know them, the name was irrelevant.

She had never asked anyone else for their name. She hadn't asked Robin, either. But...she thought of Robin by his name now. She called him by his name. She wouldn't have known it if he hadn't told her.

She had never asked the old woman for her name. She knew where the old woman could be found, if she needed to find her; she knew what she liked and what she hated; what she nodded at and what she cursed. She knew how long her legs were, how quickly she could lash out with a kick; knew to stay outside of that range if the woman's face was full of frowns.

But she didn't know her name.

The shadows lengthened as Raven watched them, trying to remember any interaction in which a name had been invoked. She couldn't. She could remember almost all of their interactions, even the ones that included Robin. No name.

No name.

She finally unlocked her arms, lifting her head to look at the old woman, who had barely moved or spoken. Raven rose slowly, turned away, and headed to the alleys; it was getting late. There was a trick to finding empty shelter, and it relied on the time between sundown and night. She had no answer to give that would serve as payment for the question she wanted answered.

"Giving up?" the old woman said to Raven's back.

Raven shrugged.

"You don't look at people when you're talking, do you?"

Raven understood the subtle command in the question, and pivoted, aware now of the passage of time. "I do," she said, a hint of exhaustion in the words. "But I wasn't talking."

The woman chuckled. "Fair enough. You're giving up?"



“I don’t know your name. I don’t think I’ve ever heard it. You have a name, so I can’t give you one the way Robin gave me mine.”

“Robin named you?”

“Robin gave me a name.” Raven shrugged.

“And what about the name you were born with?”

“I don’t know it.”

The woman frowned. “I remember seeing you around when you were a kid. I never saw parents or grandparents. You were always alone.”

Raven nodded.

“I thought you’d disappear one day. I thought the warrens would devour you, you know? Even kids with parents aren’t guaranteed to survive.” She spit as she said this, as if the word *parents* didn’t belong in her mouth. “And you were a strange kid.” She straightened as she spoke, removing her back from the wall. “Go wherever it is you call home. I’ve got nothing for you.”

Raven nodded again. But as she turned, she said, “What is your name?”

She could hear the old woman snort. “That’s your question?”

This time Raven shook her head. “I forget, sometimes. I never asked you. But I’ll remember it now, if you tell me.”

“Turn around. Look at me if you’re speaking to me. You’re not on the take; you don’t have to pretend there’s nothing between us.”

Raven’s frown traveled up her face, folding forehead and eyebrows as she obeyed.

“Definitely a strange one. My name is Giselle. It’s a name I chose for myself, not the one I was born with.” The woman’s arms were now loose by her sides, her hands slightly clenched.

“Giselle.” Raven turned the two syllables over, rolling them across her tongue as if they had texture or taste. “Your name is Giselle.”



“Yes. You could have asked before sundown, you know.” The old woman stretched. “But you said my name before nightfall. What was the question you came to ask?”

Raven blinked rapidly. What had the old woman said? She wanted Raven to say her name. She’d never said Raven couldn’t ask what the name was. Raven had made an assumption because she didn’t understand the rules of the game. Robin would have known.

She’d waited for him. She’d listened in on conversations that might touch on him. Had he died? Had his body been found? Had the Hawks taken him away on one of their infrequent patrols?

“Do you know where Robin is?”

Giselle smiled. “Have you eaten?”

“Yes?”

“Today?”

Raven considered the question. “Yes?”

“I haven’t. Spent all day waiting for you. Come on, keep an old woman company.”

Raven tensed. There was a reason the old woman was feared. Raven knew—she’d always known—that being on the inside of someone else’s space, someone’s *permanent* space, was dangerous. Sometimes people went in and never came out. Sometimes they came out as corpses, carried somewhere in the dark and left by the roadside.

The only person she had ever met who might help her if there was danger was Robin, and Robin was gone. Robin was the reason she had come. She didn’t understand it, not really. He wasn’t the first person who had vanished from the streets and the alleys. She had barely noticed he was gone for the first week or two. It happened—sometimes he found work, and sometimes she did, running errands and delivering things for people who had food and money to spare.

But it had been more than a week. More than a month. Long



enough she'd lost track. She found herself haunting the places in which they'd once met, found herself listening for the sound of his voice, the sound of his steps. Sometimes she lingered beyond the safe time, her pockets heavy with food to share, pieces of glass and metal and stone to show him. He did not come.

She had started to search in earnest. She had started to listen to other people talking, to take in their words and conversations as if they had something to teach her. Nothing. Nothing.

She had finally come to the old woman, the grey crow, Giselle.

