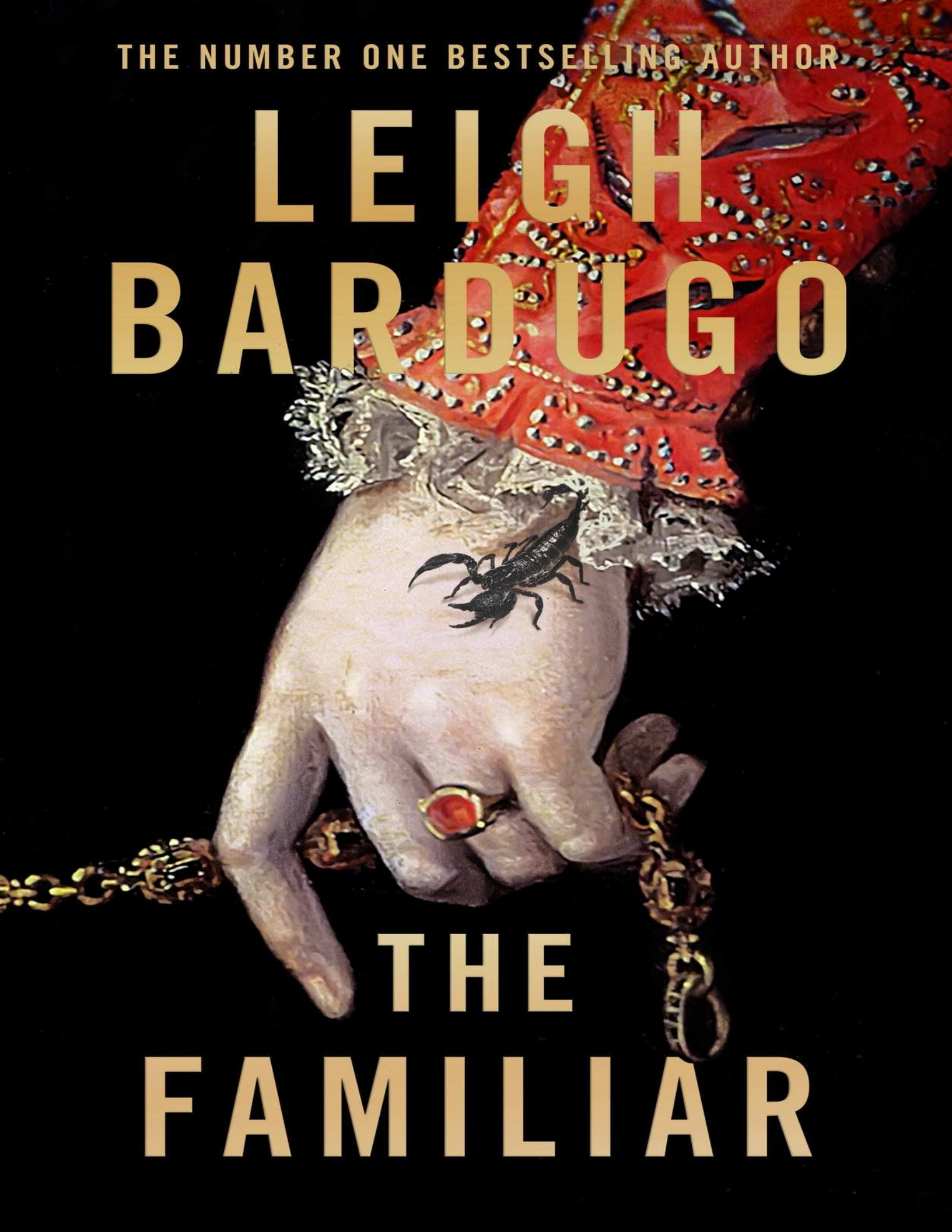
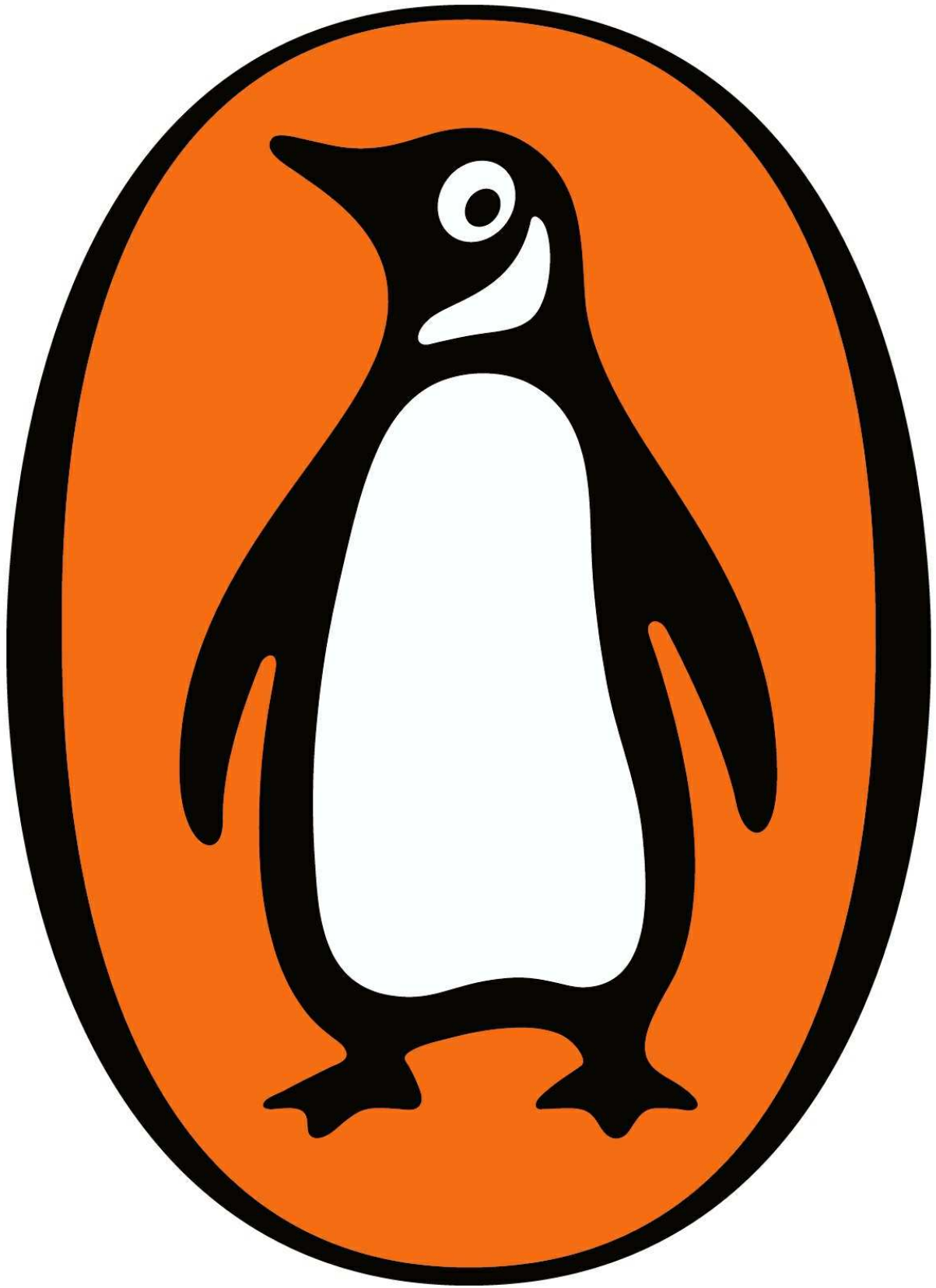


