NEW FOX SMELL

LIVIA LLEWELLYN

"**You're going to** be fine. It's just a month."

Laurel's mother speaks to her from behind the screen door. Laurel turns and gives her a tight-lipped smile. The screen metal is thick and gray, and her mother looks like she's floating within a rectangular storm.

"All of August," Laurel says. "I'll come back and have to start school right away, I won't have any time to get ready."

"I don't understand you, we've already been over this. You wanted to be invited, I remember how you begged Patricia."

"That was *years* ago, mom. You know we haven't been friends since seventh grade."

"All the cool girls get invited to the island, you used to say. I'll just die if I don't go, you said. I thought you'd be happy that she invited you, that we agreed to let you go."

"You mean make me go, and for four whole fucking weeks. And once again, I had to quit my job!"

Laurel waits for her mother to shout *language!* like she always does, but instead she pushes the wooden front door closer to the screen, her face growing darker as it recedes into the house. "You told us you wanted to go on vacation, so now you're going. It's done," she says, every word dripping with the implication that Laurel is already gone, her absence both welcome and irreversible. She's already looking away, to the living room, the kitchen. Laurel knows she should be used to this, but the pain and anger always surprise her as they flare up once again, flooding her body with cold prickly blood; and for a brief second, she's overcome with the thrill and relief of leaving this house, running as far as she can from this sticky, predictable cage of a life.

A car horn blares, the second time since Mrs. Gibson steered her massive Cadillac into their small driveway. A pale hand adorned with diamonds and gold beckons from behind the fogged windshield. Rain falls

down all around them, smacking through waxy rhododendron leaves and pattering against the sides of the house.

"We'll take good care of her, Marcy," Mrs. Gibson shouts as her makeup-perfect face emerges from the driver-side window. Little gold hoops glint from her ears. "Patty's going to be so happy to have her there. It's all she's talked about this summer—honestly, if I hadn't agreed to come back to the mainland to fetch you, I don't know what she'd have done."

Her mother's voice, behind her. "Remember to say thank you. And stop worrying, Patricia's still your best friend. Maybe you'll have so much fun you won't ever want to come back home again." The front door closes quietly, but the bolt locks sound like gun shots.

"Don't you wish," Laurel mutters, and picks up the suitcase resting at her feet. It's her old baby suitcase, covered in bright pop-art daisies and peeling travel stickers from all the interesting places they vacationed at every summer. That was long ago, though, and Mom and Dad didn't see the need to get new suitcases for something they don't want to do anymore. Well, do with her. Laurel was more fun when she was five, her father once admitted. She's seventeen now, and hasn't been fun for years, apparently.

"Hurry up, honey, it's a long drive and we want to get there before dark!" Mrs. Gibson, shouting out the window of the car. Laurel grabs the handle and runs to the car. The passenger door swings open and she tips the suitcase into the back seat before sliding in.

"Seatbelt on. Don't want you flying through the window." Mrs. Gibson smiles as they back out of the driveway and up the street. Laurel straps herself in, then wipes at her wet face, pinching her nose slightly before wiping her hands on her jeans. The car smells like damp pleather and upholstery and chemical-soaked car fresheners, all the normal car smells. But beneath those scents, her nose picks up a sulfurous layer of rotting vegetables and moldering earth, and the sharp musk of unwashed crotch and wet animal fur.

"Those are a lot of trees." Laurel flicks at the three fresheners swinging from the front view mirror, then swivels in her seat. She counts at least seven—no, nine—more hanging throughout the car.

"It just gets harder every year to get all the smells out."

"I'm sure." Laurel presses her lips together, trying not to breath too deep. A fire wouldn't get rid of those horrible scents. "But wait, isn't this a new car? I mean, this isn't your other car. I feel like I see Patricia in a different car every time I see her. I can't keep track."

"It's really doing a number out there," Mrs. Gibson mutters. They turn onto the avenue, heading toward the bridge. "But the weather is always better on the island."

"I've noticed that Patricia always comes back to school with a tan,"

Laurel says. *Along with a new car, and always new friends. Nothing ever old for her.*

"She does indeed."

