

# The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue

(a summary by Pat Evert)

## **PART ONE: THE GODS THAT ANSWER AFTER DARK**

### **New York City March 10, 2014**

The girl wakes up in someone else's bed. Knows that he'll forget. They always do. It isn't his fault—it is never their faults. His name is Toby. Last night, she told him hers was Jess. She lied, but only because she can't say her real name. In the last month, she has been Claire, Zoe, Michelle and Elle. Toby begins to stir, and she feels the old familiar ache in her chest. Now it is morning, in another city, another century—Jess holds her breath again as **she tries to imagine** a version of this day where **he wakes, and sees her, and remembers**. But it won't happen like that, and she doesn't want to see the familiar vacant expression, doesn't want to watch as the boy tries to fill in the gaps where memories of her *should be*. Toby is a musician. It's a cold morning in New York. She sets the mug on top of the piano and slides the cover up off the keys, stretches her fingers, and starts to play as softly as possible. In the bedroom, she can hear Toby-the-human stirring, and every inch of her, from skeleton to skin, tightens in dread. But she knows that Toby won't interrupt her as long as she's playing, so she savors the music for several more seconds before forcing herself to trail off, look up, pretend she doesn't notice the confusion on his face. "Jess," she says, supplying the name he can't find, because it isn't there. "It's okay," she says, "if you don't remember." He sinks onto the couch cushions. "I'm sorry ... this isn't like me. I'm not that kind of guy." She smiles. "I'm not that kind of girl." Toby says, "You're really good," and she is—it's amazing what you can learn when you have the time. She starts playing again, leading him through the notes. He doesn't know it, but he's been working on this song for weeks. Well, they have. Together. "I should go." **"But I want to know you,"** Toby says, setting down the guitar and trailing her through the apartment, and this is the moment when none of it feels fair, the only time she feels the wave of frustration threatening to break. Because she has spent weeks getting to know him. And he has spent hours forgetting her. "I have a gig tonight,..." "I'll see you there," he says, the words full of hope as she turns and steps through the door. She looks back, and says, "Don't forget me in the meantime." Toby shakes his head. "How could I?" She smiles, as if it's just a joke. But Addie knows, as she forces herself down the stairs, that it's already happening—knows that by the time he closes the door, she'll be gone.



*The*  
INVISIBLE  
LIFE *of*  
ADDIE  
LARUE

For twenty-three years, she dreaded the marker of time, what it meant: that she was growing up, growing old. And then, for centuries, a birthday was a rather useless thing, far less important than **the night she signed away her soul**. Across the boutique, the clerk startles, flustered at the sight of her. “Everything fit?” she asks, too polite to admit she doesn’t remember letting someone into the back. By the time the clerk finds the clothes, a ghost of a girl on the changing room floor, she won’t remember whose they are, and Addie will be gone, from sight and mind and memory.

### **Villon-sur-Sarthe, France - Summer 1698**

She goes with her father to sell his wares in the city. And then, the walls of Le Mans come into sight. It is a hundred times the size of Villon—or at least, it is that grand in memory—and Adeline holds her breath as they pass through the gates and into the protected city. Her father shaves at the block of wood with all the steady ease of someone peeling an apple, ribbons falling between his fingers. Adeline has always loved to watch him work, to see the figures take shape, **as if they were there all along, but hidden**. Her favorite is a ring. He carved it when she was born, made for the girl she’d one day be, and Adeline wears it like a talisman, an amulet, a key. By the end of the day, the wooden wares are gone, and Adeline’s father gives her a copper sol and says she may buy anything she likes. She settles on a journal. She could not afford the pencils to go with it, but her father uses a second coin to buy a bundle of small black sticks, and explains that these are charcoal, shows her how to press the darkened chalk to the paper, smudge the line to turn hard edges into shadow. With a few quick strokes, he draws a bird in the corner of the page. And **by the time they return home to Villon, she will already be a different version of herself**.

### **Villon-sur-Sarthe, France - Fall 1703**

Adeline is twelve now. Her father has loaded up his cart with wares bound for Le Mans, but for the first time in six years, she is not going with him. She wants only to go, to watch the people and see the art all around, and taste the food, and discover things she hasn’t heard of yet. But mother says no. Estele is an old woman, one whom many think is crazy. Addie goes to her while she is praying to the gods. “The old gods are everywhere,” she says. Adeline’s eyes narrow. “Will you teach me? How to call on them?” “You must humble yourself before them. You must offer them a gift. Something precious to you. And you must be careful what you ask for. **Be careful what you ask for, be willing to pay the price**. And *never* pray to the gods that answer after dark.” Adeline’s father returns, the first thing she does is pick the best pencil, and sink it down into the ground behind their garden, and pray that next time her father leaves, she will be with him. But if the gods hear, they do not answer. She never goes to market again.

### **Villon-sur-Sarthe, France - Spring 1707**

Adeline still prays to the new God, but when her parents are not looking she prays to the old ones, too. So far, none of them have answered. Someone must have heard, for **she is still free**. Free from courtship, free from marriage, free from everything except Villon. Left alone to grow. And dream, tucked into the seams and edges of each page

of her journal— **Adeline's secret**. Her stranger. A world she could only dream of. And when she cannot sleep, she thinks of him. Her stranger's conjured voice makes them sound so wonderful, so real. She breathes life into him with every line. And with every stroke, coaxes out another story. She is at odds with everything, she does not fit, an insult to her sex, a stubborn child in a woman's form, her head bowed and arms wrapped tight around her drawing pad as if it were a door.

#### **New York City, March 10, 2014**

The things that keep you sane. That bring you joy. That make life bearable. Addie has had three hundred years to practice her father's art, **to whittle herself down to a few essential truths, to learn the things she cannot do without**. A life without art, without wonder, without beautiful things—she would go mad. Books, she has found, are a way to live a thousand lives—or to find strength in a very long one. Addie digs the change from her pocket. Her fingers graze **the wooden ring** and she clenches her teeth at the feel of it. She resists the urge to fling the ring into the weeds, knows it will not make a difference if she does. **It will always find its way back.** *I am always with you.*

#### **Villon-sur-Sarthe, France - July 29, 1714**

Adeline had wanted to be a tree. To grow wild and deep, belong to no one but the ground beneath her feet, and the sky above, just like Estele. But then came Roger, and his wife, Pauline. A hard pregnancy, a ruinous birth, two deaths instead of one new life. Three small children left behind, and Roger looking for another wife. Adeline is three and twenty, already too old to wed. Her mother said it was duty. Her father said it was mercy, though Adeline doesn't know for whom. Instead, she prays. In the dead of night, she prays to her mother's God instead. Prays for help, for a miracle, for a way out. Day breaks. "Help me," she whispers to the grass. Finally the church bell tolls, the same low tone it calls at funerals, and she forces herself to her feet. "You will come to love your husband," her father says, but the words are clearly more wish than promise. "You will be a good wife," says her mother, and hers are more command than wish. And then Estele appears in the doorway, dressed as if she is in mourning. There will be no Paris. No green-eyed lover. No trips on boats to faraway lands. No foreign skies. No life beyond this village. No life at all, unless... She runs. Into the woods... **She clutches the wooden ring**. Adeline does not want to sacrifice it, but she has used up all her tokens, given every gift she could spare back to the earth, and none of the gods have answered. "Please," she whispers, as she plunges the band down into the mossy earth. "I will do anything." She bows her head against the soil and grips the dark earth and screams, "Answer me!" Dusk has given way to dark.

Laughter. The voice spills from a perfect pair of lips. It is the stranger. *Her* stranger. "Are you prepared to pay?" The shadow cuts her off, impatient. "What use is it, to tell me what you do not want? Tell me instead **what you want most**." She looks up. "I want a chance to live. I want to be free. I want more time." "You ask for time without limit. You want freedom without rule. **You want to be untethered**. You want to live exactly as

you please. I decline,” he says. I am stronger than your god and older than your devil. And when it comes to playing games, I divine the rules, I set the pieces, and I choose when to play. And tonight, I say no.” The chance to escape slipping away with his touch. “You want an ending,” she says. “Then take my life when I am done with it. **You can have my soul when I don’t want it anymore.**” The shadow tips his head, suddenly intrigued. And then he pulls her to him. A lover’s embrace. And then his kiss deepens. His teeth skim her bottom lip, and there is pain in the pleasure, followed by the copper taste of blood on her tongue. “Done,” whispers the god against her lips.

