



LETTER FROM JUNIPER

JUNIPER: Dear Lily.

All day and all night I thought about writing you this letter, saw it unfold in my mind, and so now that I am here with my paper and my ink it does not seem like a real thing, but like a task one undertakes in a dream. When I am finished I will curl this paper up and tuck it in an acorn shell and throw it through your bedroom window; I dreamed this, too, and did I dream you? Are you real? Are you anything of flesh, do you breathe?

Sometimes, when I look out of your mirror at you, I think that I am looking at a piece of my own soul, torn loose and tossed into the world. Not because you belong to me, but because you are familiar and strange at the same time. Lily, you are a person, you are a creature all in your own right – and isn't that curious? How can something like you have come to be? I want to unpick you, like stitches, to see what makes you run – but I won't. I will content myself with drawing your name over my wrist-bone to consider how you turn my blood into gold.

You were small when I was small. I watched you through the bluestar, through the blazing star. It was my mother warned me against you, but I heard you singing in the cinnamon fern and thought you were beautiful: a thing I could never touch. Like the crest of Orion. Like the farthest Pleiades. You wore erythronium in your hair, like your name; the yellow trout lily. Lily, lily. Sometimes I think I would eat you if I could. There is a witch in a story who ate a girl she loved, and always afterwards when she spoke, flowers fell out of her open mouth. I would swallow you up, and you would be lobelia on

my tongue for the rest of my life. This is what they say: it is not uncommon for us to want to eat what we love.

But you are uncommon. Every moment we have spent together is a shining stone in the bowl of my skull. I am greedy, and so I take them out and look at them now and then, like a dragon. The day we went to the buried well and threw butterfly weed down into the black water to count our wishes. The first time you stepped out of your dress for me, gold in the sun, yellow and gold. The night I brought you into the hill, when you clung to me like lichen and in the hall your eyes were cups of firelight. The day in the rain, both of us laughing.

Dear Lily: my mother taught me many things but she did not teach me this.

Where does it come from, the thread that ties us together? Who spun it? What is it composed of, what is its matter? I have half a mind to unpick myself, to find the source; but I won't.

That day in the field of green-and-golds. You said *who are you, where did you come from*. I said *I came from the hill; I am the girl who does not die*. You laughed, and I fell in love with you, there. There: I wrote it down, I turned it into ink and made it something tangible (but you could burn this letter and I would still love you, so it must be something beyond matter). See it here in black and white. I love you, girl from the house on the hill, girl with the hair made of sunbeams. I love you, knot in my heart. I love you, hands on my hands, hands on my ribs, mouth on my mouth. I love you, stone in my shoe. *I love only you*. Only you. Only ever you.

Yours always
Juniper.