She had not come here to disappear. She had not come here to enter a cage. Nor to eat, nor to accept any favor she couldn't pay for.

She had come to find Robin.

"You've always been a cautious bird, but that's no crime—no cat's ever eaten you. Well? What will it be?"

Raven nodded and remembered belatedly to speak. "Yes. Yes, I will come with you."

Giselle had killed before. She had had people killed, as well. Robin considered these to be the same. Raven didn't. She found much of what Robin said was too blurred around the edges, and she was always forced to ask questions just to make sense of it. The difference between Robin and any other person she had met in her life was that Robin was always willing to answer.

Because he answered, she learned how Robin thought and—far more important—how Robin used words. His words and her words could be the same but they didn't *mean* the same thing. Even if they were speaking the same language.

It had occurred to her only after Robin disappeared that maybe other people were the same: their words and her words didn't mean the same thing. Perhaps she would have learned more, but people were *hard*. And most didn't want to talk to Raven.



Giselle lived, as Raven expected, in an actual house. The house itself was in decent repair; it had actual glass windows rather than warped shutters, although one window was boarded up. All of the windows had cages around them, and Raven hesitated at the foot of the stairs that led to the front door. Had the door been guarded, she might have turned and fled.

She took a deep breath.

Giselle didn't speak until she'd opened the door—and she opened it by touching its center at the height of her shoulders. To Raven's surprise, the interior was lit, and the light was far brighter given the darkness. Giselle entered, turning to look over her shoulder at her guest.

Raven followed.

Raven didn't spend much time indoors. She recognized the dining table for what it was, but had never sat at one herself. The interior of Giselle's home was almost empty. It seemed a waste, because it was so large and it was in decent repair, but Raven kept this observation to herself, as she did most observations.

"Sit," Giselle commanded, indicating a chair at the table. "I'll make dinner. You drink?"

"Yes?"

"You drink anything besides water?"

"Oh."

The old woman chuckled. "I don't know how you've survived this long. You're like a stray cat. How did you meet Robin?"

How? Raven frowned. How had she met Robin? She knew, but didn't know how to answer. She didn't have the words.

Giselle chuckled. "You were always together when I saw you. Fine. What's your first memory of Robin?"

Memory. Raven closed her eyes.

"Child. You must like the boy. Tell me a good memory."

Raven hid frustration; she had an answer for this. "I was



watching water on glass—I had a curved piece—in the sun, and he asked me what I was doing.”

“And you answered?”

“Yes, but... I had to answer many times because he didn’t understand. But when he did, he wanted to join me, and he wanted to try different things.”

“So you *can* smile.”

Raven frowned.

“You know about the disappearances in the warrens that started a couple of years ago?”

Raven nodded. She’d been aware of it because Robin knew, and Robin worried. For her. For himself. She’d told him his worry for her was pointless. She’d done her best to teach him all of the hidden nooks and crannies of the warrens—the places that were most likely to be safe, the places that were only safe at the right time of day, and the places to which he might flee in desperation.

But they changed with time. It had been so long.

Raven didn’t interact with most people. But she could see the pattern that people, moving and living, etched into the streets just as surely as the roads themselves, and she could move with or against their subtle tide.

“Some enterprising people came into the warrens with coin. Or drugs. They wanted people. They didn’t seem to care which people; they weren’t looking for anyone specific. They’d come to the warrens because they didn’t want their victims to be people who’d be missed.” As she spoke, a ripple of expression shifted the lines of her face. “If they’d been normal people, I could have dealt with it. But they were Barrani.”

Raven knew that Barrani upset the pattern in the warrens. Barrani and humans didn’t mix well; the humans avoided their normal routes if the Barrani were on the same road. So did Raven. “Did you help them?”

“Would you believe me if I said no?”



Raven frowned. “Why would I not believe you?”

“Because most adults lie.”

“Most adults have to have a reason to lie,” Raven replied. “I have no power. I have no weapons. I have no gold. There’s no reason for you to lie to me—unless you work for them, and I’m one of the people you mean to sell.”

The woman laughed. Her laugh was at odds with her expression, but it was not entirely unkind; Raven had had plenty of experience with unkind laughter. “Robin always said you were the smartest person he knew.” The laughter left as suddenly as it had arrived, as if it were a summer squall. “Let’s say no. I’m not a fool; they’re Barrani. Their flavor of polite political games is assassination and death. Usually in much fancier streets than ours.

“I suspected the warrens’ missing people was their work.” Her grin was sharp and deadly. Raven didn’t understand why Giselle avoided Barrani—she seemed a lot like them to Raven’s eye.

