



THERE ONCE WAS A GIRL, A FIRE HORSE GIRL.

IN CHINESE ASTROLOGY, the Year of the Fire Horse is a bad year for Horses. All of their worst traits — their tempers, their stubbornness, their selfishness — burn with increased strength. Girls should *never* be born in the year of the Fire Horse; they are especially dangerous, bringing tragedy to their families.

But desperation flowed fast and thick through my mother's veins. Children did not come easily to her. After four born only to be buried, she ignored the warnings of the zodiac and bore a Fire Horse girl, who was too stubborn to die like the others.

Bringing forth something as vicious and powerful as a Fire Horse destroyed my mother. Her last breath mingled with my first. Stories are like that too — deep breaths, one ending so another can begin. One sacrificed so another can survive. We often dwell on the endings of stories, forgetting how they were born, but you must inhale to exhale.

Storytellers know this, for they choose their first words with care. If I began this story with the words “Out of the mist of time comes the story of Jade Moon, the Fire Horse girl,” you would

expect it to throb with adventure and end with heroics. If I began it with “It is said” or “There is an old saying,” you would search the story for wisdom. But this is not a story of heroics or wisdom; it is my story.

There once was a girl, a Fire Horse girl.