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THE
FAMILIAR



About the Author

Leigh Bardugo is the *Sunday Times* and *New York Times* bestselling author of *Ninth House* and *Hell Bent*, and the creator of the Grishaverse (now a Netflix original series), which spans the *Shadow and Bone* trilogy, the *Six of Crows* duology, the *King of Scars* duology and much more. Her short fiction has appeared in multiple anthologies including *The Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy*. She lives in Los Angeles and is an associate fellow of Pauli Murray College at Yale University.

Also by Leigh Bardugo

The Ninth House Series

Ninth House

Hell Bent

The Shadow and Bone Trilogy

Shadow and Bone

Siege and Storm

Ruin and Rising

The Six of Crows Duology

Six of Crows

Crooked Kingdom

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‘The taut plot, often grisly magic, lavish scene-setting, and wry humour combine to make this just as unputdownable as the first instalment. **Readers will be wowed**’
Publishers Weekly

‘Bardugo doesn’t flinch from the **dark sides of magic and human nature**’
Booklist

‘**Vivid, intelligent and funny** at just the right moments, but best of all are the

complex characters'

Kirkus Reviews

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Book of the Month

'Unlike anything I've ever read'

Veronica Roth

Leigh Bardugo

THE FAMILIAR



For my family—converts, exiles, and ghosts.

