



Lee Carroll

*Author of Black Swan Rising*

# The Shape Stealer



Evil has traversed time and threatens our world –  
will you run, will you hide . . . or will you stand and fight?

## About the Book

*Garet James is the watchtower - the last in a long line of powerful women sworn to protect our world from evil. . .*

She once defeated the malign sorcerer Dr Dee, but her pursuit of the man she loves - the centuries-old vampire Will Hughes - has unleashed another ages-old entity into our time - a being that threatens everything and everyone.

His name is Marduk and he is the descendant of a demonic Babylonian deity. Now abroad in Paris, he has sought out the villainous John Dee and they have hatched a plan together that will create chaos and ensure ruin.

And it will fall to Garet to confront this new threat. Around her she gathers a band of modern-day knights - a brotherhood dedicated to preserving the sanctity of the time-line. But there are others out there who would see Garet fail and who will stop at nothing to bring an end to everything she - and we - hold dear . . .

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About the Author

Also by Lee Carroll

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# **The Shape Stealer**

**Lee Carroll**

*For our brothers Bob, Joel, and Larry*

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## The Little Bridge

Paris in the morning. The streets newly washed by rain. The smells of coffee and fresh baked bread wafting from cafés. Sunlight a glittering promise of the day on the Seine. I'd dreamed of walking like this across the Pont Saint Michel with Will Hughes some day. How after four hundred years of night he would see his first daybreak by my side. To win that dawn we'd traveled back in time, faced a conniving alchemist, an evil astrologer, an ancient sorceress, a monster, assorted crocodiles, and Will's own sordid past . . . and won a cure. We'd come back using the Astrologer's Tower and a timepiece I'd fashioned as a time machine, and I'd handed Will the cure—the blood of the shape-shifting creature that had made him a vampire. He had drunk and become human. Descending the Astrologer's Tower we'd learned that the creature, Marduk, had traveled back with us. But I knew that together we could handle even that. When Will looked around him, amazed at the new world at his feet, I thought it was wonder at the new world of daylight after four hundred years of night, but it wasn't. He was amazed because he'd never seen twenty-first-century Paris. The Will I had brought back with me was not the man I had fallen in love with. It was his earlier self. Nineteen-year-old Will Hughes, the callow youth whom I'd found when I



traveled back in time to 1602 and inadvertently brought back with me.

“You’re not *my* Will,” I had told him. “I saved the wrong one.”

“Tell me again what he said to you in the alley?”

We were in the Café Le Petit Pont across from Notre Dame. I was on my second café au lait. Will was sipping his, his childish delight at the beverage beginning to grate on my nerves.

“What my dark twin said?”

I sighed with exasperation. “I’ve explained. He’s not your dark twin. He’s you—four hundred years later. We came from the future—*now*—to find a cure for him.”

Will pouted. My sexy, virile vampire *pouted*. I preferred those lips when they snarled back over fangs. “He said I was his *better self*.”

I snorted. “He was flattering you, probably because he knew it would work. Then what did he say?”

“He told me he knew a way that I could become human again and regain my true love, Marguerite.” He made moon eyes at me again, as he had every time he’d mentioned Marguerite. I slapped the table.

“I told you, I am not your Marguerite. I’m a distant descendant.”

“Well, he told me you *were*. He said I’d find you at the top of a tower in Catherine de Medici’s palace. That I’d have to fight my way there, but when I did I’d find you . . . er . . . Marguerite . . . on top with my cure. And I did fight! There were crocodiles!”

“Yes, you were very brave,” I said for the fifth time. “But didn’t you ask him *why* he was sending you instead of going himself?”

Will’s brow creased. “Why should I question my dark twin’s desire to save me?”

I sighed and lowered my head in my hands. “No, I suppose you wouldn’t.”

“But now that you mention it, he did say one other thing.”

“Yes?” I said, picking up my head.

“He said to tell you—well, to tell Marguerite . . .”

