

September 1934

Küsnacht, Zurich

I stand on the deck watching the trailing seams of white foam. Zurich recedes into the horizon and I wait for Küsnacht to appear ahead of me. On the banks the trees are shaking off their curling leaves. There's a shiver in the air and a thin odour of decay drifts across the lake.

I've been seeing him for three weeks, in his square shuttered house at Küsnacht. Three times a week I come by boat and sit with him. And still I haven't spoken. But today something inside me is stirring and my silence feels oppressive.

The lake is alight with autumn sun. Beside the ferry tiny fish flounce and turn, their spangled scales flashing like fallen stars. As I watch them, something begins to creep through the soles of my feet, up into my ankles, my calves. I feel it skim along my spine. My hips begin to sway; my fingers start to rap out a rhythm on the railing. As if my dull plain body wants to be a thing of beauty again.

Today I shall speak. I shall answer his tiresome questions. And I shall tell him I must dance again. Yes, I must dance again

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Doctor Jung steeples his fingers in front of his mouth so the tips brush his neatly clipped moustache. "You shared

a bedroom with your father until you were eighteen. How did you change your clothes?" His eyes are like small hoops of light that never leave my face.

"I slept in my clothes." I shift awkwardly, knowing what questions are coming next. And I'm sick of them. Sick and tired.

"Why did you not undress?" His words hang in the air as I pull my mink coat tight around my ribs. That eager little housemaid had tried to snatch it from me at the door. Kept telling me how warm the doctor's room was, how she'd laid the fire herself.

"Rats don't change for the night, do they?"

"Rats?" Doctor Jung pushes back his swivel chair and starts pacing the room. "I'm glad you've finally decided to talk but you must explain yourself, Miss Joyce."

"We lived in hundreds of places ... rooms ... apartments. Italy, Switzerland, Paris." Already I can feel my mouth stiffening, as though it's had enough of all this talk, enough of the doctor's endless questions. I run my tongue quickly over my upper lip, willing myself on. "We moved into Robiac Square when rich people started giving us money – my father's patrons. Before that my brother, Giorgio, called us migrant rats."

"And your father called it exile." Doctor Jung stoops, brings his face level with mine. And I wonder if he can see inside my empty, plundered soul, if he can see how they've robbed me and betrayed me.

"Tell me about *Ulysses*. I confess I fell asleep when I read it." He eases himself back into his chair, scribbles something in his notebook, turns his gaze back to me. "Banned for obscenity. How did it make you feel having a pornographer for a father?"

Outside a cloud drifts across the sky and blocks out the sun. "*Ulysses* ..." I echo, searching my moth-eaten mind for memories and clues. Fat blue spine ... gold lettering ... Mama snatching. "My mother saw me holding it once and took it from me. She said my father had a dirty mind

and I could read it when I was married. Married!" I give a small mirthless laugh.

"So, did you read it?"

"Of course. It's the greatest book ever written." I don't tell the doctor that I too found the plot dull, that the odd, unfamiliar characters eluded me, that I never reached the 'filthy bits' everyone spoke of. Instead I blurt out my question about Babbo, the question still gnawing at me after all these years. "Doctor, *is* my father a perverted lunatic?"

Doctor Jung looks at me through his gold-rimmed glasses. His eyes widen as the breath escapes noisily from his nostrils. There's a long silence during which he nods his head gently, as if expecting me to speak. "Why do you ask, Miss Joyce?"

My mink coat is now so tightly round my body that my rib cage contracts and the air catches in my throat. "I saw it in a newspaper. They called him a perverted lunatic. They called *Ulysses* the most obscene book ever written." As I speak my voice detaches itself from my body and slips away, as though the words, the sounds, are nothing to do with me.

"Why do you think your father chose a chambermaid for his wife?" The doctor leans across his desk, pushes his glasses onto his forehead, prepares to inspect me again.