A mi familia—conversos, exiliados, y fantasmas.

A mi famiya—konvertidos, surgunlis, i fantazmas.

CHAPTER 1

If the bread hadn't burned, this would be a very different story. If the cook's son hadn't come home late the night before, if the cook hadn't known he was hanging around that lady playwright, if she hadn't lain awake fretting for his immortal soul and weeping over the future fates of possible grandchildren, if she hadn't been so tired and distracted, then the bread would not have burned and the calamities that followed might have belonged to some other house than Casa Ordoño, on some other street than Calle de Dos Santos.

If, on that morning, Don Marius had bent to kiss his wife's cheek before he went about the day's business, this would be a happier story. If he had called her *my darling, my dove, my beauty*, if he had noted the blue lapis in her ears, or the flowers she had placed in the hall, if Don Marius hadn't ignored his wife so that he could ride out to Hernán Saravia's stables to look over horses he could never afford to buy, maybe Doña Valentina wouldn't have bothered going down to the kitchen, and all of the tragedy that was to follow would have poured out into the gutter and rolled down to the sea instead. Then no one would have had to suffer anything but a bowlful of melancholy clams.

Doña Valentina had been raised by two cold, distracted parents who felt little toward her beyond a vague sense of disappointment in her tepid beauty and the unlikelihood that she would make a good match. She hadn't. Don Marius Ordoño possessed a dwindling fortune, lands crowded with olive trees that failed to fruit, and a well-proportioned but unassuming house on one of the better streets in Madrid. He was the best that Valentina, with her unremarkable dowry and less remarkable face, could hope for. As for Marius, he'd been married once before to a redheaded heiress, who had stepped in front of a carriage and been trampled to death only days after their wedding, leaving him without children or a single coin of her parents' money.

On Valentina's wedding day, she wore a veil of golden lace and ivory

combs in her hair. Don Marius, gazing at their reflection in the watery mirror propped against the wall in the front room of his home, had been surprised by the jolt of lust that overtook him, inspired perhaps by his bride's hopeful eyes, or the sight of himself in his wedding clothes. But it's more likely he was moved by the brandied cherries he'd been eating all morning, tucking them into his cheeks and chewing them slowly rather than making conversation with his new father-in-law. That night he fell upon his bride in a frenzy of passion, whispering poetry into her ears, but he had managed only a few awkward thrusts before vertigo overcame him and he vomited the plump half-chewed bodies of brandied cherries all over the nuptial linen that Valentina had embroidered with her own hands over a period of many weeks.

In the months and years to come, Valentina would look back almost wistfully on that night, as Marius's cherry-fueled ardor was the only sign of passion or even interest in her that he had ever shown. And while it was true that she'd simply gone from one loveless home to another, that didn't mean she didn't feel the absence of love. Doña Valentina had no acceptable name for the longing she felt, and no idea how to soothe it, so she filled her days irritating their few servants with constant correction and existing in a state of relentless dissatisfaction.

That was why she went down to the kitchen that morning—not once, but twice.

The cook had grown increasingly erratic as her son's obsession with the playwright Quiteria Escárcega became known, so Doña Valentina made sure to check on her every morning. That day, as she came down the stairs, feeling the heat rise around her, she was greeted by the unmistakable odor of burning bread and nearly swooned with the pleasure of something tangible to complain about.

But the cook wasn't there.

Valentina intended to remain, sweating in the heat from the fireplace, her anger rising to a furious boil, refining a long rant against wastefulness, negligence, and the cook's general character. But a knock at the door echoed above, and Valentina knew it might be someone who wished to speak to her husband about his olives. It might even be an invitation—unlikely, but just the hope was enough to make her move. There was no one else to answer the door at Casa Ordoño. Her husband had made it clear they could afford no additional servants and that she was lucky to have a cook and a scullion to help her around the house. There was nothing to do but set aside her rage and

stomp back up the steps, dabbing at her moist face with her sleeve.