I made a circular motion with my hand to urge him to go on.

“Let’s see, what were the exact words? He made me memorize them . . . oh yes, that he was sending you his better self because that’s what you deserved.”

“Then you’re both idiots,” I said, tossing a euro coin onto the table and getting up. I headed east along the Seine, battling the early morning flow of tourists, not caring if he followed me. But of course he did. He caught up with me in front of the Shakespeare and Company bookstore, where a shopkeeper was setting up the outdoor bins of books in the little square in front of the store.

“I don’t know why you’re angry with me, good lady. I merely followed the instructions of what appeared to be my dark angel.”

“That’s why I’m angry with you,” I said, wheeling on him. “You followed orders; you didn’t think to question him, did you? If you had, he might have told you that he was you four hundred years later and merely because he’d done some questionable things in those four hundred years he didn’t think he was good enough for me. Then you might have asked, ‘Verily, good sir, have you asked the lady what she thinks?’ And he would have been forced to admit that the *lady* had already told him that she didn’t care what he’d done, that she loved *him*, the man he was, with all the experiences he’d had, not the silly boy he’d been four hundred years before.”

Will, who had grown nearly as pale as his vampire self under my tirade, fidgeted with the frills of his shirt cuff. “I am not silly,” he said. “And neither was my older self an idiot. We both did what we did for love. Can we not be

friends, you and I? We both want the same thing. You want your beloved Will back and I want my Marguerite. Can that not be arranged? I am willing to go back in time and change places with my dark . . . er . . . my older self.”

“That’s very gallant of you,” I said, “only as I mentioned earlier, the timepiece we used to travel back in time is broken.” I held up the watch that hung around my neck. Its glass face had cracked and its gears no longer moved.

I sighed and looked away from him, toward the river and the square in front of Notre Dame where tourists were lining up for morning tours. Time was moving on. Irrationally, I felt it was moving me even further away from Will—the real Will, stuck in 1602. But then something occurred to me. *Time was moving on*. Will wasn’t stuck in the past. Without Marduk’s blood he had remained a vampire, which meant he would have continued living from then until now. He must exist somewhere in the present . . . but then where was he? The question quickly made my head hurt. I needed to find someone who understood time . . . Of course! Horatio Durant, the watchmaker who had helped me make the timepiece. He hadn’t admitted to any supernatural knowledge, but that didn’t mean he didn’t have any. I would start with him. Relieved to have come up with a plan of sorts, I turned to share it with Will . . . but Will was gone. I spun around in a circle, searching for him, but didn’t see him anywhere. He’d vanished into the crowds of tourists streaming along the Seine as completely as his older self had vanished into the river of time.

## Tender Like a Rose

Despondent over Gareth's iciness, Will had turned away from her in front of the bookstore named for his long-lost mentor and love rival, its presence another unfriendly rebuke to his spirit. His eyes had wandered across the faces in the crowd, searching for a friendlier mien, when suddenly he had spied a familiar façade. Not of a person, but of a building. It was the Church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, where he had kept his Paris vigil over Marguerite four centuries earlier after they had parted in London in a conflict over his desire to join her in immortality. A sign at her previous lodgings in London had directed him to wait for her at this church. She never arrived, but another sign he encountered there eventually guided him toward Paimpont in Brittany, where he had found her. Perhaps even now there would be a sign there that would lead him to her. He'd headed toward it, leaving Gareth behind him in the crowd.