“Happens I was right.” She frowned, pulled out a chair, and sat. “I told you to sit. You’re free to leave at any time. I won’t cage you here.”

Raven stood beside the door, as if she might open it and fly out at any minute. She didn’t want to sit down. But Giselle was dangerous; she sat.

“You probably didn’t notice, but I kept an eye on Robin.”

Raven was surprised. “Why?”

Giselle shrugged. “Why did you?”

Raven frowned. “Robin is my friend. Was he kidnapped?”

“The evidence is circumstantial—but we’re not a court of law. He disappeared after the Barrani moved in.”

“But they left.”

“The Barrani hired a mortal crew from the warrens to do their dirty work. Those people should never have allied themselves with outsiders—and Barrani outsiders at that.” She spit to



the side. “We made sure they didn’t add much to their trafficking after that—but Robin was already gone. They had no idea where he’d been taken. They had no idea if he was still alive.

“Those disappearances? They’re done now. They’re over. I don’t know where you’ve been hiding the past week, but it isn’t in the places you used to hide.”

Raven nodded. “Someone found them. Hiding places grow and die all the time.”

“You don’t visit the ones you used when Robin was here.”

She shook her head. “Because Robin is gone. If he was taken by people, it means they could find him—he was never as good at hiding.”

“No. No, he wasn’t. But I think hiding is like a dagger; double-edged. And listen to me. The warrens will eat people alive, but you know that. Robin isn’t coming back.”

Raven frowned. “You know where he is.”

“It happens I do—but it’s not in the warrens. The disappearances served a purpose, or so I’m told.”

“You were told? By who?”

“Good girl. By a very grouchy old man who came to the warrens with a couple of Hawks. I’d’ve turfed him out if they hadn’t also brought a very familiar young man with them.”

“Robin?”

“Robin. The old outsider offered me a job, but it was Robin who talked me into taking it. He’d been taken out of the warrens by the Barrani—sold to them. But he wasn’t the only one, and some of the people who disappeared were returned to us.”

“What’s the job?”

“Finding people,” the woman replied. “Just that. I get a price for every person I find that’s of use to the old man; I get a smaller price for every person I send his way, regardless. I don’t kidnap them off the streets; I don’t march them there at knifepoint. I offer them a cut of what I’m offered. We’re pretty



suspicious in general; some don't take the cut if it seems too high." Her grin exposed yellowed canines.

"What does he want?"

"Students, apparently."

Raven blinked. The answer made no sense. "Students?"

"Students. You look confused."

"Suspicious," Raven replied, frowning. "Students like in rich kids' schools?"

Giselle nodded. "Yeah, I didn't believe it, either. Or I wouldn't have if Robin weren't front and center. Robin said they want students. They have classrooms—large rooms dedicated to lessons—and bedrooms for the students. And food. Three meals a day."

Raven took a risk. "What's the downside?"

Giselle chuckled. "Girl, if you weren't so bloody odd, I'd've taken you in myself. You've got half the cunning necessary—you'd have to, to survive. Can't tell you what the downside is. I know roof overhead and solid meals would be a boon to a lot of the street kids here, but some people came back. Robin won't."

"But he came with them?"

"Yeah. He was looking for you."

"What did they offer you?"

This time Giselle laughed. "For you? The old man offered ten times the head cost. *If* I can get you there, I'll get ten times the price for an unknown. So, how about it? I'll give you a cut."

Raven frowned. "What percentage were you offering anyone else?"

"Does it matter? They're not you. I'll give you a third."

Raven's frown deepened. "Half?"

"A third. I'm keeping the twenty percent as a finder's fee. You wanted to know where Robin is. I'm giving you that information. And if you accept my deal, I'll even make sure you get there myself."



Raven met and held Giselle's gaze; Giselle failed to look away. "Have you taken anyone else there?"

"No. You'd be my first. I've handed people over—voluntarily on their part—but I haven't gone down myself. Robin was doing well enough. I'm not selling out my own. We were born here, we survived; if we don't watch out for ourselves, who will?" At Raven's expression, she added, "Sure, we have to watch our own backs and our own wallets most of the time, but there's more than that.

"That old man was interested in you, girl. Too interested, maybe. I just want to see where you end up."

"You don't trust Robin?"

"I don't trust anyone—but neither do you. If you're willing to enrich me by taking a walk out of the warrens, be here in the morning."



In the morning, Raven crawled out from under a fence; it was still dark, but the dogs were sleeping. They were used to her; they didn't bark or attack when she approached. She could sleep safely here, or think safely, because they *would* attack almost anyone else. Not the owner of the place, though. There was a reason he didn't let strangers into the yard.

