

# The Pinyon Under The Glass

## Chapter 1

Once upon a time, in a world where everyone owned something and no one had anything, there lived a girl, Isabelle Arke Hale. She would have the singular name, Hale if she could, but it seemed everyone chose a different label.

Hale sat in the kitchen mostly, or sometimes the living room, or outside on the patio—never her bedroom, as she only spent time there to sleep—with notes scattered around herself. Three different books sat with their jackets facing up at the ceiling, their limbs spread open, vulnerable and sensual.

Romeo and Juliet

Howls Moving Castle

The Well at the World's End

Most of her book collection entails fantasy, magic, and otherworldly elements, an escape from the mundane. She never could read fantasy in school, but now, since the spring broke toward summer, the curriculum no longer interferes with her true devotion. At least not until she joins the new world of college classes next fall. For now, she reads and takes notes, casting her reality aside into the richness of the mind's green eye. Fields of wild daisies and distant castles, a warping of the small and big. Papers spread in a mess amongst the table, different highlights and colored pens, and no organization in the hues of notes as each instrument was grabbed hastily to get a thought down.

Hale scribbled a note in purple ink on the paper, “Why die?” She questions.

She was sick the week her class discussed Romeo and Juliet, one of the few school-issued books she was excited about. She missed the entire section; all 23,000 words were said and analyzed in the span of three classes. Four consecutive hours supposedly encompassed all that needed to be said.

She had the flu that week, her skin yellowed, and her insides seemed to reject anything foreign. No matter the intention of the stranger, her body did not want a friendship. Hale remembered this flu on a visceral level; she remembered the taste of regurgitated Sunday night pizza. A pizza tradition that her family still refused to give up despite her outward hate of the food now. She remembers the way her sister Anastasia took care of her, rubbing her back and holding her hair as Hale threw herself over the edge of the bed, vomiting into the white bucket. How she fed her small capfuls of water, and when gurgling it, the chunks of Sunday night tradition would splash around with the spit. Into the staining white bucket, it all went.

Clarice, the oldest of the three, refused to help, making it clear that she would not be the replacement. She didn't have an interest in Hale, honestly, but even more so, she had an avulsion to motherhood.

Their father never knew she was sick to begin with. Secretly, Hale was glad he didn't realize, as she knew there would have been no difference.

She had the flu, but now, four years later, she was making amends.

However, today, Hale felt underwhelmed, disappointed, and wronged once again.

Fiercely scribbling and crossing out words she couldn't understand. The death of both Romeo and Juliet came as no shock to her. She had known the ending long before, though she wasn't sure when she had learned of the trope. The starcrossed lovers dying for each other has been understood, almost as simple and expected as the sky turning purple in the evening. It's expected. But why? She kept on asking herself.

Hale didn't care about the ending; the ending is always going to be death whether or not it is written. But she wanted the middle, the understanding, the power of their death from before. She only felt static and cheated.

The kitchen table sits under a bay window, the brightest spot in the entire house and Hale's favorite. It is the most dangerous place for her to stay. She finds her mind wandering up and floating away with the steadiness of the breeze. She's jealous of her mind for being able to leave like that, as she is stuck behind in her body. Above her, on the outer glass, sits the remains of a hummingbird's nest, small and messy as the twigs are strewn about, some pieces dangling off the edge. For a month, Hale had watched the mother sit in the nest above, alone for what seemed like an eternity. It took a long time for her to realize that the bird was protecting an egg. Hale watched through her glass shell the thinness of the calcium crack open as the hairless pink creature fought its way out. She felt as though she had watched the cycle of life in an instant; she saw the birth and the hunger for a new vitality, and then she saw its disappearance. One day, more eager than ever, Hale rushed home to see the baby bird take flight. In the days leading up, she noticed the curious little animal lingering towards the edge, the mother flying forward a short distance, trying to teach. As Hale ran in, the disappointment hung low in her chest with the thought that she had missed take-off.

The nest sat empty.

She found the hummingbird dead outside, falling after trying to fly; the blood underneath it looked clear, like the blood of an insect. The mother bird was gone, and the nest stayed vacant.

As the days ticked by, the wind started to blow what was left of the twigs, once wet from the coating of birth was now dry and brittle. It was the same dryness of the dirt stuck under her fingertips only a few months ago, like tiny shards of glass poking beneath her nails. The soft, moist soil was found seven feet beneath the crust, but Hale couldn't dig that deep yet.

Upset and depressed, it took a long time for her to understand why the baby hummingbird had died.

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Hale listens as the front door opens and closes, the key in the lock sounding rushed and clumsy.

It's still early enough; the sun has only begun to set, so she doesn't need to guess that it's not her father walking through the door. It's an easy guess made even easier at the sound of Clarice's huffing in the other room. She walks into the kitchen, her feet stepping awkwardly as if she forgot how to walk and instead is trying to glide. The rollerskates, her purse, apron, and another tote bag get thrown onto the spotless white-tiled kitchen counter. "Remind me why I chose this job again?" She smirks at the ground after putting everything down with an exhaustive sigh.