Adeline rises, studying her hands, looking past the dirt for some sign of transformation. But she knows one thing—whether or not the deal was real, she will not heed the ringing church bells, will not marry Roger. **From this moment forward, her life will be her own.** “Who are you?” The words are a hiss, and she realizes then, that fearsome look on her mother’s face is not the anger of a mother scorned, but that of a woman scared. “What’s this?” demands a voice, low and deep. Her father grimaces. “We have no child.” His face hardens as he forces her out into the dark and slams the door. The bolt scrapes home. Adeline stumbles back, shaking with shock and horror. And then she turns and runs. “Estele.” But the old woman only shakes her head. “The darkness plays its own game. It makes its own rules,” she says. “And you have lost.” And with that, Estele draws back into her house. *I do not want to belong to anyone.* Adeline walks deeper into the forest. Adeline curls into the forest floor, hears his voice as he whispers that single, binding word. *Done.*

#### **New York City, March 10, 2014**

It’s dark by the time Addie gets to the Alloway—she sips her drink and waits for Toby to go onstage. Then Addie is back in his place. She is sitting at the piano. It is coming together now, words wrapped over melody. **It is becoming his.** He will remember, on his own; not her, of course—not her, but this. Their song.

The apartment belongs to James St. Clair. But she cannot seem to hold on to anything for long. They vanish, one by one, or all at once, stolen by some strange circumstance, or simply time. The only thing she cannot seem to rid herself of is the ring. She remembers her first encounter having ice cream with James. “I’m sorry. You are so beautiful, and kind, and fun.” “But?” she pressed, sensing the turn. “I’m gay.” **Addie has secrets, too, of course,** though she cannot help but keep them. It is so much easier to share a secret than to keep one, and when they stepped outside again, hand in hand, they were conspirators, made giddy by their private knowledge. She was not worried about being noticed, being seen, knew that if there were photos, they would never turn out. There were photos, but her face was always conveniently in motion or obscured, and she remained a mystery girl in the tabloids for the next week.

#### **Villon-sur-Sarthe, France - July 30, 1714**

A hand shakes Adeline awake. “Who are you?” asks Isabelle, and Adeline starts to answer, forgetting that the name won’t come. It lodges in her throat. “Where did you

come from?" "Here." Isabelle's frown deepens. "Villon? But that's not possible. We would have met. I've lived here all my life." Her skin, painted with the forest floor. She felt the scratch and tear of brambles in the woods last night, but she can find no angry welts, no cuts, no signs of blood. Her name is still a shape she cannot say, and when she speaks of her life in the village, of the shadow in the woods, of the deal she made, the words make it across her lips, but stop before they reach the other girl's ears. She's standing now, tucked behind the old yew tree, watching Maxime graze beside the barn, watching her mother hang linens out to dry, watching her father whittle down a block of wood. There is Estele, closing her door. There is Isabelle, one moment kind, and the next filled with horror. It hurts too much, **watching them forget her**. She has been made a stranger, has seen herself slide from the minds of those she's known and loved like the sun behind a cloud, has watched every mark she tries to make as it's undone, erased. She is already **missing this life, even if it will never miss her**.

She has decided to walk toward the walled city of Le Mans. Every step she takes is a step away from Villon, away from a life that is no longer hers. No sign of the miles walked, the wear and tear of so many hours on the packed-earth road, though **she felt the pain of every step**. She longs for home. The pieces of her life she never meant to lose. Amid the growing list of negatives—she cannot write, cannot say her name, cannot leave a mark—this is the first thing she has been able to do. **She can steal**. It will be a long time before she knows the contours of her curse. *My name is Adeline LaRue. I was born in Villon in the year 1691, to Jean and Marthe, in a stone house just beyond the old yew tree ...* She tells the story of her life to the little carving, as if **afraid she'll forget herself as easily as others do**. She will never forget, though she'll wish she could. **Pain, she is learning, doesn't last**. Her mind begins to clear. Her chest loosens, and for the first time since she left Villon, she feels something like human, if not whole. *Adeline* is the woman she left in Villon, on the eve of a wedding she did not want. But *Addie*—Addie was a gift from Estele, shorter, sharper, the switch-quick name for the girl who drew and dreamed of bigger stories, grander worlds, of lives filled with adventure. And so, as she walks on, **she starts the story over in her head**. *My name is Addie LaRue ...*

### **New York City, March 11, 2014**

*My name is Addie LaRue*, she thinks to herself as she walks. It is sad, of course, to forget. But it is a *lonely* thing, to be forgotten. To remember when no one else does. Addie walks up to the Met. It sits in a glass case along one wall, framed on either side by pieces made of iron, or silver. It is the length of her arm, from elbow to fingertips. A marble plinth with five wooden birds perched atop it, each about to fly away. It is the fifth that holds her gaze: the lift of its beak, the angle of its wings, the soft down of its feathers captured once in wood, and now again. *Revenir*, it's called. *To come back*. A secret kept. A record made. The first mark she left upon the world, long before she knew the truth, that **ideas are so much wilder than memories, that they long and look for ways of taking root**.

**LeMans, France - July 31, 1714**

**Palimpsest, the idea of the past blotted out, written over by the present.** How foolish to think it would stay the same, when everything else has changed. When she has changed, grown from a girl into a woman, and then into this—a phantom, a ghost. She drives the blade down and back into the first man's thigh, feels it sink into the meat of his leg. He cries out before he thrusts her away like a hornet, flinging her forward, right onto the other man's blade. Pain screams through her shoulder as the knife bites in, skates along her collarbone, leaving a trail of searing heat. Her mind goes blank with it, but her legs are already moving, carrying her through the stable doors and out into the square. Between one step and the next, the urgency falters, and fades, the purpose slipping, like a thought, out of reach. The men look around, and then at each other. The one she stabbed stands straighter now, no sign of the tear in his trousers, no blood soaking through the fabric. **The mark she left on him, erased.** The ache in her shoulder fades from a searing heat to a dull throb, and then, to nothing. She runs her fingers over the gash, but it is gone. Addie marvels a moment, despite herself, at the strange magic of it, The darkness has granted her freedom from death, perhaps, but not from suffering. Addie is not going to the end of the world, but she must go *somewhere*, and in that moment, she decides. She is going to Paris.

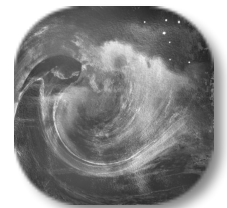
**New York City, March 12, 2014**

The food, the art, the constant offerings of culture. A city she can consume as hungrily as she likes, devour it every day and never run out of things to eat. It is the kind of place that takes years to visit, and still there always seems to be another alley, another set of steps, another door. The Last Word. A used bookstore. “Hey!” calls a voice—A hand lands on her shoulder. “You have to pay for that. A shop full of antique books, and you steal a battered paperback of *The Odyssey*? And it’s in Greek. Just take it,” he says, holding out the book. “I think the shop can spare it.”

**PART TWO: THE DARKEST PART OF THE NIGHT**

**New York City, March 12, 2014**

He’s worked there for the last five years, having started back when he was still a grad student in theology. At first it was just a part-time gig, Henry knows he should probably get another job, because the pay is shit and he has twenty-one years of expensive formal education, and then of course there’s his brother David’s voice, calmly asking where this job leads, if this is really how he plans to spend his life. And the truth is, Henry loves the store.



She plucks out a carton, and a pair of disposable chopsticks, and slips away before the man at the door has even paid. There was a time she felt guilty about stealing. But the guilt, like so many things, has worn away, and even though the hunger can’t kill her, it still hurts as though it will. A passionate affair, to be sure. So she longs for the mornings, but she settles for the nights, and if it cannot be love, well, then, at least it is

not lonely. Being forgotten, she thinks, is a bit like going mad. You begin to wonder what is real, if *you* are real. After all, **how can a thing be real if it cannot be remembered? If a person cannot leave a mark, do they exist?**