"He doesn't like intelligent women. He said that once." I don't tell him I know *exactly* why my father chose a chambermaid. There are some things that can't be spoken about. Not to fat Swiss men with pocket watches who are paid by the hour, like common prostitutes. Not to anyone.

Doctor Jung nods and chews thoughtfully on his thumb, always watching me, staring at me, trying to climb into my soul. Then he picks up his pen and I hear the nib rasping as he scribbles in his notebook. I stroke my mink coat, so soft, so comforting. Like a pet dog curled in my lap. Already Mama's face is dissolving in front of me, all of her fading away – her eyebrows like the feathers of a crow,

her thin lips, her downy cheeks with their maze of broken veins. "I don't want to talk about her anymore. It was she who did this to me." I tap the side of my head three times with my index finger.

He stops writing and frowns for so long the muscles round his eyes twitch. "Tell me about your relationship with your father, before you shared a bedroom."

"He was always writing. He barely spoke to me until *Ulysses* was finished." I lower my lashes, look at my new shoes of softest Italian leather, feel my toes curling inside them. No need to say any more. Not yet ...

"You were competing with a lot of people, real and imaginary, for his time." Doctor Jung's eyes are like pin-wheels now, boring into my head.

"I suppose so." I run my fingers through the fur of my coat, teasing it out and pushing it against the grain as I think of my greedy siblings. All those characters wandering round Dublin. Yes, greedy siblings that had taken Babbo from me. I hold the doctor's gaze in a way I hope is bold and confident, but beneath my coat sweat is trickling slowly down my cleavage.

"What's the point of me being here?" I need to get away from his interminable questions. Time is running out. *Work in Progress* is still not finished. Babbo needs my help, my inspiration. What use am I incarcerated in Switzerland? My feet start jerking to and fro, desperate little jerks like gasps of breath.

"You are here at your father's request, Miss Joyce. But as you haven't spoken until today we have a lot of catching up to do. Tell me about Giorgio." Doctor Jung laces his fingers together, watches me, waits.

And when he says my brother's name, I feel a surge of love. For ten years Giorgio and I were inseparable, like Siamese twins. I examine my hands expecting to see the white imprints of his fingers from where he'd gripped me. To drag me away from the thin-ribbed cats I longed to adopt, to pull me up the steep streets of Trieste, to stop me falling from the omnibus. There are no

marks, of course. Just the shiny puckered ghost of a scar on my thumb. But something else begins tugging and pulling at the edges of my memory. I pause, expecting it to swim slowly into focus. But it doesn't. Instead I feel a dull ache rising slowly from the base of my skull. I rub my temples for several long minutes as the silence seethes and swirls in my ears and the ache blooms in my brain.

The doctor looks at the fat gold pocket watch he keeps on his desk. "We're out of time, Miss Joyce. But I'd like you to write an account of your years in Robiac Square. Can you do that for me?"

"For *you*? I thought this talking cure was for *me*?"

"It's for me to help you." He speaks slowly, enunciating each word as if he's speaking to a child or an imbecile. He picks up the pocket watch and peers at it, pointedly. "Bring the first chapter of your memoir next time."

"Where should I start?"

"You are twenty-seven now?" He puts down his pocket watch and counts the fleshy fingers of one splayed hand with the other. "You said a Mr Beckett was your first lover, is that right?" He nods encouragingly. "Start with him. Can you remember when you first saw him?"

"Wait," I say, closing my eyes as the memory floats towards me, bit by bit, struggling out of a shifting darkness. Faint at first ... now bright and sharp. The smell of oysters and eau de parfum and Turkish cigarettes and cigar smoke. The popping of champagne corks, the cracking of ice in steel buckets, the chinking and clinking of glasses. I remember it all – the glare and rattle of the restaurant, Stella's turbaned head like a small yellow pumpkin, the damp heat of Emile's breath in my ear, the luminosity of Babbo's eyes as he toasted me, the exact words of Mama and Babbo. Oh yes ... all those words. Of birth and marriage, of my talent and my future. Life had seemed to stretch out ahead of me then, all rosy and golden and shimmering with possibility.