I don't trust anyone—but neither do you.

The words flopped about in her head, interrupted by bits and pieces of memory. The warrens were all she'd ever known—all that she remembered. She knew them as if they were part of her body; she knew the parts that were broken, knew when they were healed as much as they could be, knew how to find things if they were here.

She trusted her knowledge.

People, she didn't trust, because they were so hard to know. She looked for similarities, but it took effort and concentration. People behavior was a language she'd never properly learned. Danger signs? She'd learned those.



But safety signs were harder to know, to trust.

She'd never needed people before. She didn't really need them now. Robin had disappeared, and she'd gone on as she always had.

But she couldn't show Robin her glass pieces; couldn't show him how oil and water formed different drops along their surfaces; couldn't *share*. Robin was the only person she'd met who was half interested, not in Raven, but in what she knew, in her interests. And when there was no Robin, things felt half-finished, half-empty. She hadn't felt like this before, and it took her a while to understand it: she missed Robin. Robin was, inasmuch as Raven understood the word, a *friend*.

She'd looked for Robin. It had taken a while. She'd hoped he'd come back on his own, and she'd gone out of her way to visit less safe spots that he might seek out. He hadn't come.

Yesterday, she'd taken the risk of approaching Giselle. Giselle had answers, if they could be believed. Giselle could take Raven to Robin, if she wasn't lying. If she was, Raven might never escape. She might never see the warrens or her precious hiding spaces again. But if Giselle wasn't lying, Raven might never return. Robin had never returned. Not on his own.

Raven hadn't slept that night. Her thoughts were loud, like a swarm of angry wasps; they buzzed and buzzed, breaking the quiet that sleep demanded, although Raven herself didn't make a sound.

When dawn's colors began to stretch into the indigo of night sky, she dusted herself off and headed back to Giselle's home.

She wanted to see Robin again.

2

Giselle was waiting for Raven, the door of her house at her back, her hands bunched in jacket pockets. Raven glanced at the sun's shadows, which were still quite long. She wasn't late. She was aware, however, that people felt the passage of time differently. Perhaps Giselle expected people to be early in order to consider them on time.

Giselle straightened, her shoulders coming away from the door. She didn't waste time with greetings, which was a relief to Raven, who could remain silent. "You've got everything you need?"

Raven nodded.

"Come on; let's hit the bridge before the merchants reach it—we'll waste too much time, otherwise."

Raven waited. When Giselle began to walk, she glanced around. No one followed. No one but Raven.

"I don't need guards if that's what you're worried about. Where we're going they can cause offense to the wrong people. They're warrens born and bred. The old man we need to meet isn't."

Old man? Oh, the old man who had offered Giselle the job. Raven nodded.

“Don’t lag behind. You’re not carrying much—you know how to avoid cutpurses?”

Raven nodded more firmly.

“Good. It isn’t only in the warrens that they’re a problem—the nicer neighborhoods have their share of thieves. We’re just more open about it.” She smiled; it wasn’t a friendly smile, but it offered no threat to Raven. Giselle’s clothing did, though—she dressed the way she did around the well in the warrens.

The warrens, Robin said, weren’t respectable to most of the people in the city. So that meant Giselle...wasn’t respectable? But the old man had come to her. Ah, no—maybe Robin had come to her and the old man had followed. Had the old man been disrespectful, Giselle would never have accepted his work.

“You really aren’t much of a talker, are you?”

Raven nodded. Belatedly she realized that this could be a criticism, that she was expected to speak. To speak and not give offense. Robin never expected her to speak, but conversely never expected her to shut up, either. He didn’t find her words mystifying or boring. It wasn’t his acceptance of her silence she missed; it was his acceptance of her words.

It was the sharing of her thoughts, her ideas, her experiments, her hiding spaces. Her sense of the warrens. She had shared things—or tried—with people she met in the past, and it had never gone well. But conversely, total silence had often caused offense, as well. There was a line between silence and speech that she’d never learned how to walk.

Better to avoid people entirely.

But she couldn’t avoid Giselle today. What if Giselle changed her mind? What if Giselle left her here, on the outside, with no places to hide? Thinking this, Raven lengthened her stride.

“Which bridge are we going to?” she forced herself to ask.

“It’s one of the bridges into the fiefs.” Giselle stiffened but kept moving. “The fief of Tiamaris, to be precise. Tiamaris’s lord is a Dragon; he is close to the Dragon Court, and the Eter-