

Chapter 1 – Ciara

Heavy growling thunder vibrated through the air, a precursor to the forecasted deluge. Low hanging clouds of iron blanketed the sky above me. Cautiously I pulled my jacket hood up. If I hadn't been so concerned about getting **soaked to the bone**, it would actually have been a nice time to stop and take in the atmosphere. The lighting filtered **red** through the cloud cover, **giving** the neighborhood an off-kilter glow, the kind I would be hard pressed to **capture in a painting**, but would love to try anyway. Slight drops of rain began to patter down, beginning to cleanse the air and earth. I struck up a slow jog, keeping the steady pace until I reached the safety of my covered front porch. With a plop, I sat on the padded swinging bench, **deciding to catch** my breath before heading inside.

The rain fell harder now, drumming the roof above me and the world before me with angry fingers. It had grown darker, clouds thickening. A chill raced up my spine and I sat up straighter as I caught sight of someone walking down the road. Not the sidewalk, the actual road. Where someone could easily run them over with their car. They wore no coat, had no umbrella, and they moved with a slow and confident stride as if they couldn't care less about the situation. I squinted hard at them, trying to distinguish the figure through the sheet of rain. **Stonebrooke wasn't a large town by any means**; I knew most everyone, if not by name then at least by **face**.

As I kept watching, my heart sped up, stomach jumping to the back of my throat as I was swept up in a nauseating wave of déjà vu. I was sure I knew that gait, knew the slope of those broad shoulders. Unconsciously I pulled my pendant from beneath my shirt, clutching it tightly. The sharp crystal-cut edges dug into my palm, but I ignored it. The person, the man I knew I knew but didn't know how or why I knew him, stopped immediately in his tracks. Goosebumps erupted up and down my limbs. My breath hitched, catching in my chest, but slowly seeped out as he shook his head ever so slightly and resumed walking. He rounded the corner, vanishing from my sight. I fell back with a huff

Commented [HC1]: Because we shift perspectives multiple times within each chapter, we should come up with a title for this chapter. How do you feel about something like "The Journal" or "The Familiar Stranger"? I know it's very simple, and I'm sure you have much better ideas, but I do like the idea of incorporating the journal into the title since it becomes so important later on in the story.

Commented [HC2]: Since it hasn't started raining yet, "soaked to the bone" seemed a little too strong to me. What do you think of changing it to "wet"?

Commented [HC3]: I love how quickly you characterize Ciara. We get a good idea of who she is within the first couple of pages.

Commented [HC4]: I added this to make it clearer that she is sitting outside and not going inside at this moment.

Commented [HC5]: We need to make it clear where Stonebrook is. It seems like it's somewhere along the east coast. Maybe Virginia? Or maybe it's on the other end of the map: Oregon? Washington? How would you feel if we inserted the state name somewhere? Or even inserted some local franchises specific to the state this town is located in?

Commented [HC6]: I love your first two paragraphs. Your descriptions are beautiful! You really have a way with words. What a way to begin a story!

of air, heart and breathing gradually resuming a mostly normal pace. Hastily I stood, tucking my necklace back to where it belonged before going to the door. The wind howled and forced itself in a new direction, fat drops of rain encroaching on my dry space as I opened the front door. Unlocked?

“Hello? Mom, ~~d~~Dad?”

“We're in here!” The ~~cheerful~~ disembodied voice barely made it to my ears.

I released a breath I hadn't realized I'd been holding; a sigh of relief. I made my way to their bedroom, stopping in the doorway. Their suitcases lay open on their bed as the two of them rushed around in a packing frenzy.

“What's going on?” I asked, confused. “I mean, obviously you're packing, but why? I thought you didn't leave until Monday night.”

Mom paused from her frantic actions long enough to peck me on the cheek. “Welcome home from school, sweetie. How was your day?”

“Fine. Are you going to answer me?”

My father stepped up behind her and reached over her head to muss the top of my hair, worsening the storm-tangled curls. I really hated when he did that.

“Sorry kiddo, got a call from Director Mason. He asked us to come early and talk over a few things.”

I groaned. “And you both said yes.”

They ~~both~~ smiled sheepishly; ~~d~~Dad shrugged, and they continued packing.