I open my eyes. Doctor Jung has pushed back his chair and is standing at his desk tapping his fingers impatiently on the leather as if beating time to his pocket watch.

“I know where to start my memoir,” I say. I shall start with the first stirrings of desire and ambition that pushed their way, like the greedy tendrils of a weed, into my young heart. Because that was the beginning. No matter what anyone else says, *that* was the beginning.

November 1928

Paris

“Two geniuses in one family. Shall we be in competition?” Babbo turned the jewelled ring upon his finger, his rheumy eyes still on the *Paris Times*. He was looking at the photograph of me, scrutinising it as if he’d never seen me before. “How beautiful you are, mia bella bambina. Your mother looked like that when we eloped.”

“This is my favourite line, Babbo.” I took the newspaper from him and read breathlessly from the review of my dance debut. “*When she reaches her full capacity for rhythmic dancing, James Joyce may yet be known as his daughter’s father.*”

“What fierce and unadulterated ambition you have, Lucia. The next line is engraved upon my memory. Allow me.” He started reciting in his thin reedy voice. “*Lucia Joyce is her father’s daughter. She has James Joyce’s enthusiasm, energy and a not-yet determined amount of his genius.*” He paused and put two tobacco-stained fingers to his freshly oiled hair. “You gave an astonishing performance. Such rhythm and evanescence ... I thought of rainbows again.” He closed his eyes briefly as if he was recalling the evening. Then his eyes snapped open. “What else does the incontrovertible *Paris Times* have to say about my progeny?”

“It says ‘*Her performances have made her a name at the Théâtre de Champs-Élysées – home of avant-garde dance in*

Paris. She dances all day long; if not with her dance troupe, she is studying dance or dancing by herself. When she's not dancing, she's planning costumes, working out colour schemes, designing colour effects. To top it all, she speaks no fewer than four languages – fluently – and is tall, slender and remarkably graceful, with brown bobbed hair, blue eyes and very clear skin. Such talent!” I tossed the newspaper onto the sofa and began spinning round the parlour, turning in wide, emphatic circles. The applause was still ringing in my ears, the euphoria still tripping through my veins. I raised my arms and spun – past Babbo’s beloved ancestral portraits in their gilt frames, round the stacks of Encyclopaedia Britannicas that doubled as stools when Babbo’s Flatterers came to hear him read, past Mama’s potted ferns.

“All of Paris is reading about me, Babbo. About *me!* And ...” I paused and shook a finger at him, “... *you* had better watch out!”

Babbo crossed his ankles and leaned lazily into his chair, watching me. Always watching me. “We shall dine at Michaud’s tonight. We shall toast you until the wee hours, *mia bella bambina*. Invite your dancing American friend to grace us with her presence. And I’ll invite Miss Steyn.” He touched his hair again, smoothing it against his head with a sudden air of preoccupation. “And I suppose you’d better ask the young man who composed the music.”

“Yes, let’s ask Emile, Mr Fernandez!” My heart gave a little skip as I rose on the balls of my feet and pivoted, once, twice and then a third time before flopping onto the sofa. I glanced at Babbo. Had he seen the quickening of my pulse at the mention of Emile? But his eyes were closed and he was playing with his moustache, pressing the ends down with his index fingers. I wondered if he was thinking about Miss Stella Steyn who had been illustrating his book, or about whether or not to wax his whiskers before we went to Michaud’s.

“Did the newspaper not mention the composer – what was his name again?” Babbo opened his eyes and peered

at me, his pupils swimming behind his fat spectacle lenses like black tadpoles in a jar of milk.

“Emile Fernandez,” I repeated. Would he hear the soft inflection in my voice? While working on my premiere Emile and I had become fond of each other and I wasn’t sure how Babbo would react. He had always been very possessive where I was concerned. Both he and Mama muttered constantly about how things were done in Ireland. When I remonstrated that we were in Paris now, and every other dancer had hundreds of lovers, Babbo would sigh deeply, and Mama would lower her voice and say “Strumpets, with not an ounce o’ shame!”

