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It was love at first sight.

But what she saw was not what the others saw when they plunged into the fog steaming from the lake, which grew more and more dense until it was not lake they were floating on, but cloud, and they could have been anywhere other than the country house, anywhere at all, or nowhere.

Behind her, Cousin Isabelle made a delighted little gasp and Gerard grunted at the oars—and then there was no sound at all, and she might have been alone on that rowboat they'd been taking across the lake since she was a child—other foggy excursions, and starlit ones, and sometimes the still of morning, when the water turned rose pink and glared at the sunrise.

The fog filled the space between them, misting her skin into pearlescence. She could no longer see her brother, or Isabelle. She leaned over the bow, dragging her hand in the water, though the morning was cold and the water too—the sun had not yet won its battle with the fog—and suddenly her hand encountered something solid, something warm. In surprise, she looked down, and there, staring back at her, a face, pale and unblinking, the fog taking form beneath the water, and she drew her hand back again in surprise, but not in fear. No, not fear, but with a heart suddenly full, and a yearning she could not explain.

Then the fog thickened, and the face was gone, and all the sounds came to her in a rush: the muffled plunk of the oar, Gerard's "ugh," Isabelle's "Oh, I can't see a thing, can you? We should turn around, don't you think?"

"It's too cold to be out this morning anyway," Gerard agreed.

Had she really seen it? Had she felt it? When they emerged from the fog it seemed suddenly impossible that she had. What startled her then was not that it might have been a figment of her imagination, but how ardently wished otherwise.

The morning beyond the mist promised to be beautiful. Before them was the scene she knew so well that wherever she was she could summon it simply by closing her eyes. The ragged dock and the grove of cattails, the still unadorned waterlilies, the forsythia beyond breaking into bud.

As Gerard looped the mooring rope around the wooden cleat, and laid the oars onto the dock and helped their cousin from the boat, she turned again to look at the fog. It seemed denser now, limned with a dark gray that resisted the valiant efforts of the sun.

Her cousin was already halfway up the slope to the house.

“What are you looking at?” Gerard asked, his brow furrowed, his eyes narrowing. “What is it?”

“Nothing,” she told him, though the experience stayed with her the rest of the afternoon, long after the fog had lifted and the lake glittered and rippled in the faint spring breeze. The fog had been there at other times, and she had always thought it lovely and mysterious, but this? This was altogether different, and she no longer knew herself. This was like a dream that lingered into waking, leaving its ghost upon the day. She could not lose the sense of that warmth against her hand, or the solidity brushing the very tips of her fingers.

Early the next morning, she went to the shore again, leaving Gerard and Isabelle yawning in the breakfast room. Again the lake steamed, the fog bank at the center seemed not so solid as yesterday. She wondered if the face was there. The hunger to see it again, to touch it, had her reaching for the oars, but before she could untie the mooring rope, the sun gained victory, and the

fog retreated, banished once again.

That night when she saw the mist that haunted the garden, she stepped from the French doors and into its arms, which wrapped about her, warmly embracing. *Come with me*, it whispered, the words gentle pulses against her throat. *Come with me*.

The door opened, the sound of it echoed as if from a thick distance. Gerard called, "Are you out there, sister?"

The arms released her. She felt their absence as palpably as she had felt their presence. She shivered in the damp chill and followed her brother's voice inside, back to Isabelle playing the pianoforte, back to the conversation, to words that scattered between pauses in the music. She could not understand them; words no longer had meaning; the conversation had nothing to do with anything she knew.

Her life turned to waiting. She sensed how the fog wished to be with her on those days it was kept at bay by sun or by wind or by too-loud voices, by the warmth of a fire. All that spring she thought of those misty arms about her, the warmth that had brushed her hand in the lake. Within her grew a looming desperation, a wish—for what exactly, she could not explain. One could not be in love with the fog, no, of course not, but she could not forget that unexpected warmth.

It became common now for her to wake with an anticipation that died within moments into disappointment and grief.

"What ails you lately, cousin?" Isabelle asked. "You seem so sad."

The spring slipped completely into summer, the lake placidly stupid beneath the torpor of humidity, seeming unable even to raise the will to lap against the shore. The waterlilies bloomed and then were overripe, algae clouded the water, the perfume of rot and reed and the warm mud at the edge of the evaporating shore wafted with every slight breeze. As if in sympathy, everyone at

the country house became quiescent, languid, rousing only for too-warm sherry before dinner, and twilight, and the flicker of fireflies.

She waited for the fall again, even as she knew it meant returning to the city. She waited for the chill of the air, and the leaves turning and twisting loose, caught and flung about by a capricious breeze until they fell with a soft sigh to the ground, rustling when she stepped through them, crisp and dry beneath her feet.

She waited for the fog.

Then, one night, she heard the tapping on the glass. She went to the window. There was no one there. Only fog gathering strength to coalesce into something—a face? A hand?—pressing to get inside. She placed her own palm to the glass, then drew back until she was barely touching, and she felt again, as she had that day on the lake, that sudden, solid warmth at the tips of her fingers like a heartbeat. *Tap tap tap. Come to the lake, she heard. Come to me.*

She stepped away, frightened by her own desire.

The next night, the fog came again.

Tap tap tap. Come to the lake. Come to me.

Again, she turned away. That night, and the next, and the next, but now that she had felt that warmth again, the missing of it consumed her every thought.

“We’ll be going back to the city at the end of the week,” Gerard told her.

She did not protest, not out loud. She only waited.

There was no fog that night. No fog for days. Then, the day they were to leave—back to the city and the townhouse, and the greasy coal smoke fog that burned and choked—she woke very early, early enough that the morning was still night, and she felt the chill in the air. She looked out toward the lake, which wore a shimmering veil of fog.

She put her fingers to the window.

Come to me, she wished, and then she whispered, "Come to me."

The veil shivered as with a sudden breeze, but it did not come, and it did not answer, and she realized suddenly that she could no longer tease, and there was no more time.

She went barefoot from her room, down the carpet runner of the stairs, and turned the key in the lock of the front door, stepping out onto the cold stone porch, onto the frosted grass, which her feet made a pathway across, one she realized the others would see when they woke, so they would not be worried about where she'd gone. She ran to the lake, shivering in the fine lawn of her nightgown, her breath raising clouds. Oh to feel that warmth again ...

She stood on the shore, toes curling in the mud and waterweeds. Still, the fog did not come. It swirled, it gathered; she felt its will as her own. It would not beg her this time, she knew. This time, she must decide.

The rowboat bobbed with the current. She saw it as an entreaty. She stepped into the boat—how well she felt the lap of water beneath the wood, the gentle push and pull, *tap tapping* against the too-alive soles of her bare feet that felt every splinter, the peeling blue paint.

The horizon lightened. The sun, ready to begin its daily war against the fog. She trembled with the need to be quick. She untied the mooring rope and took up the oars, and then she rowed out, far out, until the fog surrounded her.

You came, it said.

I came to you, she answered. She laid the oars neatly aside and stood. The boat rocked gently beneath the shift of her weight. She no longer felt the kiss of water against the soles of her feet—why should she? She was no longer on the lake, but drifting on a cloud; the warmth of it radiated into her toes and ankles, up and up and up. She closed her eyes and the fog wrapped itself

about her, lightly kissing her cheeks.

She fell into its arms.