A distinctive tree near the church's north wall, which he recalled clearly from 1602, was still here, now with a plaque on its trunk labeling it "the oldest tree in Paris." It was, indeed, an ancient-looking specimen. Poor thing, it had weathered the centuries badly. At some point in its long life it had leaned so far to one side that it had been propped up by a metal girder and its trunk had split in two and been

filled with stone. Will sank down onto a bench in front of the tree, feeling at this evidence of the centuries that had passed for him and the tree as if he, too, needed support and as if his heart, too, had been filled with stone. He was still staring morosely at the tree when an odd little man approached him. The man was no more than five feet tall and gave the impression of a human egg, waddling about rotundly on two short legs: of a robin's egg in particular, given the pale blue tint of his summer attire, shorts and a tennis shirt. Dispensing with any social niceties, the man approached Will, closely observed him with deep-set blue eyes, and told him that he happened to know that Will was in need of a time portal. The man knew where Will might find such a portal, or where rumors among the fey suggested he might find one.

"How on earth do you know my plight?" Will asked, astonished.

The man allowed himself the smallest crease of a grin. "It's not on earth that I know your plight. It's in earth."

"How so?"

"I have familiarity with subterranean circles where certain fey wander. Word travels there. I happen to be Paul Robin, descendent of the great royal botanist Jean Robin, who remains somewhat alive below ground in this very locale, amidst and part of the roots of the tree you see before you. Indeed, my great-great-etc. grandfather has heard of your arrival here from his sources, and he has sent me to help you."

"Arrival at the church? Or arrival in 2009?"

Paul smiled. "Both. Sources tell me that there's a certain bookstore along the banks of the Seine, Kepler and Dee's, where—assuming you were to find it—if you browse along its shelves long enough, a time portal might open. At least, this is an experience some fey have had. It's through a method called transmigration of atoms, though I have no idea what that is . . ."

But Will did. He had learned of it in London this past unforgettable summer in which he'd fallen in love with Marguerite, and he had some brief experience with it too. Hope flared at hearing the term again.

"Unfortunately I do not have the address of Kepler and Dee's," Paul Robin went on. "But I'm sure that if you walk along the Seine long enough, you will find it. I hope so, anyway."

Paul Robin wheeled around like an egg spinning on its axis and walked swiftly away, without another word. Will was left staring after him, amidst the fading red and gold sunlight, the burgeoning shadows cast by the church and the trees in the park, wondering if he should take him seriously or not. But the man had known his name and his problem. It was worth a try. If he found the portal he'd not only solve his problem, but he'd prove to Garet James that he was not an idiot, as she had so rudely called him.

But after Will had been strolling along the banks of the Seine for nearly two hours, he still hadn't found the store. He'd found a few bookstores, but none with a name like Kepler and Dee's, and the one whose name had rung a bell, Shakespeare and Company, rang it in a somewhat inflammatory way. Nonetheless, he'd been moved to go inside and ask if the store had previously been named Kepler and Dee's, but the clerk only shook a head for no and looked at him as if he were drunk. As had the half dozen people he'd stopped along the way to ask, in his best court French, if they knew the establishment.

Some had stared, a few had laughed. But on the other hand, they all seemed a very civilized bunch, nothing like the rough street crowds of Elizabethan London who could jostle you in the interests of pickpocketing, or out of meanness. Still, he was becoming tired—he'd like another cup of that excellent beverage Garet had procured for him earlier.

That had been kind of her. Even when she was angry—which he could hardly blame her for, after so keen a disappointment as she had suffered—she'd bought him breakfast. And she would have taken him back to her lodgings if he hadn't wandered off. In truth, her coldness hadn't been any more dismissive than Marguerite's final walk away from him in Paris had been, when he'd revealed to her that he had become immortal, and she'd told him that she had simultaneously had herself turned into a mortal, under the cruel illusion that she and Will could now be together in harmony. How hopeful a situation was that?

The more he walked on, the more Garet came to mind. Maybe it was the irrepressible nature of youth, which needed someone to love close at hand. But a wave of feeling came over him, and, poet at the core that he was, he felt the urge to compose a sonnet. It could begin with a recitation of his lover's quandary, but he wanted it to end with a fervent expression of his new feeling. He sat on a bench on the Pont Saint Michel and wrote feverishly, in a tumult, scarcely noticing the crowds or the waning daylight. When Will was done he stared down at the lines he had written as though startled by them, as if he had learned something about himself and his situation he couldn't have learned otherwise, as if a hand other than his own had written the poem.