They both fall silent. Houses and businesses rush by on both sides of the avenue, neon signs and traffic lights twinkling in the downpour. Laurel rests her elbow against the edge of the car door, her hand a fist against her face as if she's knocking herself out. She thinks about the small, laidback hippie grocery story she'd been working at since June, the job she had to quit for this. Last year she had to leave a highly-coveted job as a barista so her parents could send her to a two-week horse camp somewhere in the lower folds of Mount Rainier; the summer before that it was volunteer work with a group of obscenely cheerful church kids in Eastern Washington, for which she gave up shelving books at the local library. She just wanted *one* ordinary, stupid summer like all her friends had, like scooping ice cream into papery cones at Farrell's or hanging limp dresses onto hangers in some gross mall store, hanging out after work in hot parking lots, smoking and bitching about the next school year. But Laurel's not stupid. Whenever she leaves for one of these arranged adventures, her parents get the house to themselves. They get to pretend she'd never been born. Sometimes she wonders if she should be pretending the same thing.

"Patty will be so happy to see you. She gets a little lonely on the island during the summer. But the house has been in my husband's family for generations, and it's expected."

"What's expected?" Laurel asks.

"Oh, it's just tradition, to always spend summer on the island. It's actually very pleasant, the house is quite nice. You can have your own room, or you can share one of the larger rooms with Patricia, or you can both stay in one of the cottages. There's a nice little library and a big kitchen, a tennis court and pool near the gardens, and plenty of beaches for walking. They're gravel beaches, though. Driftwood and stones. The entire island, nothing but a ring of driftwood and stones and evergreens. Long trails and animal runs through the evergreens . . . " Mrs. Gibson's voice fades, and the squelching of the windshield wipers fills the space. They're now making their way onto the Narrows Bridge, the thump-thump-thump of each steel-plated section beating like a giant heart under the tires. Every now and then the car gives a sudden small swerve to the left or right as Mrs. Gibson steers it over the metal grates, and all Laurel can think about is the car continuing that swerve, sliding across the lanes and flipping over the railings, sailing through the gray air into the icy churning waters of the Straits below. She grabs the straps of her seat belt, clenching the hard fabric until her fingers hurt.

"I'm surprised Patricia gets lonely, I thought she always invites a bunch of friends over. I'm not the only one in her class who's going to be there,

right?" Laurel doesn't really care, but anything to get her mind off the fact that they're speeding on a narrow metal strip suspended in the middle of the air, and that Mrs. Gibson's pupils are as wide as a cat's.

"Oh, well, yes, she always invites a few girlfriends over every June, and my sister and two brothers all have teenagers around yours and Patty's age, so there's always some of their friends in the house, but most of them are gone before August. To be honest, most of them are gone by the end of June—none of them are ever quite up for surviving island life. Aside from her cousins, Patty's always the last one in her circle still standing, so to speak. My little baby fox, all by herself, as usual." Mrs. Gibson chuckles slightly, and pats Laurel's knee, a friendly "just between us girls" gesture Laurel has experienced from older women more times in her life than she cares to count. She responds with her usual knowing smile.

"What's to survive, it sounds wonderful. An island all to yourselves, a tennis court, a pool. I'm surprised Patricia would ever want to leave."

"Well, yes, but there's no town, of course. So we have to import all our necessities and our pleasures. And you young folks always get bored after a few days and want to go shopping or see movies or whatever it is you do. So I suppose what seems peaceful and cozy to us feels like hell to others, if you're not used to it."

"I think I could get used to it. I mean, it doesn't sound like I'll get bored. At any rate, I don't plan on leaving until the end of the summer."

"I do hope so. You would be the first."

The fuzzy curve of the bridge flattens out, and the cables dwindle down to nothing on either side: they're on solid land again, back on the planet, and Laurel's fingers loosen their grip on the seatbelt. She quietly lets out a long breath which she hadn't realized she'd been holding in. Once again, she relaxes, watches trees and strip malls whoosh past in a continuous blur. They're at the outer edges of the Olympic Peninsula, the soft, civilized areas where the wealthy have settled, pouring money into electrical grids and sewer systems and any kind of expensive architecture that makes them forget that they do not really belong in this part of the world. Laurel feels herself slipping into light sleep, the sleep of traveling, where her body floats in and out of some other part of the universe, impervious to movement and the passage of time, while in the present the car and road and world whirl around her paralyzed flesh in a muted roar.

"No real foxes," Mrs. Gibson murmurs. "Not for years."