#### **Paris, France - August 9, 1714**

She will be called a trickster, a witch, a spirit, and a madwoman. Will be cast out for a dozen different reasons, when in truth, there is only one. They don't remember. Today, she makes a clumsy effort, tries to swipe a seeded roll from a bread-baker's cart, and is rewarded with a meaty hand vised around her wrist. "Thief!" So she pleads hastily, handing over her last coin. And that is how Addie comes to be in Paris, with a crust of bread and a broken bird, and nothing else. Eventually, Addie will master Paris. She will become a flawless thief, uncatchable and quick. She has never been religious, not like her parents. **She has always felt caught between the old gods and the new—but meeting the devil in the woods has got her thinking. For every shadow, there must be light.** Addie never decides to go to the docks. Her feet choose for her. This cannot be it, this cannot be the life Addie traded everything for, this cannot be the future that erased her past. He simply straightens up, and tosses a handful of coins onto the cobbles at her feet. He trundles off and Addie sinks to her knees to collect her reward, and then empties her stomach into the Seine. **The life she had, the one she gave up for the one she thought she wanted, stolen and replaced by this.** She has not lost an ounce of flesh, but her stomach twists, gnawing on itself. This pain is always fresh, brittle and bright, the feeling as sharp as her memory. This is death. At least, for an instant, Addie thinks it must be death. Addie realizes her limbs aren't lifeless at all, but weighted down on every side. Addie writhes and wriggles until she frees one arm and then the other. She claws her way up, and out, hands splayed across the bony mound of a dead man's back. And Addie stumbles out of the cart and collapses to the ground, retching, sobbing, alive. "I am not dead!" she says again, kicking at the wooden wheel. "Hey!" shouts a man, holding the legs of a frail and twisted corpse. "Stay back," shouts a second, gripping its shoulders. Of course, they do not remember throwing her in. Addie thrusts her trembling hands into the pockets of her stolen coat, that she realizes they are empty. **Addie has been set well, and truly, and forcibly free.**

#### **Paris, France - July 29, 1715**

It has been a year. A year since she ran from her own wedding. A year since she sold her soul for this. For freedom. For time. He steps forward into the circle cast by the candle flame. The darkness from the woods. She must know. "Why? Why did you do this to me?" He is not a man. Not even human. It is only a mask, and it does not fit. "You begged, and pleaded, and then, do you remember what you said?" *"You can have my life when I am done with it. You can have my soul when I don't want it anymore."* I am in the business of souls, not mercy. Come," he says, "give me what I want, and the deal will be done, this misery ended." A soul, for a single year of grief and madness. A soul, for copper coins on a Paris dock. A soul, for nothing more than this. "I decline," she growls.

**Paris, France - July 29, 1716**

She should have long been whittled down to skin and bone, hardened, hewn, but her face is just as full as it was the summer she left home. Her skin, unlined by time and trial, untouched in any way. She exits successfully only to collide with a man standing on the street. He smiles down at her. “Adeline. You’re looking well.” **“I look the same.”** **“The prize of immortality. As you wanted.”** “Come,” says the shadow, offering his arm. “I will walk you.” Addie has learned that women—at least, women of a certain class—never venture forth alone, even during the day. Perhaps an enemy’s company is still better than none. She starts walking... he has fallen in step beside her. A faint smile on those lips, as if he’s perfectly at ease. His very image mocks her, even as his edges blur, dark into dark, smoke on shadow, a reminder of what he is, and what he isn’t. “You can take any shape you please, isn’t that right?” His head tips down. “It is.” She turns to look at him. “It has only been two years,” she says. “Think of all the time I have, and all the things I’ll see.”

**New York City, March 13, 2014**

***I remember you.*** Three hundred years. Three hundred years, and no one has said those words, no one has ever, *ever* remembered. “Please,” he says under his breath. “Just go.” Whatever he sees when he looks at her, it changes his mind. “One coffee,” he says. “And you’re still banned from the shop.” When Henry looks at her, he knows her. She is certain he knows her. Not a first meeting, but a second—or rather, a third—and for once she is not the only one who knows. He looks at her, and there it is again, that strange intensity, but she can’t shake the feeling he’s looking for something in her face. **“What do you see,” he says, “when you look at me?”** Live long enough, and you learn how to read a person. To ease them open like a book. “I see someone who cares,” she says slowly. “Perhaps too much. Who feels too much. I see someone lost, and hungry. The kind of person who feels like they’re wasting away in a world full of food, because they can’t decide what they want.” Henry stares at her, all the humor gone out of his face, and she knows she’s gotten too close to the truth.

**Paris, France - July 29, 1719**

The marquis and his wife keep quite a social calendar, after all, and over the last few years their city house has become one of her favorite haunts. Haunt—it is the right word, for someone living like a ghost. The shadow leans against the wall with all the ease of someone who has been there for a while. She is not surprised to see him—he has come, year after year—but she is unsettled. The servants of the house move around them as if on strings, smooth and silent, every gesture done with that same, sleepy ease. Chairs pulled back, linens smoothed, bottles of Champagne uncorked and poured into waiting crystal flutes. Whatever hold the darkness has on the servants of this house, it began before his entrance in her stolen room. It began before he rang the bell, and called the maid, and summoned her to dinner. The truth is, she is scared. Unsettled by the display. She knows his power—at least, she thought she did—but it’s one thing to make a deal, and another to be the witness of such control. What could he make them do? How far could he make them go?



**New York City, March 13, 2014**

She doesn't want to pull any more tricks, not after *The Odyssey*. Plus, she's afraid. Afraid to let him walk away. Afraid to let him out of sight. Whatever this is, a blip, a mistake, a beautiful dream, or a piece of impossible luck, **she's afraid to let it go**. Let him go. "If you could have one thing," cuts in Henry, "what would it be?"

They spend the evening together. "I want to see you again," says Henry. "My real name isn't Eve. It's Addie." She swallows, hard. "My name's Addie." The evening is quiet, and she is alone, but for once it is not the same as being lonely. "Goodnight, Addie," Henry said, and Addie cannot help but wonder if he has somehow broken the spell. Three hundred years she's tested the confines of her deal, found the places where it gives, the subtle bend and flex around the bars, but never a way out. And yet. **Somehow, impossibly, Henry has found a way in. Somehow, he remembers her.**

**PART THREE: THREE HUNDRED YEARS—AND THREE WORDS**



**Paris, France - July 29, 1724**

Freedom is a pair of trousers and a buttoned coat. A man's tunic and a tricorne hat. The darkness claimed he'd given her **freedom, but really, there is no such thing for a woman**, not in a world where they are bound up inside their clothes, and sealed inside their homes, **a world where only men are given leave to roam**. Addie saunters up the street, they do not see a woman, walking alone. They see a young man, barely more than a youth, dawdling in the dying light; they do not think how strange, how scandalous it is to see her strolling. They do not think anything at all. Tonight, she has decided to celebrate her freedom. To climb to the top of Notre Dame, and have a picnic there, the city at her feet. "I must make that up to you," he says. "Aha," and loops his arm through hers, as if they are already friends. She realizes that he has made a game of it, conscripted himself into the service of her secret. Inside, the café, "Careful now," he says, eyes dancing with mischief. "Stay close, and keep your head down, or we will be found out." "I was thinking," she says, "that it must be so easy to be a man." "Is that why you put on this disguise? Paris, this is where the thinkers are. This is where the dreamers live. This is the heart of the world, and it is changing." "Have you ever been to Notre Dame?"

**New York City, March 15, 2014**

It's 4:45 P.M. and she cannot bear it anymore. And a single, leaden fear. What if? Addie falters, knocked off-balance by a vertigo of want and fear. "I'm looking for Henry." Henry rounds the corner, smoothing his shirt, and trails off when he sees Addie. But then Henry smiles, and says, "You're early." And Addie is dizzy with air, with hope, with light. "Stop flirting with my date," says Henry. Date. The word thrills through her. **A date is something made, something planned**; not a chance of opportunity, but **time set aside at one point for another**, a moment in the future. She aches with longing, wonders how it feels to know someone that well, the knowing to go both ways.

**Paris, France - July 29, 1724**

Remy delights in being part of her charade, and she delights in having someone to share it with. “Thomas, you fool,” he jeers loudly when they pass a huddle of men. “Tell me, Anna,” says Remy, now. “Who are you?” Anna’s story is a pale shadow of Adeline’s. A girl running away from a woman’s life. She leaves behind everything she has ever known, and escapes to the city, disowned, alone, but free. Remy nods thoughtfully. **“But if you only walk in other people’s steps, you cannot make your own way. You cannot leave a mark.”** Her chest aches at the idea of losing the thread of this night, and the ease beginning to take shape between them. “I would see you again,” he says, “in daylight, or in darkness. As a woman, or a man. Please, let me see you again.” And her heart breaks, because of course, there is no tomorrow, only tonight.

**New York City, March 15-16, 2014**

They stumble into his apartment. He says her name, and it is lightning through her limbs, it is fire through her core, it is longing between her legs. “Say it again,” she pleads. “Say what?” he murmurs. “My name.” Henry smiles. “Addie,” he whispers. He is real, and kind, and human, and he remembers. She can feel him drifting down toward sleep. Addie looks up at the ceiling. “Don’t forget,” she says softly, the words half prayer, half plea. Henry’s arms tighten, a body surfacing from sleep. “Forget what?”

