

Prologue

Although it is nearly midnight, an unusual light slips through a crack in the wool, brushing her arm like the feathers of a wing. In the next room her parents sleep, and the darkened village is silent, but she has lain awake all these hours and now she climbs out of bed, the floorboards rough against her feet. For weeks people have talked of nothing but the comet, how the earth will pass through clouds of poison vapors in its tail, how the world could end. She is fifteen, and all day she and her brother helped seal the house--windows, doors, even the chimney—with thick black wool, hammers tapping everywhere as their neighbors did the same.

The narrow triangle of strange light touches her here, then there, as she crosses the room. She is wearing her blue dress, almost outgrown, the worn cotton soft against her skin. In this room, a low space over the shop that is hers alone, the wool is only loosely fastened to the window, and when she yanks a corner the cloth falls away, pale comet light swimming all around. She pushes the window open and takes a breath: one, and then another, deeper. Nothing happens. No poison gas, no searing lungs--only the watery spring, the scents of growing things and, distantly, the sea.

And this odd light. The constellations are as familiar as the lines on her own palms, so she does not have to search to find the comet. It soars high, a streaming jewel, circling the years, thrilling and portentous. Distantly a dog barks, and the chickens rustle and complain in their coops. Soft voices rise, mingling, her brother's and another, one she knows; her heart quickens with anger and yearning both. She hesitates. She has not planned this moment--the turning point of her life, it will become. Yet it is also no impulse that pulls her onto the window ledge, her bare feet dangling a few yards above the garden. She is dressed, after all. She left the wool loose on purpose. All day she has been dreaming of the comet, its wild and fiery beauty, what it might mean, how her life might change.

The voices rise, and she then leaps.

Chapter 1

My name is Lucy Jarrett, and before I knew about the girl in the window, before I went home and stumbled on the fragments and began to piece the story back together, I found myself living in a village near the sea in Japan. It had been a spring of little earthquakes and that night I woke abruptly, jarred from a dream. Footsteps faded in the cobblestone lane and distant trains rumbled; I listened harder until I could make out the surge of the sea. But that was all. Yoshi's hand rested on my hip lightly, as if we were still dancing, which we'd been doing earlier in the evening, music from the radio soft in the dark kitchen, our steps slowing until we stopped altogether and stood kissing in the jasmine air.

I lay back down, curving toward his warmth. In the dream I'd gone back to the lake where I'd grown up. I didn't want to go, but I did. The sky was overcast, the faded green cabin—which I'd seen before, but only in dreams—musty and overhung with trees. Its windows were cracked, opaque with dust and snow. I walked past it to the shore, walked out onto the thick, translucent ice. I walked until I came to them. So many people, living their lives just beneath the surface. I

caught them in glimpses, fell to my knees, pressed my palms against the glassy surface—so thick, so clear, so cold. I'd put them here, so mehow, I knew that. I'd left them for so long. Their hair stirred in underwater currents, and their eyes, when they met mine, were full of a longing that matched my own.

The window shades were trembling. I tensed, caught between the earthquakes and the dream, but it was just a distant train, fading into the mountains. Every night for a week I'd had this same dream, stirred up by the shifting earth, stirring up the past. It took me back to a night when I was seventeen, wild and restless, sliding off the back of Keegan Fall's motorcycle, apple blossoms as pale as stars above us. I fanned my fingers against his chest before he left, the engine ripping through the night. My father was in the garden when I turned toward the house. Moonlight caught the gray in his short hair; the tip of his cigarette burned, rising, falling. Lilacs and early roses floated in the darkness. *Nice of you to show up*, my father said. *I'm sorry you worried*, I told him. A silence, the scents of lake water and compost and green shoots splitting open the dark earth, and then he said, *Want to go fishing with me, Lucy? How about it? It's been a long time*. His words were wistful, and I remembered getting up before dawn to meet him, struggling to carry the tackle box as we crossed the lawn to the boat. I wanted to go fishing, to accept my father's invitation, but I wanted more to go upstairs to think about Keegan Fall. So I turned away, and in a tone as sharp as broken shells I said, *Dad. Really. I'm hardly little anymore*.

Those were the last words I ever spoke to him. Hours later, waking to sunlight and urgent voices, I ran downstairs and across the dew-struck lawn to the shore, where they had pulled my father from the lake. My mother was kneeling in the shallow water, touching his cheek with her fingertips. His lips and skin were bluish. There were traces of foam in the corner of his mouth, and his eyelids were oddly iridescent. *Like a fish*, I thought, a crazy thought, but at least it silenced the other thoughts, which were worse, and which have never left me: *If I'd gone. If I'd been there. If only I'd said yes*.