*Love Garet?—Marguerite?—I'm so confused:  
whichever way I turn, I seem to lose.  
My true beloved's buried in the past  
and yet Time's twin of hers perhaps could last  
as my great love, if she would only see  
that I can love her deeply, as truly  
as sunlight loves a gnarled and ancient tree,  
as wind's enamored of the clouds that flee  
its western onrush; wind pursues them for*

*as long as there is weather, and birds soar.*

*I pledge that I am yours forevermore,  
fixated like Othello, jealous Moor,  
yet tender like a rose embracing spring.  
Please understand my plight! Let love take wing!*

After reading the poem over, Will went to the nearby railing and stared down at the Seine as if he pondered his own fate there, inside a mirror of water tinged with the red light of the setting sun. And it was Gareth's face he saw in the mirror, not Marguerite's. They were similar faces but now, for Will, they were so very different. He recited the poem aloud to himself one more time, and then decided it should be entitled "Tender like a Rose."

Yes, he could . . . perchance he already did . . . love Gareth! He'd go find her and show her the poem . . . but find her where? When he'd left her standing in front of the bookstore he hadn't stopped to wonder where they would meet again. Now he rushed back to the store, but of course Gareth wasn't there. And he didn't know the name or address of her lodgings. He turned in a circle twice, searching the crowds for her face, but now that night was approaching, the cafés and streets were even more packed. These crowds might be more polite than the 1602 mobs he was familiar with, but they were larger than any he had ever seen. The wall of people seemed to go on and on . . . forever. He turned around and around again . . . and found himself facing a man who was staring at him curiously.

"Are you the man who has been asking everyone for Kepler and Dee's Bookshop?" the man asked.

"Yes!" Will exclaimed. "Do you know where it is?"

"I ought to," the man replied. "I am Johannes Kepler."



## The Hall of Time

I searched the streets and cafés for Will and then, thinking he might have been drawn to the familiar name of his former tutor, the bookstore. At first I was angry that he'd caused me this delay in going to Monsieur Durant, but slowly I became worried. He was such a hapless innocent! What would become of him wandering twenty-first-century Paris? Then I became regretful that I'd been so hard on him. He was right that the situation wasn't his fault. It had been his older self who'd made the decision to stay in 1602—a decision I should have seen coming. Older Will had habitually expressed regret about his past conduct and professed a romantic idealization of his younger self. I'd tried to reassure him that it was *him* that I wanted, but maybe I hadn't tried hard enough. Now I'd lost both of them. I could only hope that young Will would eventually come back here to the store because it was the last place we'd been together. I'd leave a note.

Recalling that there was a manual typewriter where lingering expats typed notes—and poems and unfinished novels, for all I knew—to each other, I climbed the stairs to the second story and slid into the snug alcove that housed the typewriter. I grabbed a piece of paper, but then glanced at the pages thumbtacked to the walls of the cubby.

*Michele, je t'aime, Nicole. Zeke, meet me at the Musee D'Orsay beside our favorite Cezanne. You know the one. Yours evermore, Twink. Elsa, we'll always have Paris. Rick. And then, Garet, go to the Institut Chronologique, 193½ rue Saint-Jacques. All your questions will be answered there.*

I yanked the page off the wall and studied it for a signature, but there was none. Could Will have left it for me? But I wasn't sure how he would know about an Institut Chronologique in Paris.

And what the hell *was* the Institut Chronologique? I'd never heard of it. But if it had to do with time, then it was probably a good place to start.

I rolled the paper into the typewriter and typed a reply beneath the enigmatic note: *I'm on my way, Garet.*

The northern end of the rue Saint-Jacques was right around the corner from Shakespeare and Company. Checking my notebook, I saw that the Institut Océanographique, where just a few days ago I'd met Madame La Pieuvre, was at 195 rue Saint-Jacques. I didn't recall an Institut Chronologique on that block, but I must have missed it.