“What kind of things does he want to talk about?” I asked suspiciously.

“Oh, you know, things.” Dad ~~smiled and answered vaguely~~ as he perused his ties. ~~He picked one up and waved it~~ around. “This one or the black argyle?”

“It's charcoal, Ross.” Mom paused, looking hard at the two ties. “Better take them both, just in

Commented [HC7]: I changed this to a lighter word in order to help the readers transition to the new tone. But I don't know if this word feels right. We should definitely play with it, but make sure to keep it light.

Commented [HC8]: What is she afraid of? We should make that clear. Maybe when she opens the door she can have a rush of adrenaline or some internal dialog. Or we can just cut this sentence out.

Commented [HC9]: This is a good instance of a time for us to show what's happening instead of telling. I will continue to point instances like this out, but feel free to reject my changes.

case.”

“Right, *those* things,” I ~~grumped sarcastically~~ rolled my eyes.

Dad grinned, pushing his glasses up before laying the ties in his suitcase; ~~he was keeping something from me.~~

I hopped onto their bed and scooted into the middle, ~~and~~ ~~observed~~ing their haphazard last-minute preparations. The digital clock on ~~d~~Dad's nightstand beeped out the arrival of the new hour. Out of habit he glanced down at his watch in concern.

“We need to hurry, Amber. ~~w~~We should have left five minutes ago.”

“Don't rush me, Ross. I'm packing as fast as I can!” Mom's reply was exasperated as she tried to zip up her luggage.

He frowned but didn't say anything more; ~~and~~ ~~left~~aving the room to take his things to the car.

Mom blew a strand of hair that had fallen from her bun out of her eyes. “We've got to leave now, Ciara. I'm sorry to rush out on you like this. I had hoped to spend this weekend with you before we left but you know your father... when the ~~D~~irector called, ~~your dad~~he just went ahead and said yes without even talking to me.” She came over to the side of the bed, hugging me from the side. “There's a list of numbers on the counter you can call if you ~~need to~~have a hard time getting a hold of us, ~~and we don't answer our phones.~~ We'll be in lectures most of the day, but we'll have breaks now and again to check in.”

“You'd better go now before ~~d~~Dad comes back in,” I half-joked.

She detached herself slowly, tears shining in her eyes. “No matter how many times we do this or ~~how~~4 much you've grown, it's still hard.”

“Mo-om, I'm fine. Really.” I smiled at her.

“Right, right, I know.”

Commented [HC10]: Since we don't learn what her parents are keeping from her later in the book, is it OK if we cut this out?

Commented [HC11]: I noticed that the chapter uses a lot of participial phrases like this one, which is all right, but they are used a lot. So I changed some of them into independent and dependent clauses to mix things up.

Commented [HC12]: This is the perfect place to pinpoint her exact age: “Mo-om, I'm seventeen. I'll be fine. Really.”

I slid off the bed and helped her grab her luggage, following her out to the car. It was already running, and Dad was shoving his bags in the trunk.

"I was just about to come searching for you. I wondered if you'd gotten lost in the storm," Dad joked as he took Mom's things. She raised an eyebrow at him; he chuckled to himself and I smiled.

"Be safe in the rain. I'm going inside now so I don't get too soaked."

Dad paused and hugged me tight. "Love you, kiddo. Stay safe, be smart, make wise choices and remember who you are. Play nice with the other kids."

"Of course, Dad. Bye now!"

"Good-bye sweetie, love you!" Mom waved at me as I walked up to the porch.

I stood in front of the door, watching them finish up and drive away into the pouring rain. As they drove out of sight I sighed to myself, unsure of what to do. My best friend, Raven, was out of town for spring break until the following Wednesday at the earliest. And while I did have other friends, acquaintances, I wasn't sure if I was feeling wholly social. The rain, and the strange man, and my parents' leaving early had left me in a weird mood. I stepped into the house, locking the door behind me, and headed up to my bedroom. If nothing else, I could at least put down the atmosphere on paper with my paints.

