THE ARCHIVED

THE ARCHIVED

VICTORIA SCHWAB

HYPERION
New York

Copyright © 2013 by Victoria Schwab

All rights reserved. Published by Hyperion, an imprint of Disney Book Group.
No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the publisher. For information address Hyperion, 114 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10011-5690.

First Edition
1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2
V567-9638-5-12320

Printed in the United States of America

This book is set in Perpetua and Stone Informal.

Designed by Tyler Nevins

ISBN 978-1-4231-5731-1

Quotations on pages 121, 122, and 123 from: *Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise*
by Dante Alighieri. Translated by the Reverend Henry Francis Cary (1888)

Reinforced binding

Visit www.un-requiredreading.com

To Bob Ledbetter, whose History I'd love to read.

And to Shelley McBurney, who leaves a mark
on everything she touches, and everyone she meets.

Do not stand at my grave and weep

I am not there; I do not sleep.

—Mary Elizabeth Frye

The narrows remind me of August nights in the South.

They remind me of old rocks and places where the light can't reach.

They remind me of smoke—the stale, settled kind—and of storms and damp earth.

Most of all, Da, they remind me of you.

I step into the corridor and breathe in the heavy air, and I am nine again, and it is summer.

My little brother, Ben, is sprawled inside by the fan, drawing monsters in blue pencil, and I am on the back porch looking up at the stars, all of them haloed by the humid night. You're standing beside me with a cigarette and an accent full of smoke, twirling your battered ring and telling stories about the Archive and the Narrows and the Outer in calm words, with your Louisiana lilt, like we're talking weather, breakfast, nothing.

You unbutton your cuffs and roll your sleeves up to the elbows as you speak, and I notice for the first time how many scars you have. From the three lines carved into your forearm to the dozens of other marks, they cut crude patterns in your skin, like cracks in old leather. I try to remember the last time you wore short sleeves. I can't.

That old, rusted key hangs from its cord around your neck the way it always does, and somehow it catches the light, even though the night is pitch-black. You fidget with a slip

of paper, roll it and unroll it, eyes scanning the surface as if something should be written there, but it's blank, so you roll it again until it's the size and shape of a cigarette, and tuck it behind your ear. You start drawing lines in the dust on the porch rail as you talk. You could never sit still.

Ben comes to the porch door and asks a question, and I wish I could remember the words. I wish I could remember the sound of his voice. But I can't. I do remember you laughing and running your fingers through the three lines you'd drawn in the dust on the railing, ruining the pattern. Ben wanders back inside and you tell me to close my eyes. You hand me something heavy and smooth, and tell me to listen, to find the thread of memory, to take hold and tell you what I see, but I don't see anything. You tell me to try harder, to focus, to reach inside, but I can't.

Next summer it will be different, and I will hear the hum and I will reach inside and I will see something, and you will be proud and sad and tired at the same time, and the summer after that you will get me a ring just like yours, but newer, and the summer after that you'll be dead and I'll have your key as well as your secrets.

But this summer is simple.

This summer I am nine and you are alive and there is still time. This summer when I tell you I can't see anything, you just shrug and light another cigarette, and go back to telling stories.

Stories about twisting halls, and invisible doors, and places where the dead are kept like books on shelves. Each time you finish a story, you make me tell it back to you, as if you're afraid I will forget.

I never do.

ONE

There is nothing fresh about this start.

I lean back against the car and stare up at the Coronado, the hotel-turned-apartment building that my mother and father þnd òso charming." It stares back, wide-eyed, gaunt. I spent the whole drive twisting the ring on my þnger, running my thumb over the three lines etched into its surface as if the silver band were a rosary or a charm. I prayed for some place simple, uncluttered, and new. And I got this.

I can see the dust from across the street.

òIsnõt it divine?ó squeals my mother.

òItõs . . . old.ó

So old that the stones have settled, the cracks deepening enough to give the whole facade a tired look. A þst-size piece of stone loosens before my eyes and tumbles down the side of the building.

I look up to þnd a roof dotted with gargoyles. Not at the corners, where you'd expect gargoyles to be, but perching at random intervals like a line of crows. My eyes slide over rippling windows and down six ÿoors to the carved and cracking stone marquee that tops the lobby.

Mom hurries forward, but stops halfway across the road to marvel at the òantiquatedó paving stones that give the road so much òcharacter.ó

òHoney,ó calls Dad, following. òDonõt stand in the street.ó

There should be four of us. Mom, Dad, Ben, me. But there's not. Da's been dead for four years, but it hasn't even been a year since

Ben died. A year of words no one can say because they call up images no one can bear. The silliest things shatter you. A T-shirt discovered behind the washing machine. A toy that rolled under a cabinet in the garage, forgotten until someone drops something and goes to fetch it, and suddenly theyõre on the concrete ÿoor sobbing into a dusty baseball mitt.