As I walked south past the great marble façades of the Sorbonne I wondered where Octavia La Pieuvre was now. She had traveled with me to the Val sans Retour in Brittany to find passage to the mythical forest of Brocéliande, there to ask to be made a mortal so she could live out a mortal life with her beloved, Adele Weiss. She had told me about the curse of the Val sans Retour, which condemned all faithless lovers to wander there forever. Part sea creature that she was, Madame La Pieuvre had been dehydrated by the hike. When I'd left her to find shade she'd been reminiscing about a past lover. Did that make her unfaithful? I'd lost her during my own trials in the Val, but eventually I'd found Will and together we'd found our way out—albeit that way had led through 1602. Had Octavia la Pieuvre found her

own way out? I would have to find Adele Weiss (she was the concierge at my hotel, so that shouldn't be hard) and, if Octavia was still missing, tell her what had happened. I didn't look forward to *that* conversation. Far better to follow an anonymous note to an unknown institute . . . which I should be arriving at soon.

I had come to the Institut de Géographie with its twin globes above its doors, and I could see beyond it the square tower of the Institut Océanographique. The Institut de Géographie was number 191. So the Institut Chronologique must be next door . . . but the next building appeared to be the Oceanography Institute. I checked the numbers again. 191, 195. No 193, let alone a 193½. Had my anonymous note writer gotten the number wrong? Or was it simply a ploy to send me wandering aimlessly around Paris? After all, there were half a dozen things I should be doing—finding Monsieur Durant, looking for Marduk, telling Adele Weiss about Octavia . . . the list grew as I paced between the two buildings under the baleful glare of the cast-iron octopus above the door of the Institut Océanographique. I was so tired and overwrought I could hear a humming in my head and something ticking . . .

I paused directly in between the two institutes and, peering down the alley between them, recalled something that Octavia La Pieuvre had said to me on the drive to Brittany.

“The mythical forest of Brocéliande is not a place of this world. It can't be found on a map of France. You can't reach it on the E50 or take a TGV from Montparnasse and expect to find the door open to Brocéliande.”

Perhaps the Institut Chronologique was not on the map of Paris. Perhaps to find it one had to look hard, or listen . . .

The ticking was coming from the depths of the narrow alley between the two buildings, which ended in a wall covered with vines and ivy. As I stared down the alley, a breeze wafted through it and disturbed the greenery,

revealing a marble caryatid flanking a doorway. In the brief glimpse I had of the statue I thought she might be holding an hourglass.

As I walked down the alley the ticking became louder. When I reached the door the breeze stirred the ivy, revealing a huge clock above the doorway, half-hidden by vines—a huge and complicated-looking clock made of three revolving disks filled with celestial symbols, which were transversed by four sweeping hands. The whole contraption was encircled by a dragon biting its own tail, and every inch was inlaid with gleaming enamel.

I immediately wanted to make a reproduction of it for the line of watches I'd been thinking of launching. I took out my sketchbook and began to draw it, losing myself in the myriad details of the complicated mechanism. I hadn't drawn like this since the week before I'd left Paris, when I'd given up on finding Will and thrown myself into sketching in the museums. On this very page I was drawing on were the sketches I'd made in the Musée des Arts et Métiers of timepieces and astrolabes. From them I'd come up with the timepiece I was wearing now. On the night that I'd finished making the timepiece I'd gone to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre to say my final good-bye to Will and my quest for him. But as I'd sat outside in the Square Viviani, the bells of Notre Dame had chimed midnight and the oldest tree in Paris had split open to admit me into the earth where I'd met Jean Robin, my first guide toward finding Will. Would this door lead me into another adventure? Would it help me find Will again? I looked down for a knob . . . but there wasn't one. Nor was there a door knocker or . . . when I searched through the vines at either side of the door . . . a doorbell. I'd come to a closed door at the end of a narrow dead-end alley where an extraordinarily complicated clock ticked away the seconds. Was this the beginning of an adventure, or the end? As I pondered that question the gears of the clock moved and

three of the hands met at the top. Bells began to chime. One . . . two . . . seven . . . eight . . . twelve . . . thirteen . . .