The weekend was passed slow and unexciting. The omnipresent rain never let up, splattering both Saturday and Sunday with an unimpressive haze. Most of the time I worked on my painting, not bothering to even leave the house; I hadn't needed to. But by Sunday night I was feeling the beginnings of cabin fever. Rain still squalled outside, lashing the windows and rattling the eaves. Vaguely I wondered if I could remember a spring ever being this stormy, and decided I couldn't. We got our fair share of spring showers, like anywhere else, but this seemed a bit extreme. As I turned in for the night,

Commented [HC13]: I love her parents. Her dad is such a dad. It's great!

Commented [14]: What meaning is this sentence going for: "Friends and acquaintances" or "friends—well, more like acquaintances—I . . .?"

I hoped it wouldn't cause any flooding.

2

The alley was black, black, black. Rain slashed into me from all angles, tossed back and forth by the fickle wind; I hardly noticed.

“I'm done asking, Arvis. Tell me where it is.”

The flame-haired manboy kneeling before me spat, the spray of blood mixing with the rain and puddling at his knees. “You're going to kill me either way. I'd just as soon complete my contract and not tell you.”

“But it is your choice as to how swiftly that death will come.”

Arvis glared up at me, the one eye that wasn't swollen shut narrowing. The rest of his face was smooth and unlined, belying his true age. To any mortal on Earth he would seem no older than twenty, but I knew better.

I sighed. “Have it your way.” I angled my body slightly away from him, hauled back my fist, and punched him square on the nose. I felt the bones and cartilage crunch, felt the hot spray of blood on my fingers counterbalance the chill of the rain. A rumbling growl of disapproving thunder masked his yell of pain as the punch sent him flying back. In one swift and practiced move I drew the knife from my boot and straddled his prone form, all before his teeth had stopped rattling from the impact.

“I'm under no orders, Arvis. I don't have to do this.”

His voice gurgled around the blood accumulating around his mouth. “But you will.”

“Probably.”

Arvis let out a demented giggle. The coiled pit of fury in my gut loosened; my lip curled as I felt rage move me. I brought plunged the knife into his shoulder, plunging it in and twisted it above

Commented [HC15]: I think we should call this section “Seth” since that’s how he first introduces himself to Ciara and since we don’t learn about his background until much later. This way the reader won’t be expecting a premature explanation.

Commented [HC16]: Do you want the action to be faster or slower? This sentence is perfect if he is taking his sweet time to punch this guy in the face. But if the punch is supposed to be immediate, then we should change it to “I punched him in the nose.”

his collar bone. His giggled morphed into a howl as steam rose from around the blade.

“Where is it?” I yelled.

“Kill me!”

I growled in frustration, whipping the knife free, streamers of liquid crimson fluttering into the dark from its edge. With my free hand I grabbed his wrist with vice-like intensity. All it took was one flex, and the bones were crushed beneath my fingers. Arvis paled, the pain from his wounds rendering him mute. Momentarily. A few scant seconds later he was screaming and thrashing. Snarling I dropped his wrist and clamped a hand over his mouth, slamming his head into the concrete to still him.

“The journal, Arvis!”

He shook his head, flailing.

I gripped his face tighter, fingers and thumb digging into his cheeks; I felt the skin begin to stretch and rip, seeking to loosen my hold. I lifted his head and smashed it down, again and again and again. When his body went limp and his eyes rolled back I let go in disgust, leaning back on my heels as I waited for him to come to. I tilted my head back, looking into the rain as it pelted my face. My sodden hair fell back, hanging heavy behind me. I looked down at my hand and rolled my fingers, watchinged the tendons move as the rain washed them clean.

I hadn't wanted it to be this way. Torture wasn't my thing. But Arvis had information I needed; what else was I supposed to do if he wouldn't share? Invade and break his mind? I could, although the prospect was unpleasant. There were too many variables; Arvis could destroy the information, and himself, before I had the chance to find and seize it. I'd been prepared to give him a quick, clean death. After all, he couldn't go unpunished for his transgression. However, he had chosen this. The path of pain. And I would give it to him until I had what I needed.

A strangled moan drew me forward; I slapped at his cheek and pulled up his eyelid so he could

Commented [HC17]: I love all the gruesome details of this torture scene. I can really visualize what's going on!

see me.

“Just... get it... over with...” he wheezed.

“Not until you tell me what you did with it. Do this and I promise a swift kill.”