Laurel's head snaps up. "I'm sorry, what," she mumbles as she grabs at the seatbelt, which has cinched itself tighter during her short (or was it long?) nap. She stretches her legs out as far as they can go, her sneakers tapping at the curved shell of the interior. Laurel was never a patient traveler—the longer they drive, the more the car seems to cinch itself around them. The rain has slowed to a more typical drizzle, speckling the

windows just enough that Mrs. Gibson has to hit the wiper button every couple of minutes to clear the glass. There's no other cars on the highway, it's just them, a speck of metal sailing down the empty ribbon of concrete underneath an ocean of clouds. Up ahead, the highway disappears along with the trees into the horizon. It's like they're sailing into space.

"I'm so sorry, dear, I thought you were awake. I was saying, there aren't any actual foxes on the island."

"Oh?"

"Just so there's no expectations on your part. Everyone's always disappointed there's no foxes. They disappeared a long time ago. Of course, every summer we bring a few new strains over, but they never seem to survive the transplant more than a few days, a week at the most. It's not an easy place for them to live, I guess, when will this damn rain end?" Mrs. Gibson squints and juts her face at the windshield, coated with a river of droplets despite the squealing efforts of the wipers. Outside, most of the traffic has bled away into the surrounding towns and villages hidden beyond the wide edges of the highway. A strange thought blossoms inside Laurel, her curiosity tinged with a sudden fear.

"Wait, why don't they survive? What's on the island that kills the foxes?"

Mrs. Gibson cocks her head and smiles, then gives a quick shrug of her shoulders, as if she couldn't say. "I guess . . . I guess they spend so much time being angry that they were tricked onto a strange island that they don't teach themselves how to adapt and survive. They just run around, screaming like children until they're too weak to run or fight."

"Fight what, bears? Please don't tell me there are bears."

"No, dear. Not bears. You'd never guess in a million years."

"Huh." A small huff of air shoots through Laurel's nostrils as it dawns on her. "You hold fox hunts. Your family hunts foxes every summer. Is that it? Is that why all Patricia's friends leave so soon? Because they won't kill the foxes?"

"Patty said you've always thought of yourself as very clever. Very leader of the pack clever. A good quality to have, although now that I think about it, I'm not sure she meant it as a compliment."

Laurel swivels her body around as much as she can in the miniscule space. "Wow. You know, Mrs. Gibson, Patricia and I haven't really been close friends for a couple of years now. I mean, I can't imagine what she'd have to say about me, she doesn't really know who I am anymore. I don't even know why she invited me. But I can tell you right now that I'm not going on any fox hunt. I mean, if she remembers anything about who I am, she'd know that."

Mrs. Gibson places a ringed hand on Laurel's sweaty knee and gives it a firm squeeze. "You have my word, Laurel, you won't have to touch a single gun."

"Thank you."

Laurel stares out the window again. They've long passed the remnants of human life, and the freeway is an unbroken line, no cut-offs or exits anywhere in sight. The trees rush past in a wall so unbroken, so symmetrical, that for a dizzying second it feels as if they're driving down the same stretch of road past the same hundred yards of forest over and over again, caught in an endless loop. She remembers when she and Patricia and the other kids used to play in the woods just outside their neighborhoods, the few remaining stretches of undeveloped land in a region where the cities grew faster and further and more destructive than clouds of volcanic ash. They ran through those woods like animals, tearing through massive ferns and soaring over fallen branches, weaving their way toward the rough rocky beaches of the Straits where they fell about, panting and staring up at the storm grey skies. As much as they've grown apart, Laurel still misses those days, filled with the crash of their feet against the forest floor, their hot panting in the cool, clean air, the echoing silence of the wide world pouring over and through and past them, making them small and enormous all at once. Laurel leans her head against the window again, ignoring the cramping in her legs and hips from the uncomfortably small seat. That damp, sour-sharp smell has only grown stronger, even the grove of swinging tree fresheners can't hold it at bay. She's drowning in the scents, in the cloying, overheated air.

"I'm just curious. If you aren't friends any longer, why did you accept the invitation?"

"I didn't want to go," she finally mumbles. Her head lolls down. "My parents wanted me out of the house, they made me go. I don't want to go."

Oh, I don't believe that. Mrs. Gibson's voice sounds millions of miles, millions of years away. *I don't believe that at all. You're just like my Patty. I've seen you run.*

Her fingers are buzzing. That's what draws her away from the river of fever-dream half-sleep, where her limp body was floating above a grey, tree-lined road stretching toward a bluish bump hovering far up above the edge of the earth, nestled in a secret layer of space between the stars. Laurel blinks her gummy eyes, drawing her cramped hand out of her pocket. A notification bar on her phone is flashing, but she can't read the words, they don't look like any language she's ever seen before. Outside it's still late afternoon, time has passed yet still they're making their way down what feels like that same stretch of six-lane highway that cuts through that same solid wall of evergreens, now crowded against the flat edges of the concrete

barriers as if slowly and steadily resisting the intrusion, pressing back until they can once again flow uninterrupted across their own lands.