Thirteen?

Two little windows flanking the clock slid open. I waited to see what sort of mechanical figures would pop out, but instead an elderly man's face framed with white fluffy hair appeared in one of them.

"Ah, Garet James," Horatio Durant said. "It's about time."

From its half-hidden door and narrow alleyway entrance I expected a tiny atelier similar to Monsieur Durant's watch shop in the Marais; instead, I walked into a lofty atrium at the center of which was suspended a gigantic pendulum swinging above a black granite basin filled with sand. As the pendulum swung, it described arcs in the sand. Looking up, I saw that the roof soared so high above us I could barely make it out.

"How . . . ?" I began, turning to Monsieur Durant.

"Is it bigger on the inside than the outside?" he finished the question for me. "The institute lies outside the restrictions of time and space," he intoned rather formally. Then he shrugged, threw up his hands, and lifted his white bushy eyebrows at me. "At least, that's what it says in our brochure. As far as I'm concerned, it's a big nuisance. Do you know what it costs to heat this place in the winter? And forget about keeping it clean! The last cleaning crew we hired got lost in the archives and we haven't seen them since."

"I was going to ask how you knew I was coming."

"Ah." Monsieur Durant tapped the side of his nose.

"The pendulum always knows. Look." He pointed to the lines drawn in the sand, all smooth uninterrupted arcs except for one that had an intricate knot in it. I tried to imagine the motion the pendulum would have had to perform to describe such a design—and failed.

“That knot indicates an anomaly in the time line. It told me that someone had traveled through time today. I assumed it was you, since you used my workshop to fashion your timepiece.” He tapped the watch that was hanging around my neck and then moved closer. “May I?”

I took the timepiece off and handed it to him. He dug a jeweler’s loupe out of the pocket of his baggy trousers and fitted it over his right eye.

“It broke when we came back. Can you fix it?”

He opened the case and studied the gears. His lips moved as though he were counting—or saying a prayer—but he made no sound for several moments. Then he looked up, one eye made giant by the jeweler’s loupe. “Did you adjust the settings at any time while you were in the past?”

I shook my head. “I don’t think I’ve adjusted anything on it since it left your workshop.”

“Hmph. I’ll have to see. It’ll take . . .”—He grinned—“*time*. But we’ve got a bigger problem than your watch. The time line. Ever since we saw the anomaly this morning we’ve been charting the changes in the archives. Come . . .” He motioned for me to follow him through an arched doorway. As we walked around the pendulum I paused to listen to the soft whooshing of its progress through the sand.

*Whoosh, whoosh, Will, it seemed to whisper. Whoosh, whoosh, why?*

I shook my head. I was just tired, I thought, following Monsieur Durant through the arched doorway and into an even loftier domed space.

“*Voilà la Salle du Temps!*” Monsieur Durant announced with obvious pride. The Hall of Time was as vast as the Gare de l’Est, only instead of trains standing in their tracks, stacks of books soared up to the domed ceiling. The stacks were fashioned of curving black cast iron and looked as though they had been made by Hector Guimard, the designer of the Paris Metro entrances. The ceiling, too, was spanned by cast-iron ribs that came together in a giant

oculus and supported panes of brightly colored and intricately patterned stained glass. The effect was that of being inside a brilliantly painted hot-air balloon that was soaring through the air. A steady breeze wafting down through the oculus added to that impression and filled the hall with a fluttering that sounded like flocks of pigeons but that came, I saw, from rows of old-fashioned newspaper racks—the kind that libraries or some cafés used to have. I recalled an old Italian café on Bleecker Street in New York City where my father liked to have a morning espresso and pastry and read the selection of European papers that hung from racks like these.