Cameras. She was there when cameras were hulking tripod beasts, the photographer hidden beneath a heavy drape. She was there for the invention of black-and-white film, and then color, there when still frames became videos, when analog became digital. Addie continues through the apartment, idle curiosity giving way to a more purposeful search. So she goes from room to room, searching for clues to the question she cannot seem to answer. *Who are you, Henry Strauss?*

“We are closed,” he says, in a heavy accent, and Addie slips from English into French as she explains she is a friend of Delphine’s, and the man softens at the mention of his daughter’s name, softens more at the sound of his native tongue. The patissier places each of the remaining pastries in a pink box, and hands them to her. And when she offers to pay, Michel shakes his head, and thanks her for the taste of home, and she wishes him good night. Back on the curb, Henry stares at her as if she’s performed a magic act. She cannot hold the secret of her curse aloft over so many heads, knows she cannot keep him to herself, that **this is all a game of borrowed time**. They climb the stairs she turns her thoughts to the party, and thinks, perhaps, they will remember her, at the end of this evening. Bea rolls her eyes, flashing Addie a crooked smile, **“I wouldn’t forget a face like yours. There’s something ... timeless about it.”** Henry’s frown deepens. “You have met, and that’s exactly what you said.” He looks to Addie. “You remember this, don’t you?” She hesitates, caught between the impossible truth and the easier lie, begins to shake her head. “I’m sorry, I—” “Who are you?” says Robbie. “Don’t be rude,” answers Henry. “This is Addie.”

**Paris, France - July 29, 1751**

Luc steps into the room like a gust of cool wind. “Madame,” he says in a voice loud enough to carry, “I fear you have opened your doors too wide. That woman, there.” Heads begin to turn in Addie’s direction. “Do you know her? That woman is a swindler and a thief. A truly wretched creature. “Look,” he gestures, “she even wears one of your own gowns. Better check the pockets, and make sure that she hasn’t stolen more than the cloth from your back.” “Stop her,” announces Geoffrin, and Addie has no choice but to abandon it all, to rush for the door, to push past them, out of the salon and into the night. No one comes after her, of course. Except for Luc. She shakes her head. “This is nothing. You have marred one moment, ruined one night, but **because of my gift, I have a million more; infinite chances to reinvent myself.** I could walk back in right now, and your slights would be as forgotten as my face.”

**New York City, March 17, 2014**

Robbie looks at Addie with ice in his eyes and says, “Who’s this?” “That’s not funny,” says Henry. “Are you still drunk?” Robbie draws back, indignant. “I’m—what? No. I’ve never seen this girl. You never said you met someone.” Henry is an impossible thing, her strange and beautiful oasis. But he is also human, and **humans have friends, families, a thousand strands tying them to other people.** “Please,” she says. “Come with me.” They spill out into the street, the morning’s peace forgotten. Henry is shaking with anger. “I’m sorry,” he says. “Robbie can be an ass but that was—” Addie closes her eyes. “It’s not his fault. It’s that—people forget me. Even if we’ve met a hundred times. They forget.” “That doesn’t make any sense.” “I know,” she says, “but it’s the truth. If we went back in that store right now, Robbie wouldn’t remember. You could introduce me, but the moment I walked away, the moment I was out of sight, he’d forget again. Because,” she says, “I’m cursed.” “My name is Addie LaRue. I was born in Villon in the year 1691, my parents were Jean and Marthe...”

**Villon-sur-Sarthe, France - July 29, 1764**

She has learned to travel light; or rather, **to let go of things as easily as she comes into them. Things are too hard to hold on to.** “Do I know you?” asks her mother, but there is no hint of recognition in her voice, only the doubt of the old and the unsure. Addie shakes her head. The door groans shut, and Addie knows, that she will never see her mother again.

**New York City, March 17, 2014**

Henry looks at her, and listens. Listens as she tells him of living forever, and being forgotten. And then, out of nowhere, Henry *laughs*. “You made a deal,” he says. “I believe you.” She blinks, suddenly confused. “What?” “**I believe you,**” he says again. Three small words, as rare as *I remember you. Who are you?* she wants to ask. *Why are you different? How do you remember when no one else can? Why do you believe I made a deal?* She says only one thing. “Why?” He says— “Because I made one, too.”

## **PART FOUR: THE MAN WHO STAYED DRY IN THE RAIN**



### **New York City, September 4, 2013**

A boy is born with a broken heart. The doctors go in, and piece it back together, make it whole, and yet, as he grows up, he is convinced **something is still wrong inside**. They've left his heart too open. And now he feels ... too much. Other people would call him sensitive, but it is more than that. When his parents argue, and he cannot bear the violence in their words. When David throws away his childhood bear, when his first girlfriend, Abigail, stands him up at the dance, when he finds Liz cheating on him during their senior trip, when Robbie dumps him before junior year, every time, no matter how small, or how big, **it feels like his heart is breaking again inside his chest**. The first time Henry saw Tabitha Masters, she was dancing. She was the kind of pretty that steals your breath. And by the end of the night, he was falling in love. Down on one knee with a ring in the middle of the park, and Henry is such a fucking idiot, because she said no. And then she walked away, and now Henry is here at the bar and he's drunk, but not nearly drunk enough. Everything still hurts. Take a drink every time you hear you're not enough. And now he knows he's had too much to drink. He was trying to reach the place where he wouldn't feel, but he thinks he might have passed it. Henry stares at the stranger, the more resemblance fades—replaced by the awareness that the man isn't getting wet. It never touches him. It falls all around him, but he stays dry. "What do you want?" asks the stranger, and he looks at Henry with the greenest eyes he's ever seen. So bright they glitter in the dark. "I'm tired of falling short. Tired of being ..." **"You're perfect,"** the man murmurs. **"Pain can be beautiful,"** he says, exhaling a cloud of smoke. **"It can transform. It can create."** And when the devil speaks again, there's a new depth to his voice. "You want to be loved," says the stranger, "by all of them. You want to be enough for all of them." And he doesn't think any of this is real. So it doesn't matter. Or perhaps the man in the rain is right. He just has nothing left to lose. Henry takes his hand, and the stranger squeezes, the darkness smiles, and says a single word. "Deal."

### **New York City, March 17, 2014**

The day just carries on as if nothing's changed, but it feels like everything has, because Addie LaRue is immortal, and Henry Strauss is damned. "No one has ever remembered. I thought it was an accident. I thought it was a trap. But you're not an accident, Henry. You're not a trap. You remember me because you made a deal." She shakes her head. "Three hundred years spent trying to break this curse, and Luc did the one thing I never expected." She wipes the tears away, and breaks into a smile. "He made a *mistake*." What I've always truly wanted, is for **someone to remember me**. That's why you can say my name. That's why you can go away, and come back, and still know who I am. And that's why **I can look at you, and see you as you are. And it is enough**. It will always be enough."

**New York City, March 18, 2014**

Addie is so many things, thinks Henry. But she is not forgettable. How could anyone forget this girl, when she takes up so much space? She fills the room with stories, with laughter, with warmth and light. Henry realized that photographs weren't real. "There's no context, just the illusion that you're showing a snapshot of a life, but life isn't snapshots, it's fluid. **So photos are like fictions.** I loved that about them. Everyone thinks photography is truth, but it's just a very convincing lie." "It won't work," she says, right as Henry takes the picture. Or tries. He taps the screen, but there's no click, no capture. He tries again, and this time the phone takes the photo, but it is a blur.

**New York City, September 5, 2013**

A stranger in a black suit, a conversation that must have been a dream. He squints up and sees a dark leather band around his wrist. An elegant analog watch, with gold numerals set against an onyx ground. On its face, a single golden hand rests the barest fraction off of midnight. On the reverse, Henry sees two words etched in hairline script. *Live well.* He scrambles out of the bed, away from the watch, stares at the timepiece as if expecting it to attack. At the coffee shop he can't tell if she's flirting until he gets his drink, and sees the little black arrow she's drawn, pointing to the bottom. She's written her name and number on the bottom of the cup.

**New York City, March 18, 2014**

"Bea, this is Addie." Henry expects her to nod, to say, "Oh, good to see you again" — instead, Bea smiles. She says, "You know, there's something timeless about your face," and he's rocked by the strangeness of the echo, the force of the *déjà vu*. And Henry thinks it must be hard to surprise a girl who's lived three hundred years.

**New York City, September 5, 2013**

The Merchant, a local bar, is busy. He has no idea what's happening. He looks down at the watch on his wrist, glinting in the bathroom light, and for the first time, **he's certain that it's real.** That the man in the rain was real. The deal was real. "Henry," echoes the girl with a catlike smile. She looks at him with such obvious desire. No one has ever looked at him that way. Not Tabitha. Not Robbie. No one—not on the first date, or in the middle of sex, or when he got down on one knee ...