Arvis swallowed, face clenching up in agony. “Will you return my flower to my sister?”

“You know I can't.”

“I suppose... I had hoped, if anyone knew a way, it would be you...” He cried out as his body convulsed involuntarily. It was going into shock; and was trying to steal his consciousness away from the pain. “Alright, fine, I'll tell you,” Arvis panted. “Just make it stop.”

I nodded once, solemnly.

“It's at... the booksh-” His jaw spasmed, teeth grinding against one another.

“The bookshop. Which one?”

“The one! The shop!” A screech distorted his words, fingers hooking into claws as he began to thrash once more. Arvis began to babble loosely in the tongue of his home, shoulder wound still smoking slightly. A flake of iron must have gotten stuck within when I drew the knife.

Sighing I grasped the hilt, laying the blade to rest in his heart. I wouldn't be getting anything else from him; he was broken. Arvis's mouth opened and closed a few times before his whole body went slack.

“So weak.” I stood up and stepped back in disgust, tendrils of swirling smoke wreathing around me. His body began to burn from the inside out, glowing a heated red as it fell in on itself, becoming a glowing red pile of embers. I retrieved my knife, blade cooling in the rain as I wiped it on my sleeve before returning it to its sheath in my boot. Gradually the coals burned down, and the piles of ash became coming muddled lumps in the wet alley. And then slowly, gently, something pushed its way free of the central mound. A flower, seeming to glow in the heavy dark around it. I nodded once, then

Commented [HC18]: We need to insert more information about Arvis later in the book. It's sad that we don't learn what he did and why Seth can't give his sister his flower.

turned away. Arvis was now dead, and I had a bookshop to find.

Ciara

Monday dawned gray and overcast, but even so, it was dry. Anxious to get out of the house for a time, I threw on some clothes and dashed out the door. Unsure of what I wanted to do, though, I headed for Main Street. There were plenty of shops and boutiques I could look through. The exercise was invigorating, and the crisp air crackleding in my lungs. Wind still gusted occasionally, sending clouds scuttling across the sky. But it never pushed them completely away. By the time I reached Main Street, there were a few drops falling here and there. Chewing my lip in indecision, I glanced up and down the street. I wasn't hungry at all, so I didn't feel the need to stop in at any of the eateries. And I didn't feel like trying on any clothes, so those boutiques were out of the running. Perhaps... my face brightened as my eyes alighted on Fisher's Books, a cozy mom-and-pop bookshop, and one of my favorite places to hang out in Stonebrooke.

I hustled down the street, head bowed against the gusts that were growing in frequency. Before I entereding the bookshop, I glanced up one more time, frowning at the extra clouds growing in the sky. Hopefully the continual wind would blow them over and leave us dry for a day. I pushed the door open, smiled at kindly Mrs. Fisher behind the counter, and began browsing. A soft touch on my arm startled me, but I had to smile as I looked into Mr. Fisher's sparkling, watery blue eyes.

“I've got a crate of new arrivals here, Ciara, if you want to take a look at 'em.”

“Thanks, Mr. Fisher. That would be great.”

He bobbed his head as I knelt by the crate, and then he shuffled off, and I pawed through the stacks of books in the crates offhandedly. Nothing seemed to really catch my interest until I came to one at the very bottom. Carefully I pulled it from beneath the rest, and cradleding it in my hands. It

looked ancient, bound as it was in thick dark leather that was beginning to crack along the edges. I flipped it open, ~~the whispering~~ pages ~~whispering~~, and gasped. ~~My vision was filled with~~ Glimpses of immaculate drawings and paintings, of such a dazzling array it was almost staggering. ~~filled my vision.~~ The book was large and heavy, sections filled with a sprawling text, handwritten in a thin, slanting font. Eagerly I searched for an author's signature or some other distinguishing mark, but to my disappointment found nothing.

“Where did you get this?” I breathed as Mr. Fisher came tottering back over.

“Ah yes, I thought that might be something you'd like. A strange young fellow brought it to me. Never ~~seen~~ him before, an' I was just as amazed as you by the book. When I asked the lad what he wanted for it, you know what he said? Nothing. He wanted nothing.” Mr. Fisher's expression fell, growing troubled. “He almost seemed like he just wanted it gone... as if he were afraid of something...” By the end of the sentence he was mumbling, like he was talking more to himself than to me.