“I’ll telephone Miss Steyn and you can telephone Mr Fernandez and your delightful dancing friend whose name escapes me.” He put his hand to his throat and carefully adjusted his dimpled bow tie.

“Kitten,” I said. And then I remembered how Mama and Babbo stubbornly called her Miss Neel. “You know, Miss Neel! How can you have forgotten her name? She’s been my best friend for years.”

“Kitten was bitten by an ill-starred bittern, bewitched by a catten after ...” His voice tailed off as he dug into the pocket of his velvet jacket for a cigarette. And in the silence we heard the heavy tread of my mother on the stairs.

“I’m thinking it might be to our advantage not to read the review of your debut repeatedly to your mother.” He stopped and closed his eyes again. “It is a peculiarity of hers, as you know.” He placed a cigarette carefully between his lips and fumbled in his pocket. “Indulge me with a last twirl, mia bella bambina.”

I did a triple pirouette as quickly as I could. Mama didn’t like me dancing in the parlour and I didn’t want her angry words to mar my mood.

She bustled in with her arms full of parcels, her broad chest heaving from climbing the five flights of stairs to our apartment. Babbo opened his eyes, blinked and told her we were all going to Michaud’s ‘for a wee celebration’.

"D'ye mean to say there's some money comin' in the post?" I could see her scanning the room, making sure I hadn't meddled with the furniture as I did sometimes when she was out and Babbo asked me to dance for him.

"No, my mountain flower." He paused to light his cigarette. "Better than money. Lucia is the toast of Paris and we must toast her too. Tonight we shall be toasting and boasting."

Mama stood there, still holding all her bags. Only her eyes moved, narrowing until they were no more than slits. "Not your dancing again, Lucia? Sure it's wearing me out. You'll be putting me in an early grave. Along with the lift that's never working and all those stairs I'm having to climb."

I sensed the mood thicken but I was used to Mama's martyred protestations and Babbo kept shooting me conspiratorial looks and winking at me when her head was turned. So I passed her the *Paris Times* and ignored her grumblings. "I'm going to be a famous dancer, Mama. Read it."

"That I will, Lucia, but I need to unpack me bags and have me some tea first. Look at these fine gloves, Jim." She dropped the parcels on the sofa, pulled a glossy white box from one and started unrolling lengths of black tissue paper. The room suddenly felt cold, as though a sleeve of wind had blown through it. I put the *Paris Times* on the sofa and pulled my arms into my chest. Couldn't she be happy for me – just this once?

Babbo winked quickly at me then blew out a long plume of smoke. "They are indeed beautiful gloves. And nowhere will they look more elegant than round the stem of a glass of Michaud's most intoxicating champagne." He gestured to the newspaper on the sofa. "Read it, Nora. It describes the prodigious talents of our bella bambina. I am reminded of the proverb about the apple never falling far from the tree."

"Holy Mary, Mother o' God! You're like a pair o' chisellers who've been at the sweet jar." She sighed and looked

at her new gloves. "Well, I'm not much in the mood for cooking and I suppose me gloves will be admired in Michaud's." She sniffed and reached for the *Paris Times*. "'Tis Giorgio who should be in here. Why is no-one writing about our Giorgio?" She jabbed at the newspaper with her fingernail.

"They will, Nora. They will. Perhaps Lucia has had a Cassandra moment, a dream, about Giorgio?" Babbo looked expectantly at me, but before I could respond Mama cut in with a flurry of caustic comments about 'daft omens' and 'crazy Cassandras'.

"Giorgio's time will come, but tonight we celebrate my rainbow girl." Babbo blew out a smoke ring and I watched it shift and rise uncertainly, before it broke away and disappeared into the air.

"What's all this about rainbow girls? Don't be telling me they – whoever they are – are seeing the future too?" Mama pushed her fingers fiercely into her new gloves.