**New York City, September 7, 2013**

God, it feels good to be wanted. Everywhere he goes, he can feel the ripple, the attention shifting toward him. Henry leans into the attention, the smiles, the warmth, the light. Every moment fueled by the heady pleasure of being wanted, of knowing that whatever they see, it's good, it's great, it's perfect. He's perfect. People drift toward him now, every one of them pulled into his orbit, but the why is always different. The only unsettling part, really is—their eyes. The fog that winds through them, thickening to frost, to ice. A constant reminder that this new life isn't exactly normal, isn't entirely real. "Mr. Strauss." Henry's stomach drops. "There's a position opening in the theology school, and I think you'd be perfect for it." Henry almost laughs.

**New York City, March 18, 2014**

The girl in the sketch, the painting, the sculpture, is leaning on the rail beside him, her face open in delight. "It was you," he says. Addie flashes a dazzling smile. "It was." Henry shakes his head. "I thought you couldn't leave a mark." "I can't," she says. But art," she says with a quieter smile, "art is about ideas. And ideas are wilder than memories.

**New York City, September 13, 2013**

He takes a deep breath, bracing himself for a Strauss family dinner. Henry has his father's loose black curls, his mother's gray-green eyes, but he lacks one's steadiness, and the other's joy. Not once does anyone tell him that he's too thin, or that he needs more sun, or that he looks tired, even though all of those usually precede the pointed remarks of how it can't be that hard to run a bookshop in Brooklyn. "To the family," toasts his father when they sit down to eat. "Together again." He feels like he's stepped into another version of his life. One where his sister looks up to him and his brother doesn't look down, where his parents are proud. **The absence of judgment is jarring.** And all of it is so nice, so aggressively pleasant, **so mercifully free of snide remarks, petty squabbles, passive disapproval**, that Henry feels like he's still holding his breath. "You work so hard" is a thing his mother has never said. A thing she apparently says now. David grips his shoulder and looks at him with those mercifully clouded eyes and says, "I love you, Henry. I'm glad you're doing so well."

**New York City, September 19, 2013**

Vanessa is already inside. He isn't chiding himself for each and every move, isn't convincing himself that he has to say the right thing—there's no need to find the right words when there are no wrong ones. He doesn't have to lie, doesn't have to try, **doesn't have to be anyone but himself, because he is enough.** What do you see in me?" He says. If she said *real, sensitive, thoughtful*, he might have bought it. But she doesn't. She uses words like outgoing, funny, ambitious, and the more she talks about him, the thicker the frost in her eyes, the more it spreads, until he can barely make out the color beneath. And Henry wonders how she can see, but of course, she can't. He likes her. And sure, he also likes that she likes him (the him that she sees). "Nothing. I just..." She breaks into a smile. "I love you." And the scary thing is, she sounds like she means it. How he can convince Vanessa that it isn't love, it's just obsession, but of course, that isn't really true, either. He made the deal. This is what he wanted. He sees Vanessa in the kitchen, standing at the counter, a box of matches in one hand, and the cardboard box of Tabitha's things burning in the sink. "Vanessa," he says, gritting his teeth, "I need you to go." "What did I do wrong?" And he could point to the smoldering remains in his kitchen sink, or the fact it's all going way too fast, or the fact that when she looks at him, she sees someone else entirely. But instead, he just says, "It's not you. It's me." "I'm sorry," she sobs, clinging to him. "I'm sorry. I love you." He guides her away, and she looks devastated, ruined. **She looks the way he felt the night he made the deal, and it breaks his heart.**

**New York City, November 14, 2013**

“Tabitha.” Henry hasn’t seen her since that night, has managed, until now, to avoid her, to avoid this. **It isn’t real.** “No.” She shakes her head. “I wasn’t ready to take the next step. But I never wanted it to end. I love you, Henry.” The fog twists across her vision. And he knows that, whoever she sees, it isn’t him. It never was. It never will be. So he lets her go.

**New York City, March 18, 2014**

Henry pulls her back against him, kisses the crook of her neck. He is sugar-high and a little drunk, and happier than he has ever been. Addie is better than any little pink umbrella. She is better than strong whisky on a cold night. Better than anything he’s felt in ages.

**New York City, December 31, 2013**

“Robbie’s always been in love with you,” says Bea. “But that’s the thing,” he says, shaking his head. “He wasn’t in love with who I was, not really. He was in love with who I could have been. **You can’t make people love you, Hen. If it’s not a choice, it isn’t real.**” And he’s an idiot, trapped in a world where nothing’s real.

**New York City, Winter 2014**

Henry gives up. Resigns himself to the prism of his deal, which he has come to think of as a curse. And then, one day, he meets a girl. She walks into the store and steals a book. She turns to look at him, there is no frost, no film, no wall of ice. Just clear brown eyes in a heart-shaped face. And Henry thinks it must be a trick of the light, but she comes back the next day, and there it is again. The absence, but something in its place. A presence. The strength of someone else’s gravity. And when the girl looks at him, she doesn’t see perfect. **She sees someone who cares too much, who feels too much, who is lost, and hungry.** She sees the truth, and he doesn’t know how, or why, only knows that he doesn’t want it to end. For the first time, he feels seen.

**New York City, March 18, 2014**

“Put your hand over mine,” he says, and she hesitates only a moment before pressing her palm to the back of his hand, ghosting her fingers over his own. “There,” he says, “now we can draw.” She waits for it to disappear. But it doesn’t. She writes in halting cursive, one letter at a time. Addie LaRue. Her hand drops away from his, and she reaches out, runs her fingers through the letters, and for a moment, the name is ruined, streaks of green against the glass. But by the time her fingers fall away, it is back, unmarred, unchanged. “This is how it starts,” she says. And he begins to write.

## **PART FIVE: THE SHADOW WHO SMILED AND THE GIRL WHO SMILED BACK**

### **Villon-sur-Sarthe, France - July 29, 1764**

Addie makes her way to the church. It does not take her long to find her father's grave. *Jean LaRue*. She stops when she sees the dates below her father's name. 1670–1714. The year she left. But the memories from before, when she was Adeline LaRue—those are fading. The twenty-three years she lived before the woods, before the deal, worn to little more than edges. For the first time, Addie is grateful for the cleansing nature of her curse, for having made the deal at all—not for her own sake, but for her mother's. That **Marthe LaRue had only to grieve one loss, instead of two**. The grief has come and gone—she lost this man fifty years ago, she has already mourned, and though it hurts, the pain isn't fresh. She studies the names on the gravestones, knows each and every one, but the difference is that once upon a time, the names knew her, too. Here is Roger, buried beside his first and only wife, Pauline. Here is Isabelle, and her youngest, Sara, taken in the same year. The one that held her hand so many times, showed her there was more to life. Estele Magritte, reads her tombstone. 1642–1719. She throws the shutters of her shack open and finds herself face-to-face with the woods. Their roots are inching forward, crawling into the garden and across the lawn. **A slow and patient advance**. Fifty years, and she is still learning the shape of her curse. She cannot make a thing, but she can use it. She cannot break a thing, but she can steal it. She cannot start a fire, but she can keep it going. "Perhaps I have been too merciful." The pain climbs through her limbs, infecting knee and hip, wrist and shoulder. Her legs buckle beneath her, and it is all she can do not to scream. Addie watches in horror as her hands begin to wrinkle and thin, blue veins standing out beneath papery skin. "You asked only for life. I gave you your health, and youth, as well. Perhaps you need to suffer." She has survived worse. She will survive worse. This is nothing but a god's foul temper. When she finds the breath to speak, the words come out in a ragged whisper. "Go to Hell."



### **New York City, March 19, 2014**

Henry wakes and gropes for his glasses, puts them on, and looks at her, and smiles, and this is **the part that will never get old. The knowing**. The present folding on top of the past instead of erasing it, replacing it. "Where do you live?" he asks. "I manage. The city is full of beds." "But you don't have a place of your own. Then you can stay here." "Three dates, and you're asking me to move in?" Henry laughs, because of course it is absurd. But it is hardly the strangest thing in either of their lives. She has never been able to hang on to anything for long. Only the leather jacket, and the wooden ring, and she's always known it is because Luc wanted her to have both—had bound them to her under the guise of gifts.