When she marched down the stairs again, a letter from her father stuffed unread into her sleeve, she heard the cook nattering about something to the squat lump of a scullion girl who smelled of damp and who was always stumbling about the house with her eyes on her graceless feet.

“Águeda,” Valentina said as she burst into the kitchen, voice vibrating with the righteousness of a good scold, “can you tell me why you see fit to waste my husband’s fortune and my time by once again burning the bread?”

The cook looked at her dully, sullen eyes red from crying over her foolish son, then turned her gaze to the table at the center of the kitchen, where the bread waited in its black pan.

Even before Valentina looked, she felt her body flush, the likelihood of her own humiliation coming on like a sudden storm. The bread sat, a little golden cushion in its iron bed, its top high, glossy, and golden brown, perfectly risen, perfectly baked.

Doña Valentina wanted to examine the bread, poke it with her finger, and declare it a liar. She had seen that same bread only minutes ago, blackened and ruined, its dome of crust collapsed by heat. And she knew, she *knew* it was not another loaf drawn from the fire to replace the first because she recognized that iron pan with its slightly dented corner.

It wasn’t possible. She had been gone only a few minutes. They’re playing a trick, Valentina thought, the stupid cook and the stupid kitchen girl are trying to goad me, to get a reaction and make me look a fool. She would not give them the satisfaction.

“You have burned the bread before,” she said lightly, “and I have no doubt you will do it again. See to it that our midday meal is not late to table.”

“Will Don Marius be home to dine, señora?”

Valentina considered slapping the cook’s smug face. “I don’t believe so,” she said brightly. “But I will have two friends joining me. What are you preparing?”

“The pork, señora. Just as you asked.”

“No,” Valentina corrected. “It was the quail I requested. The pork is for tomorrow, of course.”

Again the cook stared at her, her eyes hard as stubs of coal. “Of course, señora.”

Valentina knew very well that she had requested the pork. She had planned the meals for the household a week prior as she always did. But let the cook

remember that this was her home and she was never to be the butt of the joke.

After Doña Valentina left, Luzia plucked the quail and listened to the cook mutter angrily as she set aside the stewed pork, pots and pans clattering. She was making a fuss, but the pork could be kept for tomorrow with little trouble. It was Doña Valentina's manner that had further soured Águeda's miserable mood. Luzia was almost grateful. An angry Águeda was better company than a moping Águeda.

Still Doña Valentina's unhappiness bled into everything, and each time she came to the kitchen Luzia worried her bitterness might turn the milk or cause the vegetables to spoil. Her aunt had warned her long ago that some people brought misery with them like weather, and she'd told the story of Marta de San Carlos, who, jilted by her lover, had gone for a walk along the leafy paths by the Alcázar and wept so long and so hard the birds had joined in. For years after, anyone who entered the gardens and heard the birds sing was overcome by sadness. Or so Luzia's aunt said.

When Luzia had seen the burnt bread, she hadn't thought much about passing her hand over it and singing the words her aunt had taught her, "Aboltar kazal, aboltar mazal." *A change of scene, a change of fortune.* She sang them very softly. They were not quite Spanish, just as Luzia was not quite Spanish. But Doña Valentina would never have her in this house, even in the dark, hot, windowless kitchen, if she detected a whiff of Jew.

Luzia knew that she should be careful, but it was difficult not to do something the easy way when everything else was so hard. She slept every night on the cellar floor, on a roll of rags she'd sewn together, a sack of flour for her pillow. She woke before dawn and went out into the cold alley to relieve herself, then returned and stoked the fire before walking to the Plaza del Arrabal to fetch water from the fountain, where she saw other scullions and washerwomen and wives, said her good mornings, then filled her buckets and balanced them on her shoulders to make the trip back to Calle de Dos Santos. She set the water to boil, picked the bugs out of the millet, and began the day's bread if Águeda hadn't yet seen to it.

It was the cook's job to visit the market, but since her son had fallen in love with that dashing lady playwright, it was Luzia who took the little pouch of money and walked the stalls, trying to find the best price for lamb and heads of garlic and hazelnuts. She was bad at haggling, so sometimes on the

way back to Casa Ordoño, if she found herself alone on an empty street, she would give her basket a shake and sing, “Onde iras, amigos toparas”—*wherever you go, may you find friends*—and where there had been six eggs, there would be a dozen.