"From my book ... they rompride round in rout ... for they are the florals ... Nothing to worry your indomitable and imperious head about." Babbo stared up at the ceiling and sighed.

"Why can't you be writing a normal book, Jim? 'Tis sure to be the death o' me." She reached reluctantly for the *Paris Times* with her gloved hands. "Wear something colourful, Lucia. We don't want to be outshone by Miss Stella Steyn tonight. What page did you say?"

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As soon as the head waiter spotted us, he scurried forward, carving a path through the throng of people. Men kept stopping Babbo to greet him or ask about *Work in Progress*. Only Mama was allowed to know the real title of the book Babbo called his *Work in Progress*, and she had been sworn to secrecy.

As my parents exchanged greetings with other diners, Giorgio appeared behind me. "Sorry I'm late," he panted.

“I had to wait hours for a tram. But I’ve seen the newspaper – what a stupendous review.” He pulled me to him and kissed the side of my head. “What a clever little sister I have! Let’s hope you make your fortune very soon, if only to pay for my singing lessons.” He grimaced briefly and turned his face away.

“Let’s hope so,” I said, not wanting to brag. “Singing lessons not going well?”

“Not well enough to live up to Father’s expectations.” Giorgio fingered the starched collar of his shirt and I noticed there were lavender circles round his eyes and the odour of liquor on his breath. “I have to ask him for money every day and he always looks at me like a dog that hasn’t been fed. Then he sighs in that disappointed way of his.”

I touched his arm in sympathy. I hated seeing him so demoralised and I’d never smelled drink on him before. “When I start earning I can help.”

But Giorgio didn’t respond. Instead he said, “D’you remember Mr and Mrs Cuddle-Cake?”

I laughed. “Those parents we invented?”

His face broke into an expression of wistfulness. “I dreamed about them the other night. They finally came to adopt us and Mr Cuddle-Cake taught me to ride a horse.”

“It’s a bit late for imaginary parents.” I looked back at Mama and Babbo manoeuvring their way through the crowded restaurant in the midst of a phalanx of black-and-white waiters.

“When we were children Mother and Father were never there. And now we’re grown-up they won’t leave us alone. Mr and Mrs Cuddle-Cake wouldn’t have been like that, would they?”

“No, but they weren’t real.” I didn’t want to think about the past so I gave an exaggerated shrug and was about to remind him that Mama thought he was perfect and could do no wrong, when he said, “Oh look, everyone’s here.”

He pointed to a table in the window where Stella,

Emile and Kitten were sitting serenely amongst the gleaming cutlery and polished glasses. The chandelier lit up Emile's beaming face and I felt a little flutter in my chest. He'd pomaded his dark hair and put an orange lily in his button hole. He waved a hand at me and I saw the light catch on his diamond cufflink, sending a spray of rainbow-coloured flashes across the table. Stella sat beside him, dressed in peacock-blue silk with three twisted ropes of amber beads that tumbled to her waist and a lemon-yellow turban with tassels that danced along her eyebrows. Babbo appeared silently behind us and examined her with the forensic eyes of a botanist inspecting an unfamiliar orchid.

"I wish I could dress like that," I whispered to Kitten as she pressed her lips to my cold cheeks. Stella had a bravado, a bohemian carelessness that I yearned for. Mama insisted on choosing and buying my clothes and while they were always elegant and well-tailored, they never had the flamboyance of Stella's outfits.

"You don't need to worry about clothes, darling. Not after your debut and that review. I'm quite envious. Anyway, wait 'til you see what she's wearing below the waist! Tasselled harem pants – totally impractical if it rains." Kitten squeezed my hand affectionately. "But Giorgio doesn't look his usual carefree self?"

I dropped my voice and put my mouth to her ear. "He's worried about money and I think he's tired of being at the mercy of Babbo's patrons."

"It'll be fine when your Pa can sell his book in America. But why's he staring at Stella like that?"