"No phone service anymore. Not here. Go back to sleep." Mrs. Gibson's languid voice cuts through the fuzz: Laurel slides up in her seat, wincing as she lets her right arm, stiff and tingling from being curled up against her head for so long, drop slowly back down to her side.

"I wasn't really sleeping." She can barely push the words out of her phlegm-coated mouth. Is she sick? "I thought we'd be there already."

"Everything is further out, out here. You know how it is."

Laurel doesn't respond. She's struggling to shake off the drugged, cottony feeling in her head, and the smell in the car has grown. It's angry, powerful and musky, so cloyingly strong it makes her eyes water and her heart flail in her chest. The entire car feels smaller, as if the odors are compressing everything around her. Laurel reaches to her side, fumbling for the window button in the door. It doesn't yield to her touch.

"I think—I think this is stuck?" she asks, pressing down so hard it feels like she's going to snap the bone. "It's so stuffy, I don't feel good, I need fresh air."

"All the fresh air is on the island. Stay calm. Be still. Go back to sleep."

"Please, I feel like I can't breath—maybe one of the back windows?" Laurel glances over at Mrs. Gibson. A faint smile is frozen on the woman's lipstick-pink mouth. Other than the slight movement of her chest rising and falling with each breath, she seems almost motionless, as though a picture of Mrs. Gibson sits beside her. So close to her now, as if they were about to hug. Laurel looks down. Her car seat is so small that her thighs spill over its edges, and her knees are firmly jammed against the underside of the dashboard. She raises her hand, placing a palm flat against the ceiling of the car, now only an inch above her head, if even that.

"Did we switch cars?" The words aren't even out of her mouth before Laurel realizes how absurd they are.

Mrs. Gibson laughs as she sits back, her face and posture natural again, relaxed. "You didn't smoke something before I picked you up, did you? It's fine, I know how girls your age just love to experiment."

Laurel can't be bothered to smile anymore. Despite the numbing effects of all the scents, she feels cold panic rising inside her, and resists the urge to buck her legs out, smash her fists against the window, anything to make more room. "No, no, it's not that. It's—something's wrong. Something's wrong with the car." She places her hand on the glove compartment, sliding her thumb over the latch that's almost next to her stomach. "And I thought we'd be there by now."

"As soon as we get to ferry at the end of the bridge."

Laurel is silent. Something about that statement is terribly wrong. She shakes her head, but she can't shake off the fuzzy confusion seeping across

her eyes, across her mind. Her mouth opens and closes, then opens again. "A ferry?"

"Of course! It's an island, how do you think we get to it?"

"Right, yeah. Still sleepy, I guess." Laurel rubs her eyes, then tugs at a hairband around her wrist. Her fingers can barely work their way under the band, all her energy has bled into the damp, cloying air. She lets her hands drop into her lap and stares at them. They look like two dead spiders. Her phone slides onto the floor with a dull thump. She doesn't have the strength to bother.

"It doesn't make sense," she mutters at her hands.

"What dear?" Mrs. Gibson asks.

"If the island is connected by a bridge, why are we taking a ferry?"

Mrs. Gibson lets out a long yawn. "There's no bridge to the island, only to the ferry. Only the ferry can get to the island."

"What? I don't get it."

"Up ahead. Look."

Laurel forces her head up and looks out the windshield. "God." She meant to say *oh my god*, but the stench in the car rips all the air out of her lungs. They're traveling up, the highway rising at a steep slant as if they're moving up the lengthy curve of a bridge, as if the bridge is moving away from the land and shooting up toward the purpling edges of coming night. The trees are gone, and so is everything else—no familiar mountain range jutting up from the distant peninsula or setting sun, and if there are cables and iron arches holding up the bridge, they are invisible against the cavernous bowl of the sky. Far ahead of them and moving closer, Laurel makes out an oily, shimmering movement, an oval-shaped darkness that seems to be eating away at the end of the bridge. She wants to say *what the fuck is that*, but all that comes out is a soft, breathy *fuuuuu*.

