1. Autumn 4

"I'm Daniel," he said, his fanged grin quite charming with a prominent gap between his two front teeth. He came up to her immediately after she walked into the rehearsal studio and actually wiggled his pointy ears.

"I figure you're my competition." He glanced dismissively at the six or seven other guys hanging about. "There're some drag parts in the show, so why not Bat Boy?"



Quince hoped nobody else had figured that out. Except the director, of course.

"What song are you singing?" he asked. "I'm singing *Apology to a Cow* from the show."

Of course he was. She didn't want to tell him what she was singing, but did it really matter? "*I Know Things Now.*"

"Oh," he said, excited. "From *Into the Woods.* Were you Red?"

Yeah, you gleeking coxcomb, Thisby spat. *Fifteen fucking years ago.*

"Excuse me," Quince said. "I've got to go sign in."

Away from Daniel, she was finally able to absorb the room that was so similar to many others she'd been in. It had the tang of nerves and ambition and spilled energy drinks full of sugar and caffeine. She could practically taste it on her tongue.

She gave the artistic director her meager resume, headshot, and marked sheet music. She turned around to take in the space, a community hall with folding chairs and a table or two facing a raised stage platform. There was a stand-up piano in the corner that looked well-loved. The lighting was better than she remembered. There were no flickering fluorescent tubes, but LED track lights that ran along the ceiling. It was functional, if not pretty, but it was how it made her feel. She'd been nervous, but she wasn't anymore. It was like an old family friend.

They had a dance sequence that they memorized from a YouTube video, and they did it as a group. Quince was still saying in her head, *Right, left, jump. Double to the right and six, seven, eight*. Daniel wasn't perfect, but he had that wild energy the role of Bat Boy called for.

She waited in the hallway with the others, as one-by-one they were called back into the studio for their singing audition. Daniel was nowhere to be seen.

When she stepped on the raised stage, she saw the edges of peeling gaffer tape blocking out old shows, and the history of this place settled whatever lingering nerves she had. The accompanist gave her a few bars of *I Know Things Now*, the only piece she could prepare on such short notice. Thisby was right, she played Little Red fifteen years ago. The lyrics felt more personal this time, how somebody showed her new things and how not to be scared. She was able to sing them with

emotion she hadn't felt at thirteen. Life experience, she realized, was worth something.

When she walked out, Daniel was waiting. "Hey, you're good."

Before she could ask him how he would know that, he added, "I have a hidden place where I can hear what's going on."

She tried to be affronted, but she felt ridiculously pleased.