"She's illustrating a book for him, and you can be sure it's his book he's thinking about." I lowered my eyes and added, under my breath, "He's probably wondering how to describe her in Flemish or Latin or rhyming puns."

I slid onto the banquette next to Emile, felt the heat and sturdiness of his body next to mine. Around us swirled the sounds of talk and laughter, the jangling of bangles and beads, the scraping of chairs, the clattering of plates

and glasses, the rattle of knives and forks. And in my head they became the applause from my debut, exhilarating and electrifying.

Babbo ordered champagne and oysters on ice, and as soon as our glasses were full, he pushed back his chair and stood up, gripping the table with a bony hand. "A toast to Lucia! Dancer, linguist, artist!"

"With her clear skin and blue eyes." Mama raised her glass, extending her neck and turning her head to the chandelier as she did so. I had the sudden thought that she was jealous of me. It was the briefest and most ludicrous of thoughts. But it was something in the angling of her neck beneath the light. As though she were making it clear my appearance had come from her. It struck me how rarely I saw Babbo's covetous eyes on her now, how rarely I saw him listening, in that fixed way of his, to the cadence of her speech. All that was reserved for me. I glanced across the table and there he was – glass aloft, blinking hard, his gaze swinging between me and Stella.

Meanwhile, the champagne fizzed in our glasses, the salt green smell of oysters hovered above the table, small clouds of cigar smoke strayed from our neighbouring diners who clapped and smiled at me. Emile's thigh pressed against mine, firm and full of certainty. And in that instant it seemed as though I could be happy forever and that no one could be happier than I was. I leaned into Emile and let my hand creep onto his leg.

"Where are you dancing next, Lucia? Will Josephine Baker have to vacate the stage for you?" Stella adjusted her turban then impaled an oyster on her fork and slipped it neatly into her mouth.

"She's a wild piece o' goods, that Mrs Baker. Dancing naked with bananas. Shame on her!" Mama lifted her napkin and shook it out, as if she was hoping to shake away all discussion of Josephine Baker, the dancer who had taken Paris by storm with her risqué shows.

"They say she's making an absolute fortune," said Giorgio. The tip of his tongue curled from his mouth and

rested briefly on his upper lip. "Apparently she's swapped the banana skirt for a small pink feather."

"She's naked but for a feather?" Kitten's eyes were wide with shock.

"She's a floozy, is what," said Mama, her nostrils flaring with contempt.

"She's a modern young woman and she's earning her own money. I say good for her." Stella raised her glass of champagne but quickly lowered it when she saw Mama glaring.

"She's had herself two husbands already and they say she has a lover now. What sort of a lady is that, I ask you?"

"That's why she can dance on stage wearing only a feather. If she wasn't married, it wouldn't be allowed," said Kitten quietly. "Pa says marriage is the only way a woman can be free, even today, even in Paris. All these liberated women, all these flappers – Pa says they're not truly free at all."

"Must feel pretty bloody liberating to dance in the nude." Giorgio snorted and ground out his cigarette. "Especially when you're earning a fortune from it. You can't be more free than that."

"What nonsense!" Stella, her eyes alight, stabbed at the air with the prongs of her fork. "Women now have a real chance for freedom. Look at all the women in Paris, painting and dancing and writing. They're not all married."

"Bravo, Stella," I cried, clapping my hands together. Stella had what Mama called 'a tongue on her.' It was yet another aspect of Stella I admired and envied. I was about to interject with my own views on how free one could feel when lost in movement, how liberating it was to dance whether you were rich *or* poor, clothed *or* unclothed, when Giorgio cut me short.

"They say she gets hundreds of marriage offers every week. Perhaps I should make an offer. What d'you say, Emile?" He turned to Emile and clapped him on the shoulder.

"I agree with Kitten. Marriage is the rock on which our society is built and the only way any of us can be free. That's how we Jews think. Marriage underpins everything. But I'm not sure that includes marriage to Mrs Baker." Emile's hand had found mine beneath the table cloth and he stroked my fingers with his thumb as he spoke. "What do you think, Mr Joyce?"