Mrs. Gibson is whispering, *sleep, sleep,* the words hot and wet against Laurel's neck. Laurel contorts her body as much as she can, recoiling from the woman's heat and touch. Maybe if there's still enough room, she can slide over into the back seat, and then out through the side door—as she tries to twist herself around, Laurel freezes. Mrs. Gibson is sitting with her hands in her lap, ankles crossed as if she's sitting in a church pew, waiting to drop four quarters into the collection plate. But her face is anything but calm and serene. Laurel has never seen such a look of determination, concentration, as if she's preparing for whatever they're rapidly approaching. Her hands rest in her lap.

"Oh my god—" Cold fear momentarily breaks through all the languid paralysis, and Laurel lurches into Mrs. Gibson, grabbing at the steering wheel. It's rigid and unmoving beneath her weak grasp. Underneath the dashboard, her feet thrash around the pedals, trying to find the break.

There's so little room—"Pull up your legs, if I can't steer the car, we're going to crash!"

"The car is being steered." Her voice is barely a whisper. "Keep still. Less painful."

"No, it is fucking *not*," she gasps into Mrs. Gibson's face. "What are you doing, what is happening?!"

"Rough crossing," the older woman replies, her lips barely moving. "You'll survive. You just need to make it through the bridge."

"What are you talking about!" Laurel shrieks. Overhead, the car roof buckles down in a screech of metal, and spiderweb cracks instantly radiate throughout the windshield. "We're not anywhere near the fucking water!"

"Look."

Laurel stares out the remains of the windshield, little slivers of cold wind threading through the cracks and slicing at her face. That musky animal scent, the dank smell of unwashed skin and genitals, thick overripe secretions bursting from swollen scent glands: it's coming from her. It's her.

Outside, the highway is flat against the horizon, growing smaller and smaller as it disappears into the pulsing, gobbling black dot. It's not perspective, Laurel realizes, as her body begins to violently shake. The highway, the car, the skies: they're all growing smaller, slipping into some hole or mouth or orifice so infinitesimal that it can barely be seen.

The entire front of the car smashes inward, as if a titan's invisible hands clapped and crushed a bug. A high-pitched scream fills the interior space: she knows it's coming from her, but it's not *of* her, the scream is its own creation, coiling out of her mouth like a frightened snake. The steering wheel has pushed forward into Mrs. Gibson's chest, she never had a chance to let out more than a wet muffled grunt before her chest crunched inward, and the car is still racing down the highway, no longer being steered but pulled. Laurel feels and hears the roaring engine, the wheels spinning against the pavement, there are no words for this pain, no words only bright images that explode like song from every part of her body that is now a mouth, and there is—

There is the car with all of its hard and sharp metal pieces and the dark engine collapsing into itself like a dying sun and there are human bones and all the beautiful strands of nerves and bones like liquid moving around the hot strips of car and their faces split open like decaying flowers and legs and arms rip away, replaced by strips of tires, pistons, shards of polished steel smashing their way up torsos and through hearts, and everything is growing smaller again. There are strands of blue electricity

that crackle and pulse as they slide through and around the grinding mass of metal and flesh—the only sentient remains of two passengers traveling a cosmic route they could never have survived in their original form. There is liquid darkness, the elastic liquidity of pulverized organic matter as it passes through the hole, the liquid of the metals as it mingles with bones pulled into strands as long as epochs, rivers of engine oil and shit and blood and the faint chemical scent of paper trees and now it is a Planck length-wide being stretching across the arc of the universe, an infinitesimal ferry sailing through currents of time and pockets of antediluvian life with its two miniscule passengers, until it slows a billion years into an undiscovered future or past, pools out and down, sloughing off its cargo on a quiet gray island shore as it once again disappears into the unknown.

Little flecks of bone spiraling up from the goo, teeth pulling themselves out of paste and chromium drops, nerves and wires and cables spiraling back into a shape they remember only vaguely as a dream. Ravens shout in alarm from the trees as two shapes emerge and float away from the cauldron of chaos at the end of the bridge, a four-lane bridge that becomes a two-lane road disappearing into the somber stillness of a quiet coastal island, surrounded only by the gentle lapping of—

Waves crash down and in and recede, the sound flowing like broken glass over Laurel's body. With shaking fingers, she rubs her gummy eyes until they open. She stands on a beach that flows unbroken in both directions until it disappears with the curve of the land. The beach is wide and flat, a shore of smooth black and gray granite pebbles. Behind her, the edges of the beach are lined in long piles of smooth driftwood—entire tree trunks tangled with smaller branches, lengths of splintered timber, and the occasional pale ivory of broken skulls and bones. Beyond the driftwood rises an unbroken wall of evergreens.