Another source of the fluttering came from long wooden tables that stretched between the racks, where men and women sat gazing into large tomes, whose pages turned by themselves while the readers hurriedly took notes in composition books.

“What are they doing?” I asked Monsieur Durant.

“The *chronologistes* are recording the changes in the archives,” he replied. “When the anomaly appeared this morning, a number of books were disturbed . . . There goes another one.”

He pointed to a shelf about thirty feet above the floor where a book was protruding over the ledge. As we watched it slid even further out. One of the *chronologistes*—a young woman with crimped tea-colored hair and thick square rimmed glasses—ran toward the shelf, her rather impractical green suede heels clicking on the marble floor. She reached the shelf just in time to catch the book.

A thunderous pounding greeted her successful catch as the *chronologistes* applauded their comrade by stamping their feet.

“Brava, Annick!” Monsieur Durant exclaimed. “What have you got?”

Annick, blushing beneath her freckles at Monsieur Durant’s praise, laid the book down on the table and gently

opened its cover—I noticed she was wearing white cotton gloves—to the title page. “*A History of the Dutch Stock Market,*” she read aloud in proper, only slightly accented English. “*From 1602 to the Present.*”

“Ah, it looks like your friend Will has been busy.”

“Will? Which Will?”

Annick covered her mouth and giggled.

“The one you left behind in 1602,” Monsieur Durant said, shaking his head. “He’s been changing things—nothing big, nothing that would threaten the world’s existence—but little things. Here, let me show you.”

We left Annick poring over the Dutch stock market and walked to a table where a balding middle-aged man in a pin-striped suit and yellow bow tie was bent so far over an ancient-looking tome that his sharp nose nearly touched the page.

“Anything more in the folio, Jean-Luc?”

Jean-Luc’s head jerked up, his round spectacles fogging as he let out an excited gasp. “*Love’s Labour’s Won* is no longer lost and *Cardenio* is appearing!”

“There are some more sonnets,” a white-haired woman sitting on the other side of the table said. “Granted, some have fifteen lines and/or titles, not characteristic of the famed 154. But there are other signs of the same authorship, and they all laud your friend Will.”

“But Shakespeare hated Will for stealing Marguerite,” I said.

“That was BA—Before the Anomaly. The Will who stayed behind in 1602 made it up with his mentor. Here, listen to this . . .” She read a sonnet aloud:

*“Unmasked”*

*Come here, dear Will, and let us pluck a rose,*



*One petal Marguerite and one your Gareth James;  
We'll know their scarlet hues without their names,  
Rare tints a match for both our bloods. Wind blows,  
Rain falls, or sun burns bright—it's all the same—  
When love exceeds both of our growing fames,  
And all the theories, facts we'll ever know.  
A bond outlasting eons, drifting snow,  
And all the seasons calendars can grow.  
Our friendship now restored, we're London-kin,  
As well as colleagues in the sonnet. Let's  
Walk slowly on down Lyme Street, close to dusk,  
Envision our beloveds in the mists  
The river conjures, cleansing love of sin.  
Feel jealousy no more. Our loves unmasked.*

*Friendship now restored? Could that mean . . . ?*

“Wait,” I said. “I don’t understand. Where is all this coming from?” I looked around the great hall. Books were falling, pages were fluttering. “What *is* this place?”

“I told you,” Monsieur Durant replied, smiling impishly. “La Salle du Temps of the Institut Chronologique. The great Hall of Time. We keep track of changes in the time line here. When the oculus is closed, the hall is impervious to changes in the time line. There is at all times . . .” His lips quirked into another smile and Jean-Luc smirked, leading me to believe that the *chronologistes* were prone to punning on the word *time*. “. . . a corps of archivists on the premises who are also impervious to the anomaly, as is our library.” He waved to the stacks of books. “We’ve assembled a collection representing the world’s literature, history, science, financial records, and assorted ephemera. As soon as we open the oculus the books in the archives begin to rewrite themselves. The *chronologistes* take notes on the changes they observe and assemble a report. We confer with our brethren institutes—”

“There are more places like this?” I asked, gaping at the enormity of the place.