When she was still alive, Luzia’s mother had warned her that she wanted too much, and she claimed it was because Luzia had been born at the death of the king’s third wife. When the queen died her courtiers threw themselves against the palace walls and their wailing was heard throughout the city. One was not supposed to mourn the dead; it was said to deny the miracle of resurrection. But the death of a queen was different. The city was meant to grieve her passing, and her funeral procession was a spectacle rivaled only by her stepson Carlos’s death earlier that year. Luzia’s first cries as she entered the world were mixed with the weeping of every madrileño for their lost queen. “It confused you,” Blanca told her. “You thought they were crying for you, and it has given you too much ambition.”

Once, though her aunt had warned against such things, Luzia had tried the same little song of friendship with the coins themselves. The pouch had jangled merrily, but when she reached inside, something bit her. Twelve copper spiders spilled out and skittered away. She’d had to sing over the cheese, the cabbage, and the almonds to make up for the lost money, and Águeda had still called her stupid and useless when she’d seen the meager contents of the shopping basket. That was where ambition got you.

Aunt Hualit had only laughed when Luzia told her. “If a little bit of magic could make us rich, your mother would have died in a palace full of books, and I wouldn’t have had to fuck my way to this beautiful house. You’re lucky all you got was a spider bite.”

Her aunt had taught her the words, pulled from letters written in countries far across the sea, but the tune was always Luzia’s. The songs just came into her head, the notes making a pleasant buzz on her tongue—to double the sugar when there was no money for more, to start the fire when the embers had gone cold, to fix the bread when the top had burned so badly. Small ways to avert small disasters, to make the long days of work a little more bearable.

She had no way of knowing that Doña Valentina had already visited the kitchen that morning, or that she had seen the burnt bread in its pan. Because while Luzia had been born with certain talents, far-seeing was not one of them. She wasn’t prone to visions or trances. She saw no futures in the patterns of spilled salt. If she had, she would have known to leave the bread

untouched, and that it was far better to endure the discomfort of Doña Valentina's anger than the peril of her interest.

CHAPTER 2

Valentina had no handmaid, so it was left to the scullion to help her undress every night, to douse the candles, wipe down the windows and seal them tight, and set the chamber pots beneath the beds. Usually Valentina was able to ignore the girl. She was a good enough worker, appropriately drab in her linen and wool, not the type to attract notice. It was one of the reasons Valentina had hired her, though truth be told, she'd not had much choice. The wages she could afford to offer were low, and with so few hands to help, the work was hard.

But this night, as the girl unhooked the back of Valentina's gown and brushed it down to remove any dust, Valentina asked, "What's your name?" She must have known the scullion's name at some point, but had used it too rarely to commit it to memory.

"Luzia, señora," the girl said without looking up from her work.

"And do you have a suitor?"

Luzia shook her head. "No, señora."

"A shame."

Valentina expected a mumbled *yes, señora*. Instead, Luzia, folding the dress into its trunk, said, "There are worse things for a woman than being alone."

I was happier in my mother's house. The thought came unbidden to Valentina, the grief sudden and overwhelming. But of course there was no greater shame than an unmarried daughter, nothing more useless than a woman without husband and children. Was this girl happy? Valentina wondered, the question forming on her tongue. She clicked her teeth, biting back the words. What did it matter if a servant was happy as long as she did her job?

"You and the cook thought you'd have a laugh at my expense today, didn't you?"

“No, señora.”

“I know what I saw, Luzia.”

Now the girl looked up, and Valentina was startled to see her eyes were deep brown, nearly black.

“What did you see, señora?” she asked, her dark gaze like a slick river rock. Valentina had the uneasy sense of the two of them alone in this room, of the silence of the house, of her own weakness. She felt as if she’d opened up a cupboard and found a wolf.

“Nothing,” Valentina managed, embarrassed by the catch in her voice. “I saw nothing.” She stood and crossed the room, sense returning as she put distance between herself and the scullion. “Your gaze is very bold.”

“Apologies, señora,” Luzia said, eyes on the floor once again.

“Go,” said Valentina with what she hoped was a careless wave.

But when Luzia had departed, Valentina bolted the door behind her.

Luzia didn’t sleep that night and she took no chances the next day. She waited for the water to boil without singing a word to hasten it. She fetched wood for the fire without speaking a syllable to lighten it. She didn’t breathe properly until she was hurrying down the street to San Ginés. Doña Valentina had been watching her closely since the incident with the bread. She wasn’t looking for magic; Valentina thought Luzia and the cook were out to get her with some petty prank.