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Mama squirming on her chair, staring at her glass of champagne. Babbo ran his fingers absent-mindedly across his chin, smoothing and stroking his beard. "Marriage, religion ... conventions and institutions. Shackles to be thrown off." He gazed fixedly at the plate of spent oyster shells in front of him.

"Take no notice o' Jim. Sure what would he be knowing about shackles" Mama gave a truncated sigh, as though exasperation had deprived her of breath half way through. I shot Giorgio a questioning look but he was busy searching for his lighter, an unlit cigarette dangling from his lower lip.

"Freedom for women and the institution of marriage aren't incompatible. But no one can dispute the primacy of family. Look at you Joyces." Stella gestured across the table with its litter of bread crumbs and trails of ash and half-empty glasses. "Married for all these years, devoted to Lucia and Giorgio. Would they be so talented, so clever, if you hadn't married?"

"We'd be bastards in the gutter." Giorgio's mouth widened into a yawn, and as he stifled it with his fist he caught my eye and winked. "Instead we're rising stars on the stage, aren't we, Lucia?"

"Well, I'm o' the mind that Mrs Josephine Baker should be locked up. Sure she'd be under lock and key in Ireland." Mama pushed away her glass and gave a tight shake of her head.

"And so would I, Nora. So would I." Babbo spoke into the knot of his tie so quietly that only I heard him, for then Emile leapt to his feet, crying "Enough talk of gutters and prisons. Another toast to the talented and beautiful

Lucia!" He lifted his glass and everyone shouted my name again.

That was when I saw *him*. He was standing in the street looking furtively through the window, so close his nose almost touched the glass. His eyes were bright and curious, and he seemed to be looking at Babbo but then his gaze shifted to me. And in that split second something extraordinary happened. As he caught my eye a current of emotion passed between us. My heart jumped violently. Then he lowered his head, his shoulders curved forward, and disappeared up the boulevard. I felt Emile slide back onto the banquette, thrusting his leg against mine again.

"What *is* she looking at now? Lucia? Lucia? We're all toasting you and you're gawking out o' the window like someone possessed." Mama rolled her eyes despairingly.

Babbo frowned, put his champagne flute back on the table, and held up his palm. "Hush, Nora. She is having a clairvoyant moment. Quiet for my Cassandra!"

"Someone was staring at me through the window," I said, dazed and bewildered by the oddness of the experience, the intensity of those eyes, the sudden jolting of my heart. I gave a dismissive wave of my hand and turned gratefully to Emile, hoping to deter Babbo from any further talk of Cassandra.

"One of your new devotees, I'll be bound." Kitten laughed and squeezed my forearm. "He probably recognised you from the newspaper."

"Indeed, the price of fame. I know it only too well." Babbo peered round the table, his spectacles flicking reflections of light from face to face. "You will have to bear it as best you can, Lucia. No doubt they will be queuing outside for your autograph."

Would he be outside? The man with the bird-bright eyes and the beaky nose and the cheekbones like fish knives? No. He had melted into the darkness. And everyone at the table was laughing at Babbo's wit. Everyone except Emile whose lips were so close to my ear I could hear the smack

of saliva in his mouth as he whispered, “You *will* have queues of followers. You will!”

And then Babbo started pronouncing on the indisputable link between dancing and visions, telling us about an obscure African tribe who danced until they saw the future. I knew his eyes were on me but I couldn’t focus on his words.

“And they were half-naked too, I’ll bet,” said Mama in a thin tepid voice. Everyone laughed again.

But all I could think of was the man staring at me through the window. I felt a strange sensation of restlessness spilling through me, as though something deep inside me was hatching.

And now, looking back from the Alps where the air is starting to bite and claw at me, I see how right I was. Unlikely though it seemed at the time, something *was* hatching, unspooling low in my solar plexus. And this was where it started.