Monsieur Durant sighed. “Fewer than there used to be. As you can imagine, this is a very expensive enterprise to maintain. And it is always vulnerable to corruption . . .” A pained look flitted across Monsieur Durant’s face. “And the vagaries of social unrest, or worse. We lost the Warsaw office in the Second World War. But there are still two great monasteries—one in the Pyrenees and one in the Himalayas—as well as institutes in New York City, Edinburgh, and San Francisco. We’ve been getting some very interesting communications from New York this morning. Your friend Will has been a busy fellow.”

“So let me see if I’ve got this straight. Because Will stayed behind in 1602, he has changed time, and you are able to see those changes here?”

“See and record. Once any one of us leaves the institute our own memories will assimilate to the new time line. Jean-Luc here will not remember that *Love’s Labour’s Won* was ever lost. Claudine . . .”—he gestured to the white-haired woman who had read the sonnet—“will think she has known those poems all her life. Because she *will have*. Only here in the institute are we granted a brief window of . . . er . . . *time* . . . to record that the world was ever different and to evaluate the nature of the changes made.”

“Why?” I asked.

Monsieur Durant looked perplexed.

“I mean, sure, I can imagine you do this for knowledge’s sake—”

He shook his head so vigorously that his fluff of white hair moved like a storm cloud. “*Non, non, non!* Not merely for the sake of knowledge, but to guard against those who would change the time line for their own nefarious purposes. If we find such a change, we send our operatives back in time to prevent the change.”

“Oh,” I said, abashed at my assumption and looking with new eyes at the bookish crew assembled in the hall. “Will you be sending anyone back this time?”

Although they didn’t raise their eyes from their books I knew by the cessation of pen scratchings that the *chronologistes* were listening.

“That assessment is made by the head office when all the data is in, but I would gather from what we’ve seen so far that the answer will be no. Mr. Hughes has, on the whole, been making harmless and even beneficial changes. I can see no pattern of attempting to gain unfair advantage over the world. Even his dealings in the world’s financial markets have been to shield and protect the victims of precipitous crashes, and defenseless animals from cruelty, instead of profiting from any foreknowledge he had. The changes we have seen in the police blotters . . . well, Jules can tell you about them.”

A thin young man with fair hair parted in the middle lifted his head from a ledger and pushed his eyeglasses up the bridge of his nose. “*Maisoui*,” he began in French, then cleared his throat and reverted to English. “So far I have recorded twenty-eight fewer suspicious deaths from the years 1602 to 1689.”

“What kinds of deaths?” I asked, my mouth suddenly dry.

“Murders of prostitutes and street beggars, some bearing the earmarks of a vampire attack such as wounds about the neck, and great loss of blood. A few murders of this sort each year have been *rewritten*.”

“You see,” Monsieur Durant looked at me with eyes that were no stranger to pain. “A new vampire would have preyed on such victims. It is not surprising that he would have inadvertently killed many in his blood lust. But when Will went back he chose *not* to kill these people. Of course, there is always the possibility that one of the people he has chosen to spare will change the time line adversely, but so far . . .” Monsieur Durant shrugged. “When you walked

through the streets of Paris this morning, you did not observe any cataclysmic changes, did you? The sky was still blue, the sun was still in the sky, *n'est-ce pas*? It seems to me that Mr. Hughes is on a mission of repentance. And, I think, my dear, it's clear what his inspiration is. All of this . . .” He waved his hand at the tables of fluttering pages that sounded in the vast hall like flocks of pigeons wheeling through the sky. “. . . is Will Hughes's four-hundred-year-long love letter to you.”