But on the streets, Valentina couldn’t follow. No woman of her station could leave the house without her husband or father or priest to accompany her. Luzia had heard of rich ladies who broke bones toppling from their houses, and one who had even died when she had leaned out too far, trying to get a glimpse of something new. She sometimes played a game with herself when she was tired or her back was aching: Would she prefer to sit on a cushion and embroider all day but only see life bound by a casement? Or would she prefer to take another walk to the well? When the buckets were empty the answer was easy. Not so much when they were full.

As she passed in front of the house, she felt Doña Valentina’s eyes on her from her high window, but Luzia refused to look up, and walked as fast as she could to San Ginés, the twists and turns of the dusty streets familiar, the mile vanishing beneath her feet.

Luzia’s aunt had told her she must be seen at church every day. But when

she entered the dark nave, it was her mother who she thought of, buried somewhere beneath her feet. Someone was always being buried at San Ginés, the stones lifted, resettled, and dislodged again, the bodies rearranged to make more space.

Blanca Cotado had died in a pauper's hospital, her corpse paraded through the streets with the other dead so the parish clergy could collect alms to put toward masses said for the departed. Luzia had been ten years old and she'd remembered her mother's words of instruction, of the true prayers she was meant to recite, a secret echo in her head. It was a game she and her mother had played, saying one thing and thinking another, the bits and pieces of Hebrew handed down like chipped plates. Luzia didn't know if God heard her when she prayed in the cool shadows of San Ginés or if He understood the language she spoke. Sometimes that worried her, but today she had other concerns.

She strolled out through the church's eastern door and into the neighboring garden with the statue of the Blessed Virgin nursing. *She might be Ruth*, her father had said, *she might be Esther*. But her mother came from a long line of learned men, and she whispered, *These statues aren't for us*. Luzia's feet carried her down a winding side street that led to Plaza de Las Descalzas and then on to a brick house with a grapevine carved over the door. Luzia visited every few weeks, though she would have come every day if she could. She always carried fresh linen in her market basket so she could pretend she was bringing it to one of Hualit's servants if for some reason she was questioned. But she never was. Luzia knew how to be invisible.

Once she had seen Hualit's patron, Víctor de Paredes, leaving her aunt's house. He'd worn black velvet and climbed into an even blacker coach, as if he were vanishing into a well of shadow, a piece of night that refused to budge in the afternoon sun. To avoid questions for her aunt, she had continued walking past Hualit's door, pretending she was on her way somewhere, but she hadn't been able to resist a peek inside the coach. She only glimpsed De Paredes's boots, and opposite him, bundled into the corner, a slender, sickly young man, his skin smooth and gleaming, his hair the cool white of a dove's breast, his eyes glittering like oyster shells. When she'd met his pale gaze, she'd had the odd sensation she was lifting out of her shoes, and she'd hurried on, only looping back when she could be certain the coach had gone. It was still winter, and she'd been surprised to see that the almond trees peeking over the walls on her aunt's street had burst into bloom, their

branches thick with tufts of trembling white flowers.

Today there were no almond flowers, no inkblot coach sitting in front of the house, and Aunt Hualit opened the door herself, herding her inside with a smile.

Stiff lace and black velvet were the fashion now and Hualit wore them whenever she left the house, when she became Catalina de Castro de Oro, mistress to Víctor de Paredes. But at home, in the elegant courtyard with its burbling fountain, she wore robes of colored silk, her thick black hair snaking around her shoulders in waves scented with bee balm.

Luzia knew it was all for effect. A man like Víctor de Paredes had a taste for the exotic, and Hualit was even more exciting than the melegueta pepper that arrived in the bellies of his ships. De Paredes's ships never sank, no matter how rough the seas, and all over the capital people whispered it was a sign of God's favor. But in this courtyard he crooned that Catalina de Castro de Oro was his good luck charm, and Luzia often wondered if Hualit had managed some enchantment over her patron, for her fortunes were so bound up with his.

"Something's wrong," Hualit said once the door had closed. She grabbed Luzia's chin and stared into her face, her fingers like iron tongs.

"If you will let go of me, I can solve the mystery for you."

Hualit snorted. "You sound like anger but it's fear I smell."