"Because they were the first to offer a job?"

"Oh, right... Next time, remind me to give it a day."

Clarice was never mean to her baby sister but was never friendly. Their relationship never went past quick remarks to lighten the air. Its simplicity and shallowness were what Clarice craved, or maybe it was all that remained of what she rejected. Hale always wanted more, but she felt a spark of pride and confidence in the quick-witted way her eldest sister would talk to her.

The sisters, all three, shared resemblances: earthy brown hair, luminescent freckled skin, bridged noses, and constant open expressions. The main difference between the three was the color of their eyes, both Anastasia and Clairce held blueish-grey irises' while Hale's eyes had the wetness of a deep forest. Hale always believed it was the blue in their eyes that created intimacy in them; they found solitude swimming in each other's indistinguishability.

Their heights were also almost the same, with Hale being just a head under with no prospects of growing to reach them. Clarice and Anastasia on paper or photographs were identical, despite how close Hale got, she was still the odd one out.

And she was reminded of it constantly.

“Are you home tonight?” Hale asked her sister as she looked back into her book, an attempt to sound casual and indifferent so as to not spook her away as if Clarice were a fox in the wild.

“Not tonight,” is all she had to say in response. There were many things Clarice could be doing tonight: a date, going out with friends or Anastasia, or simply staying inside her room. Clarice spent very little time in her room as well, but even less in the rest of the house.

Clarice went off to her room, taking everything in her pile of accessories, everything except her teal roller skate.

It wasn't until later, when Hale's stomach started to bark at her, that she was taken out of her notes long enough to comprehend the sounds down the hall. Clarice's bedroom was on the bottom floor, the room closest to the front door. She heard giggles and hushed voices like an inappropriate joke had just been made—some innuendo.

She glazed around the corner just in time to see the twins making their way out the door. Anastasia, in a long skirt and loose curls, waves at Hale but doesn't say anything before they are out. She wonders whether or not she'll be invited in a few years when she's old enough to drink alongside them. She wonders if there's an age she can be when Clarice sees her more as a sister and not the threatening burden and if there will be a day when Anastasia will see her more as a sister and not feel the distance of parental obligation.

Alone with only the remains of twigs above her head, Hale peers at her phone. Checking the time in between her procrastination to read again. 6:06 p.m. was the last number her phone screen showed before she decided to call her dad.

He surprised her when he answered on the second ring.

“This is Tantalus Hale.” His voice the implication of busy and professional, not rushed but not fully attentive. It made her nervous to speak, she even thought about hanging up immediately.

But Hale was one of those people who, once she got her mind on something, it was impossible to pull the thought away. Distractions and reading were only a sheer veil of what she truly desired. The panicked daughter knew deep down that if she hung up before announcing herself, codependence would drag her back. She suddenly became irate that she had called in the first place, angry at him before the conversation even began. She would be able to do nothing else; she would not be able to distract herself from returning to the pending disappointment. Her fingers would be forced to travel the park of her contact list and call once again. The repeated disturbance would only aggravate him further. *Always the hard worker*, Hale thought to herself with an eye roll before talking, immediately losing the defiance in her thoughts, “Hey... sorry, it’s me... Belle.” She hated using that name; it felt foreign and indifferent to her, but it felt wrong to use the same name her father had already claimed—no matter how badly she wanted to.

“What’s up, kiddo?” It was the only nickname she was awarded; kiddo, unlike other words she was granted, was sincere. It was like a shrine hanging onto the walls inside his mouth, clutched and attached to his uvula. The dust collecting on the corners of the letters mixes with the salivating hunger, turning the reminiscence into thick, choking mud.

“Sorry, I was just wondering if you wanted me to cook dinner tonight? Clarice and Anna went out so I could go to the store and pick something for the two of us. I was thinking spaghetti?” It was silent for a few minutes, only the faint sound of typing could be heard over the slowing beat of her heart. Every now and then, Tantalus Hale would lightly say a “hold on,” “just give me a minute,” or simply sigh. Hale was about to continue with an explanation or just hang up, but the typing suddenly stopped. Her father spoke on the other end, “Let’s see; it is about 6:10 I should be back by 8. Spaghetti sounds nice.” And with that anti-climatic end, he hung up, but Hale felt accomplished, surprised, and ecstatic to cook for him.

Lately, all she's eaten were the quick meals left in the freezer or the overly processed lunch meat on white bread. There became less and less of a point to really make something when no one was around to enjoy it with her.

As Hale got changed into a blue dress, thinking of all the different sauce recipes she could do, she realized how much she had missed cooking. Even more so, as she started out the door on her own little adventure, she realized how hungry she had been.