She runs her hand over her face, arms, breasts, stomach. Under the reddish-brown layer of viscous gore, her body feels unsplit, unwounded. Laurel grabs at her hair. It hangs in wet chunks from her head, matted and sticky, but it's all there. She slicks her hand down her arm, trying to wipe off the semi-congealed blood. It sloughs off and plops to the wet rocks at her feet, but even as she raises her hand again, her skin ripples and contracts, sending another fresh layer to the surface. Laurel raises her fingers to her nose and inhales deeply. She knows this smell intimately, recognizes her own scents and the sticky texture of the chunky blood oozing from every pore in her skin. Overhead, a thousand pale moons shine weakly in the gray skies.

The sound of rocks crunch against each other: Laurel drops to a crouch and presses into the driftwood as a shape emerges from around the bend in the beach. Slender and tall, reddish-brown skin glistening under the light of the overcast skies. The shape pauses, looks furtively around, then stumbles forward. Laurel knows that face.

"P—Patricia?"

Two rows of glaringly white teeth emerge from the dry, brown-blooded sea of its face.

"It hurts the worst the first time. No way to avoid that, I'm sorry to say. Because you girls never obey me. You never listen to what I say."

Laurel whips her head up. Mrs. Gibson stands at the top of a small path winding through a break in the driftwood, her skin stained as dark as crushed blackberries, the pink lipstick obliterated from her mouth.

Laurel rises up from her crouch, fingers curling into fists. "Where are we? What happened to me?"

"We crossed the bridge, then took the ferry to Fox Island."

"This isn't—" Laurel turns and looks out across the gently lapping waters. Strange shapes move within the gray fog that coats the coastline, shapes as massive as buildings. Larger. A soft, thunderous rumble emanates from them, or some other unseen colossus, sending little quakes through the beach and up Laurel's body until she trembles in time with the vibrations. Further to the left, a shaft of dark light slashes through the fog and clouds like a sword, the low bass of a horn accompanying each rotation. There aren't any lighthouses along the Straits. There never have been.

"This isn't—where did you take me, where are we?"

Mrs. Gibson smiles. She wipes the blood away from her face: it stays off, the skin underneath remains pale and white. "I'd think the more pressing question would be, *what have I become*, or maybe, *where did I park the car*, but you can be forgiven for not quite understanding the situation."

A calm, cold numbness washes through Laurel, that she gradually realizes is a combination of white-hot rage and uncontrollable fear.

"What have I become?"

"You haven't *become* anything. You're simply in a place where you're more you than you could ever be. More girl than you were back home." Mrs. Gibson pulls a blood-soaked pack of cigarettes out of her jacket pocket and slides one out with her broken nails. "More animal. More alive."

"Take me back to the car, now."

"You better worry about your own engine, sweetheart," she says, turning away as she heads into the woods. "In fact, you and Patty had both better start running—they're headed right toward you!" she shouts back, coils of acrid smoke following her words. "They can smell you from a

million miles away, and you no longer have that new car smell!" Laurel stares at the shadowed space between the trees where Mrs. Gibson used to be, then turns back to the beach.

"*What! The Fuck! Is going on!!*" Her ragged screams bounce back and forth across the waters. Immediately from within the looming gray bank of clouds, a roar claps back across the water, so unimaginably loud that all the driftwood along the shore clatters from the force of the sound. Wet warmth floods her crotch, trickles down her legs.

Patricia lopes past her in a quick animal gait. She's wiped her face clean, just like her mother. "You'll be the one, I know it. I told mom, this time I wanted someone who'd last the whole summer with me. Not a friend. Someone who'd hate me enough to survive."

"Survive what!?"

"Duh, the fox hunt, you dork!" she says with that familiar bright grin as she breaks into a run. Laurel watches as she grows smaller and smaller, disappearing around the curve of the island. She looks out at—the ocean? the Sound? Columns and mounds of dark flesh are beginning to take shape, slowly emerging from the storm and fog. Her feet are stepping back already, legs stumbling backwards up that little path, even though part of her wants so badly to see, to see. But the thought is fleeting and alien, that part of her brain is shutting down, and now Laurel's running, legs pumping like pistons through forest choked with green ferns and bramble, running until she's nothing more than a streak of fresh red on the ancient land, a pine and cunt-scented arrow pointing the way for the hounds and hunters to meet her at the end.