### **Fécamp, France, July 29, 1778**

**To think, she could have lived and died and never seen the sea**. No matter, though. Addie is here now, pale cliffs rising to her right, stone sentinels at the edge of the



beach where she sits, skirts pooling on the sand. She stares out at the expanse, the coastline giving way to water, and water giving way to sky. Luc takes her to a church. She shakes her head, and says aloud, “I never understood why I should believe in something I could not feel, or hear, or see.” Luc raises a brow. “I think,” he says, “they call that faith.” “Says the devil in the house of God.”

### **Paris, France, July 29, 1789**

Outside, the air reeks of gunpowder and smoke, for the last fortnight the noise has been ceaseless. *Vive la France*. The avenues of Paris have all become a maze, the sudden erection of barriers and barricades turning any path into a series of dead ends. Addie flinches back, expecting to strike stone, but the wall opens, and the world gives way, and before she can draw breath, draw back, Paris is gone. As she is plunged into absolute darkness. “Where are we?” she demands. Luc glances over his shoulder, and says something in the same choppy flow before repeating himself in French. “We are in Florence,” that is not in France but Italy.

### **New York City, April 6, 2014**

“How many languages do you know?” “Enough,” she says, but he clearly wants to know, so she ticks them off on her fingers. “French, of course. And English. Greek and Latin. German, Italian, Spanish, some Portuguese, though it’s not perfect.” “Come on,” she says, grabbing his hand. Henry frowns. “We haven’t paid.” “I know,” she says, hopping down from the stool, “but if we go now, he’ll think he just forgot to clear the table. He won’t remember.” This is the problem with a life like Addie’s. **She has gone so long without roots, she doesn’t know how to grow them anymore.** “No,” says Henry. “He won’t remember you. But he’ll remember me. I’m not invisible, Addie. **I’m the exact opposite of invisible.**” “I know, but you shouldn’t have to do everything—be everything.” “I don’t mind.” “But I do!” she snaps. Doesn’t understand the sudden weight on her chest until she realizes what it is—**fear**. Fear that she’s messed up, thrown away the one thing she’s always wanted. Fear that it was that fragile, that it came apart so easily. “Addie.” He grabs her shoulder. She turns, expecting to see his face streaked with anger, but it’s steady, smooth. “It was just a fight. It’s not the end of the world. It’s certainly not the end of us.”

### **Venice, Italy, July 29, 1806**

His attention is focused solely on the sketchpad balanced on his knee, the charcoal skating gracefully across the paper. It is only when his gaze flicks up to her, and then down again, that she realizes he is drawing *her*. She makes no move to cover herself. Addie hasn’t been shy about her body in a long time. Indeed, she has come to enjoy being admired. There *is* a freedom, after all, in being forgotten. If Matteo keeps the picture, he will forget the source, but not the sketch itself. “Did we have a good time?” Matteo asks. “I confess, I cannot remember.” “Neither can I,” she lies. “Well then,” he says with a rakish grin. “It must have been a very good time.” He kisses her bare shoulder, and her pulse flutters, body warming with the memory of the night before. She is a stranger to him now.

“Adeline.” She turns to face him, this man she made real, this darkness, this devil brought to life. And when he asks if she has had enough, if she is tired yet, if she will yield to him tonight, she smiles, and says, “Not tonight.” *I have found a way to leave a mark, she wants to say to him. **You thought you could erase me from this world, but you cannot. I am still here. I will always be here.*** So she says nothing.

#### **New York City, April 25, 2014**

Over eggs and coffee, she recounted the torturous walk to Le Mans. In the bookstore one morning, as they unpacked new releases, she relived that first year in Paris. Tangled in the sheets last night, she told him of Remy. Henry has asked for the truth, her truth, and so she is telling it. In pieces, fragments tucked like bookmarks between the movement of their days.

#### **• London, England, March 26, 1827**

She could live in the National Gallery. Indeed, she has spent a season here, wandering from room to room, feasting on the paintings and the portraits, the sculptures and the tapestries. “I see you’ve been busy,” he says, those green eyes trailing over the portrait. She has. She has scattered herself like breadcrumbs, dusted across a hundred works of art. “It does not matter,” he says, hand falling. “You do not matter, Adeline.” The words bite, even now. “Perhaps that’s why you cursed me as you did. So you would have some company. So someone would remember you.” **“The vexing thing about time,” he says, “is that it’s never enough.** Perhaps a decade too short, perhaps a moment. But **a life always ends too soon.**”

Luc forces the man to his feet. “The time for deals is done, Herr Beethoven. Now, you must say the words.” The man shakes his head. “No.” “Surrender your soul,” says Luc. “Or I will take it by force.” “No!” shouts the man, hysterical now. “Begone, Devil. Begone, and—” It is the last thing he says, before Luc unfolds. The man staggers, pale and gray, as the darkness plucks his soul like a piece of fruit. The darkness closes its fingers around the soul, and it crackles through him like lightning, and plunges out of sight.

#### **New York City, May 15, 2014**

It is Addie’s idea to bring the cat home. She hears the click of the Polaroid, catches the sudden flash, and there’s a moment when she wonders if it will work, if Henry will be able to take her photo, the way he wrote her name. But Addie indulges Henry as he tries a second time, and a third. Watches as the camera jams, spits out a blank card, comes back overexposed, underexposed, blurred, until her head is swimming with flashes of white. She picks up the latest attempt, studies the shape of the girl in the frame, her features blurred beyond recognition. She closes her eyes, **reminds herself there are many ways to leave a mark, reminds herself that pictures lie.**

#### **Villon-sur-Sarthe, France - July 29, 1854**

In the cemetery, the tree Addie transplanted has taken root. It looms over Estele’s grave. She tells Estele stories of England, and Italy, and Spain, of Matteo, and the

gallery, of Luc, and her art, and all the ways the world has changed. *Everything changes, foolish girl. It is the nature of the world. Nothing stays the same.* “What a strange pilgrimage you insist on making.” Addie smiles to herself. “Is it?” She turns to see Luc leaning back against a tree. It is not the first time she’s seen him since the night he reaped Beethoven’s soul. But she still hasn’t forgotten what she saw. It has been *a hundred and forty years*, as a ghost. There are days when she mourns the prospect of another year, another decade, another century. She remembers there is such beauty in the world. And she does not want to miss it—any of it.

### **New York City, June 13, 2014**

They’re heading to the Knitting Factory. It is Henry’s birthday. “Hi guys,” he says, “this is Addie.” They’ve been asking for weeks to meet the new girl in Henry’s life. They keep accusing him of hiding her, but Addie has met them over beers at the Merchant, been for movie nights at Bea’s, crossed paths with them at galleries and parks. It seems to bother Henry more than it does her. He must think she has made peace with it, but the truth is, there is none to be found. The endless cycle of hello, who is this, nice to meet you, hello **wears at her like water against stone—the damage slow, but inevitable.** She has simply learned to live with it. And she wants to be honest, to say that of course she does. She never gets closure, never gets to say good-bye—no periods, or exclamations, just a lifetime of ellipses. An old friend, Toby performs a song before the audience. She is overcome with emotional breathlessness.

### **En Route to Berlin, Germany - July 29, 1872**

Humans are capable of such wondrous things. Of cruelty, and war, but also art and invention. She will think this again and again over the years, when bombs are dropped, and buildings felled, when terror consumes whole countries. But also when the first images are impressed on film, when planes rise into the air, when movies go from black-and-white to color. Luc draws her into the compartment. Her heart catches on the missed step, the sudden drop, as the train falls away, the world falls away, and they are back in the nothing. They are standing on the steps of a pillared opera house, her traveling clothes gone, replaced by a far finer dress, and Addie wonders if the gown is real, as far as anything is real, or simply the conjurings of smoke and shadow. The show... She learns that it is Wagner, it is *Tristan und Isolde*. But she has never heard anything like this. The way they sing. The scope and scale of their emotions. The desperate passion in their movements. The raw power of their joy, and pain. She doesn’t lie, even to spite him. “It is wonderful.” A smile plays across his face. “Can you guess which ones are mine?” Time is cruel to all, and crueler still to artists. Because vision weakens, and voices wither, and talent fades.” **Happiness is brief**, and history is lasting, **and in the end,” he says, “everyone wants to be remembered.**” Addie knocks his hand away, and turns her attention back to the stage as the opera resumes. she cannot help but wonder. If all the things that Addie has loved, she loved because of them—or *him*. Addie still feels buoyant in the wake of the opera, the voices ringing through her like a bell. But Luc’s question echoes, too. *Which of them are mine?* Addie wonders, softly, silently, if their souls were a fair price for such fine art.

### New York City, July 4, 2014

“When we first met,” Henry muses, “Why didn’t you tell me your real name?” “Because I didn’t think I could,” she says. “When I try to tell people the truth, their faces just go blank. When I try to say my name, it always gets stuck in my throat.” She smiles.