She gestured for Luzia to join her on the low couch in the courtyard's corner, artfully arranged with embroidered cushions. None of it was strictly Moorish, but it was all decadent enough to give De Paredes the feeling of the forbidden. And the setting suited Hualit well. Everything about her was soft and lush, her honeyed skin, her luminous eyes. Luzia often wished she'd been born with a bare scrap of her aunt's good looks, but Hualit would only cluck her tongue and say, "You're not wise enough for beauty, Luzia. You'd spend it like coin."

Hualit's maid Ana set wine and a plate of olives and dates on the low table, and gave Luzia's shoulder a quick pat as if she were a favored pet. She was the only servant her aunt kept, a stout woman who wore her silver hair in three looping braids down her back. She loved playing cards and chewing anise seeds, and most important, she never gossiped.

"How do you know you can trust her?" Luzia asked when the maid had gone.

"She's had a thousand opportunities to betray me and never taken one. If

she's biding her time, she may well be dead before she seizes her chance." Hualit poured wine into tiny jade cups and said, "Why ask after all this time? And why do you look so worried? There's a divot between your brows like you took a spade to your forehead."

"Let me stay," Luzia said without meaning to. Autumn had begun and the leaves of the grapevines that twined around the courtyard's columns had turned a luminous orange, dropping away in places to reveal the twisting gray braids of the stalks, the fruit long since harvested for drying. "I can't bear to go back to that house." It was bad enough to fear and resent Doña Valentina, but pitying her, witnessing her lonely vigil at her window, waiting for a husband who was barely a husband, was unbearable.

"Your father would never forgive me for corrupting your virtue."

Luzia scowled. "I'll leave Casa Ordoño with my back ruined and my knees knobbled and my hands rough as sand, but at least my precious virtue will be intact."

Hualit only laughed. "Precisely."

Luzia was tempted to smash the jade cup on the tiles. But the wine tasted too good and the half hour spent eating dates and listening to Hualit's stories from court was too dear. When Luzia's mother had died and the wobble in their lives had become a quake, she'd hoped Hualit might let her work in her home, but her father's mind had still been orderly enough for him to forbid it. "If you work in a sinner's house it will be the end of your virtue. You will never have a husband or a home of your own."

Luzia was hard-pressed to know how she would make any kind of match when she spent all her hours toiling away at Casa Ordoño and seeing to Doña Valentina's demands. When she ventured out to the market, she found herself looking into the face of every young man—and the old ones too. But she'd gotten too good at being unseen. She walked unnoticed past the butchers and fishmongers and farmers. At well past twenty, she had never had a suitor, never so much as kissed someone, barring a drunk who had seized her at the market and tried to grind his stubbled face against hers before she planted a kick to his shin.

She had heard and seen plenty, men and women on their knees in narrow alleys, skirts up, trousers down; veiled beauties in their coaches at the Prado, fine ladies and whores indistinguishable in the darkness; the coarse talk that floated out of the stalls in the plaza. *What makes a good woman?* a priest had opined to a group of performers on their way into one of the mentideros. *She*

might have skill with a needle, said a young actor, playing to the crowd. *Or a talent for conversation*, he went on. *Or she might be able to hold a man's cock inside her and squeeze until he sees God*, he shouted, and the crowd burst into laughter while the priest bellowed that they would all burn in hell.

When Don Marius's father had sickened, Luzia had been brought to the old man's house to help bathe him. They'd taken her to his bedchamber and she'd stood with her back against the closed door, clutching her basin full of water, the soap, the towel, whispering every prayer she knew, certain that they'd left her alone with a dead man. She'd watched his desiccated body until she'd seen his narrow chest rise and fall. But when she'd tried to bathe him, he'd seized her hand and clamped it to his cock. It felt like a mouse in her hand, soft-bodied and pulsing. He was strong, but she'd used her other hand to cover his nose and mouth, until he let her go. She kept her hand pressed to his face until his rheumy eyes started to bulge. "I am going to finish bathing you now, Don Esteban, and you will stay still or I will snap your sad little root off at the base." He'd been docile after that. He'd seemed almost pleased.

That was the extent of her experience with men's bodies.

"There must be more," she said, setting down her wine and closing her eyes. "Why teach me to read if I'm meant to live a life without books? Why teach me Latin when a parrot would have more opportunity to speak it?"

"Only God knows what we're meant for," Hualit said. "Now, have another date. They're good for sour stomachs and self-pity."