“How much would you like for it?” I asked, trembling, ~~and~~ glossing over his mention of the previous owner's eccentricities. I was drawn to the book. I had to have it; I felt the need on a deeper, spiritual level.

Mr. Fisher looked at the book, then back to me. He scratched the small patch of fluffy white hair ~~left~~ on the crown of his head before speaking. “Well it needs to be in good hands. Needs to be well taken care of. And I know it would be with you.”

I nodded vigorously. He reached for the book and I relinquished it reluctantly, waiting as he turned it over and over. His arthritis-thickened fingers ~~slide~~ over the glossy leather noiselessly. Finally, he handed it back to me, and without thinking I clutched it tightly to my chest. He chuckled.

“Why don't you just keep it. You're a nice girl, Ciara. Always ~~helpingful~~ from the goodness of

your heart. So yes, you keep that book.” Mr. Fisher winked at me.

“But I couldn't possibly—”

“Oh hush now,” Mrs. Fisher chimed in from behind the counter. “We paid nothing for it and neither will you. If there's anyone in this town besides us who recognizes that book for the treasure it is, it's you.” Her husband nodded in agreement.

Tears filled my eyes at their generosity. “Thank you,” I whispered. “I will treasure it always.”

“We know you will.” Mr. Fisher nodded again with finality, eyes twinkling, and then he shuffled away.

I cleared my eyes and throat, and then I returned to browsing. A few hours passed before I realized it. I finally left after purchasing a drawing book and some off-the-wall novella I'd never heard of but seemed interesting. With great deference I placed the handmade book into the drawstring bag with the other books, exchanging it for the and pulled out the novella; I wanted to read it while I walked home. Stiff wind buffeted me as I stepped out of the bookshop. The street was now empty and deserted. Except for me. Slowly I began to walk, cracking the novella open and reading. An enormous peal of thunder echoed above me, heralding the arrival of buckets of rain. I exclaimed wordlessly, looking down miserably at my new book. I badly wanted to put it back in the safety of the cinched bag, but I feared opening it. What if rain were to get in and ruin the others? More expressly, the handmade one? So instead I clutched the novella to my chest and began to walk faster.

I hustled down the street, trying to escape the driving rain. In my bones I knew it was the kind that wouldn't let up for hours; instead of trying to wait it out in one of the cafes, it would be better just to get home as quickly as I could. My book was now officially waterlogged, and I could feel rivulets of water eddyied down the dusty rose-pink cover. Just as unruly wet as when dry, I could also feel my curls, just as unruly wet as when dry, clinging to my neck and face, making it even harder to see. I

Commented [HC19]: I changed this to make it more clear that she's reading the novella and not the journal.

looked over my shoulder as the roar of an engine caught my attention. A car went whizzing by, fins of water flying up from its speeding wheels. ~~As I began to turned away~~ ~~back around~~ I ran into something.

Commented [HC20]: Edit OK?

Or rather, some-one. I began to fall back, but a hand shot out and pulled me steadily to my feet.

“Oh gosh, um, thanks. I'm sorry,” I muttered as I struggled to shove sodden curls away from my eyes. My cheeks warmed as I realized I ran into a man. A tall man. I was staring directly at his sculpted chest, which I couldn't help but admire, as his shirt was thoroughly soaked and clung to every curve of his torso. I looked up into his eyes and immediately grew cold. Electricity arced between us: I *knew* this man. The man walking down the road on Friday. It was him again, and I knew him. How did I know him?

Ebony hair clung to his neck and swept across his face, partially covering one eye. But the eye I could see pinned me in place, an intense soul-burning shade of cobalt blue. My jaw flapped as I searched for more words.

“Uh, yeah, again I'm just so sorry, I'm just gonna—” I forced my feet to move back as I spoke, not looking away from him. My heel snagged a buckled section of the sidewalk. I saw him lunge toward me, but I fell too quicklyfast. Lightning exploded in my skull as my head cracked against the pavement, and my vision blacked out. I felt myself beginning to slip away into unconsciousness, vaguely awarerey of being lifted up.