“Except with you. **I think he wanted to erase me. To make sure I felt unseen, unheard, unreal.** You don’t really realize the power of a name until it’s gone.” And then he asks, “When’s the last time you saw him?” and Addie falters. “Almost thirty years ago,” she says. “We had a falling-out,” and it is the barest version of the truth.

### The Cotswolds, England, December 31, 1899

The cottage is not hers, of course. Not in the strictest sense. She found it more or less intact, a place abandoned, or simply forgotten. The furniture was threadbare, the cupboards almost empty. But she has had a season to make it hers. Now, her steps crunch the perfect snow, and it rises in her wake. Now, she runs her fingers through the gentle hills, and they smooth behind her touch. Now she plays in the field, and does not leave a mark. The world remains unblemished, and for once she is grateful. And then, he’s there. “Two hundred years,” Luc says, kneeling beside her, “and still behaving like a child.” How easily he moves through the world, she thinks. How hard he’s made it for her.

## **PART SIX: DO NOT PRETEND THAT THIS IS LOVE**

### Villon-sur-Sarthe, France - July 29, 1914

She cannot stand to look upon the tree (over Estele’s grave). She cannot bear to linger here any longer. Addie turns her back on the ruined stump, the tombstone worn to nothing. Luc lifts his glass.

“Happy anniversary, my Adeline.” If she is his—then by now he must be hers as well. “Happy anniversary, my Luc,” she answers, just to see the face he’ll make. “I suppose,” he goes on slowly, “there is something to the idea of company.” It is the closest he has ever come to sounding *human*. She sees it, rolling toward her on the table. It is *her* ring. “Put it on, and I will come.” A week later, Addie boards a ship for New York. By the time she docks, the world is already at war.



### New York City, July 29, 2014

It is three hundred years since she was meant to be married—a future given against her will. Three hundred years since she knelt in the woods, and summoned the darkness, and lost everything but freedom. Henry appears in the doorway holding a plate with a donut, three candles stuck into the top. And despite everything, she laughs. “What’s this?” “Hey, it’s not every day that your girlfriend turns three hundred.” Her ring falls in the sand. Addie crouches down before it, and sweeps a handful of sand over the top, before jogging after Henry. “I love you,” he says, and Addie wonders if this is love, this gentle thing. The difference between heat, and warmth. **Passion, and contentment.** “I love you too,” she says.

**Chicago, Illinois, July 29, 1928**

She's careful to never let the ring slide over her knuckle. She has reached for it a hundred times: when she was lonely, when she was bored, when she saw a thing of beauty and thought of him. Fourteen years she has resisted the urge to put it on. And fourteen years he has not come. "I am still human," she says. "You move among them like a ghost," he says, his forehead bowing against hers, "because you are not one of them. You cannot live like them. You cannot love like them. You cannot belong with them." "I would rather be a ghost." And for the first time, the darkness flinches. Draws back like shadows in the face of light. His eyes go pale with anger. "Suit yourself," mutters Luc.

**New York City, July 29, 2014**

They have all stopped mid-stride, mid-speech, mid-sip. Not frozen, exactly, but forcibly stilled. Puppets, hovering on strings. The music is still playing; softly, now, but it is the only sound in the place besides Henry's unsteady breath, and the pounding of her heart. And a voice, rising from the dark. "Adeline." The whole world holds its breath, reduces to the soft echo of footfalls on the wooden floor, the figure stepping out of the shadows. A dark brow rises. "You think I mean to pull you apart? Not at all. **Time will do that soon enough.**" He looks to Henry. "Tick tock. Tell me, are you still counting your life in days, or have you begun to measure it in hours? "Humans live such short lives, don't they? Some far shorter than others. Savor the time you have left. In his wake, the bar shudders back into motion. **Humans live such short lives. Some far shorter than others. It was his choice.** She pulls the watch toward herself, and studies the face. Four months she's been with Henry. "Henry," she says, "how long did you ask for?" He is silent for a long time. And then, at last, he tells her the truth.

**New York City, September 4, 2013**

A boy is sick of his broken heart. Tired of his storm-filled brain. It is just a storm, just a storm—but tonight it is too much, and he is not enough, and so he crosses the roof, doesn't slow until he can see over the side. And that is where the stranger finds him. That is where the darkness makes an offer. Not for a lifetime—for a single year. He is so tired of hurting, so tired of being hurt. And that is why, when the stranger holds out his hand, and offers to pull Henry back from the edge, there is no hesitation. He simply says yes.

**New York City, July 29, 2014**

There's no way to un-know the fact that someone is dying. And Addie forces herself to ask, "How long do you have left?" "Thirty-five days." Now it all makes sense. This boy, who writes down every word she says, so she'll have something when he's gone, who doesn't want to lose even a single day, because he doesn't have that many more. This boy she's falling in love with. This boy, who will soon be gone. She is *furios*. Addie slides the band over her knuckle. It's been thirty years since she last wore it, but the ring slips effortlessly on. "Show yourself!" she shouts down the block.

### **Occupied France, November 23, 1944**

The cell grinds shut, and German soldiers laugh beyond the bars as Addie slumps to the floor, coughing blood. The Germans have noticed. They caught her dressed in nondescript trousers and coat, though she kept her hair pulled back, she knew by the way they scowled and leered that they could tell her sex. She told them in a dozen different tongues what she would do if they came near, and they laughed, and satisfied themselves with beating her senseless. For **thinking that forgettable was the same as invisible**, that it would protect her here. Somewhere along the way, she decided she could help. Three years of ferrying secrets through Occupied France. Three years, only to end up here. But right now, even Luc's smug satisfaction would be better than the eternity in a prison cell, or worse. And so, for the first time in centuries, Addie prays. The world goes strangely, impossibly quiet. "There *are* things worse than death," he says, "Wars," he mutters. "Tell me you are not helping them." Luc almost looks offended. "Even / have limits." She pushes the bars—only to find the lock undone, the cell door swinging open beneath her weight. She stumbles forward, out of the cell and into freedom, into him. The prison gives way to nothingness, to blackness, to the wild dark. And when it parts, she is back in Boston.

### **New York City, July 30, 2014**

She slips the ring over her finger. There is no flood of darkness. Only a stillness, a vacant quiet, and then— A knock. Luc's brows draw up. "Don't you trust me?" "I never have," she says. "There's no use starting now." But this is a silence born of strategy. This is the silence of a chess game being played. And this time, Addie has to win.

### **Los Angeles, California, April 7, 1952**

The Cicada Club buzzes with life. "What's his name?" she asks. "Sinatra," he answers as the band lifts, and the man begins to sing. A crooner's melody, smooth and sweet, spills into the room. Addie listens, mesmerized, and then men and women begin to rise from their chairs and step out onto the dance floor. Luc moves with the fluid grace of wind rushing through fields of wheat, of storms rolling through the summer skies. She will never be quite sure which happened first—if she kissed him, or he kissed her, who began the gesture, and who rose to meet it. She will only know that there was space between them, and it has vanished. He kisses her like someone tasting poison. Cautious, questing, almost afraid. He tastes like the forest, and somehow, impossibly, like home. He kisses her again, this time, there is no caution. She has kissed a lot of people. But none of them will ever kiss like him.

### **Everywhere, Nowhere 1952-1968**

It is only sex. At least, it starts that way. He is a thing to be gotten out of her system. She is a novelty to be enjoyed. It is only sex. And then it is not. It is the first time that she has woken up in bed with someone who hasn't already forgotten her. The first time she hasn't felt alone. All she knows is that she is tired, and he is the place she wants to rest. And that, somehow, she is happy. She presses her ear to his bare chest and listens for the drum of life, the drawing of breath, and hears only the woods at night,

the quiet hush of summer. A reminder that he is a lie, that **his face and his flesh are simply a disguise.**

#### **New York City, July 30, 2014**

The car pulls to a stop outside Le Coucou, a beautiful French restaurant on the lower side of SoHo. She has been there before, two of the best meals she's had in New York. The food is, of course, exquisite. But as they eat, the host and servers stand against the walls, eyes open, empty, a bland expression on their faces. She has always hated this aspect of his power, and the careless way he wields it. "Send them away," she says, and he does. A silent gesture, and the servers disappear, and they are alone in the empty restaurant. He says, "I have no power over promised souls. There will be their own." "Tell me, Adeline," he says. "Have you missed me?" She missed him the way someone might miss the sun in winter, though they still dread its heat. It was his fault no one else remembered, it was his fault that she lost and lost and lost, and she does not say any of that because it will change nothing, and because there is still one thing she hasn't lost. One piece of her story that she can save. Henry. So Addie makes her gambit. "Because you let me have no one else." She takes a steadying breath. "I know you won't spare me, Luc, and perhaps you are right, we do belong together. So if you love me, spare Henry Strauss. If you love me, let *him* go." "Come," he says, pushing back from the table. "This place no longer suits my taste."

"What do I see in him?" she says. I see myself. Not who I am now, perhaps, but who I was, the night you came to rescue me." Addie shakes her head. "You see only flaws and faults, weaknesses to be exploited. **But humans are messy**, Luc. That is the wonder of them. **They live and love and make mistakes, and they feel so much.**" "I am in the business of souls, Adeline, not second chances." "And I am begging you to let him go."

#### **New Orleans, Louisiana, May 1, 1984**

She has forgotten something. That man in the bed is not a man. That the life is not a life. "Do you love me?" she asks. "Then let me go." "I am not holding you here." "That isn't what I mean," she says, rising on one arm. "Set me free." "I can make it better," he murmurs. "All you have to do is surrender." But Addie pulls back, pulls away, pulls free. **"And I am meant to trust you? To give in, and believe that you will give me back?"** But this is a fight forged over centuries. As old and inevitable as the turning of the world, the passing of an era, the collision of a girl and the dark.

#### **New York City, July 30, 2014**

But one thing has changed. There is no triumph in his eyes. The color has gone out of them, so pale they're almost gray. And though she's never seen the shade before, she guesses it is sadness. "You put them on such a pedestal, but humans are brief and pale and so is their love. It is shallow, it does not last. You long for human love, but you are not human, Adeline. You haven't been for centuries. You have no place with them. You belong with me. Want is for children. If this were want, I would be rid of you by

now. I would have forgotten you centuries ago,” he says, a bitter loathing in his voice. “This is need. And need is painful but patient. Do you hear me, Adeline? I need you. As you need me. I love you, as you love me.” Luc’s eyes burn a shade she’s never seen before. A venomous color. And for the first time in centuries, she is afraid. He didn’t just steal a night. He took an entire week. Seven precious days, erased from her life ... and Henry’s. Henry thought she was gone. He simply holds her tight, and says, “Enough,” says, “Promise me,” says, “Stay.” And none of them are questions, but she knows he is asking, pleading with her to let it go, to stop fighting, stop trying to change their fates, and **just be with him until the end.**

### **New York City, August 2014**

These are the happiest days of Henry’s life. But for the first time in months, in years, in as long as he can remember, he is not afraid. He is worried about his friends, of course, about the bookstore, and the cat. But beyond the low hum of concern is only a strange calm, a steadiness, and the incredible relief that he found Addie, that he got to know her, to love her, to have her here beside him. He realizes that Addie has never met his family, and then he realizes, with a sudden, sinking weight, that he is not supposed to go home until Rosh Hashanah, and that he will be gone by then. “If you could do it again,” he says, “would you still make the deal?” And Addie says yes. **It has been a hard and lonely life, she says, and a wonderful one, too.** She has lived through wars, and fought in them, witnessed revolution and rebirth. “Nothing is all good or all bad,” she says. “Life is so much messier than that.” There are some good-byes he has to make. Henry lies, and tells his friends he is going out of town. They do not know it is good-bye.

### **New York City, September 4, 2014**

Your time always ends a second before you’re ready. Your life is the minutes you want minus one. God, what he would give for just another day. It is almost time, and they are on the roof. The same roof he nearly stepped off a year before, the same one where he stood with the devil and made his deal. They teach you growing up that you are only one thing at a time—angry, lonely, content—but he’s never found that to be true. He is a dozen things at once. He is lost and scared and grateful, he is sorry and happy and afraid.

### **New York City, September 1, 2014 (3 nights until the end)**

It is almost 2am. Addie takes a stool at the bar, and orders a shot of tequila. She reaches into her pocket and finds the ring. “Shouldn’t you be with your love?” There is no humor in Luc’s eyes. They are flat, and dark. “He’s sleeping,” she says, “and I cannot.” “Adeline,” he says, stroking her hair. **It will hurt. And it will pass.** All things do.” Luc sinks onto the stool beside her. “And how was it, your human love? Was it everything you dreamed of?” “No,” she says, and it is the truth. **It was messy. It was hard. It was wonderful, and strange, and frightening, and fragile—so fragile it hurt—and it was worth every single moment.** “I’m not asking for your mercy, and I know you have no charity. So I’m offering a trade. Let Henry go. Let him live. Let him



remember me, and..." "You would surrender your soul?" There is a shadow in his gaze when he says it, a hesitation in the words, less want than worry, and she knows then, she has him. She looks straight into his eyes. "Do this, and I will be yours, as long as you want me by your side." Luc smiles, his green eyes emerald with victory. "I accept."

#### **New York City, September 4, 2014**

"You can't do this," he says again, and she says, "It is already done," and Henry feels dizzy, feels sick, feels the ground sway beneath him. "But I need you to do one more thing." Her forehead presses against his **"I need you to remember."**

### **PART SEVEN: I REMEMBER YOU**

#### **New York City, September 5, 2014**

A boy wakes up alone in bed. And then, of course, he remembers. The last night of his life. There's no trace of her left behind, except the stuff in his head and— the journals. He sits there for hours against the side of the bed, turning through every page of every book, every story she ever told, and when he is done, he closes his eyes, and puts his head in his hands amid the open books. Because the girl he loved his gone. And he is still here. He remembers everything.



#### **Brooklyn, New York, March 13, 2015**

"Henry Samuel Strauss, this is bullshit." Bea slams the last page down on the coffee counter, startling the cat, who'd drifted off on a nearby tower of books. "You can't end it there." She's clutching the rest of the manuscript to her chest, as if to shield it from him. The title page stares back at him. *The Invisible Life of Addie LaRue*. "What happened to her? Did she really go with Luc? After all that?" Anything he wrote beyond those last shared seconds, that final kiss, would be fiction. He tried. **But this is real—**

**though no one else will ever know it. He wants to tell her it's all true.** That she met Addie, just like he wrote, that she said the same thing every time. He wants to tell her that they would have been friends. That they were, in that first-night-of-the-rest-of-our-lives kind of way. He wishes he could have lived with her. But now, he is glad to have it. Because the truth is, he is already beginning to forget. Belief is a bit like gravity. **Enough people believe a thing, and it becomes as solid and real as the ground beneath your feet.** But when you're the only one holding on to an idea, a memory, a girl, it's hard to keep it from floating away. He will get an agent, and the book will go to auction, and in the end he'll sell the work on one condition—that there is only one name on the cover, and it is not his—and in the end, they will agree.

#### **London, England February 3, 2016**

"I can't believe the author didn't put their name on it," says the first. "Must be some kind of PR stunt." "I don't know," says the second. "I think it's charming. Makes the whole thing feel real. Like it's really Henry, telling her story." The shop girls are right.

There is no author's name. No photo on the back. No sign of Henry Strauss, beyond the simple, beautiful fact that the book is in her hands, the story real. She peels back the cover, turns past the title to the dedication. Three small words rest in the center of the page. *I remember you*. She smiles, brushing away tears, as she sees him on the roof that final night. Addie has said so many hellos, but that was the first and only time she got to say good-bye. That kiss, like a piece of long-awaited punctuation. An end.

**That is the thing about living in the present, and only the present, it is a run-on sentence.** And Henry was a perfect pause in the story. It was a gift. She thumbs through the chapters of the book, *her* book, and marvels at the sight of her name on every page. Her life, waiting to be read. "Adeline." And then Luc is there. "How clever you are," he says, murmuring the words into her skin. But he does not seem angry. "They can have the story," he says. "So long as I have you." Arrogance is an unattractive trait, but Luc wears it with all the comfort of a tailored suit. His eyes are a bright, triumphant green. Three hundred years she's had to learn the color of his moods. She knows them all by now, the meaning of every shade, knows his temper, wants, and thoughts, just by studying those eyes. And when she carved the terms of her new deal, when she traded her soul for herself, she did not say forever, but *as long as you want me by your side*. And those are not the same at all. Perhaps it will take twenty years. Perhaps it will take a hundred. But he is not capable of love, and she will prove it. She will ruin him. Ruin his idea of them. She will break his heart, and he will come to hate her once again. She will drive him mad, drive him away. And then, he will cast her off. And she will finally be free. So Addie says nothing of the new game, the new rules, the new battle that's begun. She only smiles, and sets the book back on its shelf. And follows him out into the dark.