But after a year of tiptoeing through our lives, trying not to set off memories like land mines, my parents decide to quit, but call it change. Call it a fresh start. Call it just what this family needs.

I call it running.

òYou coming, Mackenzie?ó

I follow my parents across the street. Below the marquee is a revolving door, ÿanked by two regular ones. A few people ñ mostly older—lounge around the doors, or on a patio to the side.

Before Ben died, Mom had whims. She wanted to be a zookeeper, a lawyer, a chef. But they were *whims*. After he died, they became something more. Instead of just dreaming, she started doing. With a force. Ask her about Ben and she pretends she didn't hear, but ask her about her newest pet project—whatever it happens to be—and she'll talk for hours, giving off enough energy to power the room. But Momõs energy is as þckle as it is bright. Sheõs started switching careers the way Ben switches—*switched*—favorite foods, one week cheese, the next applesauce . . . In the past year, Mom's gone through seven. I guess I should be thankful she didn't try to switch lives, too, while she was at it. Dad and I could have woken up one day and found only a note in her nearly illegible script. But she's still here.

Another stone crumbles off the side of the building.

Maybe this will keep her busy.

The deserted space on the þrst ÿoor of the Coronado, tucked behind the patio and below the awnings, is the future home of my

motherõs biggest whim ñ she prefers to call this one her òdream endeavor"—Bishop's Coffee Shop. And if you ask her, she'll tell you this is the only reason we're moving, that it has nothing to do with Ben (only she wouldn't say his name).

We step up to the revolving doors, and Dad's hand lands on my shoulder, þlling my head with a jumble of static and wavering bass. I cringe, and force myself not to pull away. The dead are silent, and objects, when they hold impressions, are quiet until you reach through them. But the touch of the living is loud. Living people haven't been compiled, organized—which means they're a jumble of memory and thought and emotion, all tangled up and held at bay only by the silver band on my þnger. The ring helps, but it canõt block the noise, just the images.

I try to picture a wall between Dad's hand and my shoulder, like Da taught me, a second barrier, but it doesn't work. The sound is still there, layered tones and statics, like radios tuned wrong, and after an appropriate number of seconds, I take a step forward, beyond his reach. Dad's hand falls away, and the quiet returns. I roll my shoulders.

òWhat do you think, Mac?ó he asks, and I look up at the hulking shape of the Coronado.

I think I'd rather shake my mother until a new idea falls out and leads us somewhere else.

But I know I can't say this, not to Dad. The skin beneath his eyes is nearly blue, and over the last year he's gone from slim to thin. Mom might be able to power a city, but Dad barely stays lit.

òI think . . .ó I say, managing a smile, ò. . . it will be an adventure.ó

I am ten, almost eleven, and I wear my house key around my neck just to be like you.

They tell me I have your gray eyes, and your hair—back when it was reddish brown instead of white—but I don't care about those things. Everyone has eyes and hair. I want the things most people don't notice. The ring and tbVclbhotS0Vcb tnd r bVclhbVoVchatVbhdt0cwhrtV

I don't know what it's for, not yet—a blinder, a silencer, a buffer against the world and its memories, against people and their cluttered thoughts—but I'm so excited I promise I will never take it off. And then the car hits a bump and I drop it under the seat. You laugh, but I make you pull off the freeway so I can get it back. I have to wear it on my thumb because it's too big. You tell me I'll grow into it.

We drag our suitcases through the revolving door and into the lobby. Mom chirps with glee, and I wince.

The sprawling foyer is like one of those photos where you have to figure out what's wrong. At first glance it glitters, marble and crown molding and gilt accents. But at second look the marble is coated in dust, the molding is cracked, and the gilt accents are actively shedding gold onto the carpet. Sunlight streams in through the windows, bright despite the aging glass, but the space smells like fabric kept too long behind curtains. This place was once, undeniably, spectacular. What happened?

Two people mill by a front window, seemingly oblivious to the haze of dust they're standing in.

Across the lobby a massive marble staircase leads to the second floor. The cream-colored stone would probably gleam if someone polished it long enough. Wallpaper wraps the sides of the staircase, and from across the room, I see a ripple in the fleur-de-lis pattern there. From here it almost looks like a crack. I doubt anyone would notice, not in a place like this, but I'm supposed to spot these things. I'm hauling my luggage toward the ripple when I hear my name and turn to see my parents vanishing around a corner. I hoist my bags and catch up.

I þnd them standing in front of a trio of elevators just off the lobby.

òFascinating,ó I echo. And eerie. Like a well-lit version of the Narrows.

We reach the apartment at the end and Dad unlocks the door—an ornate 3F nailed to its front—and throws it open. The apartment beyond has the same scuffed quality as everything else. Lived-in. This place has marks, but none of them are ours. In our old house, even when you took away the furniture, and packed up the *stuff*, there were all these marks. The dent in the wall where I threw that book, the stain on kitchen ceiling from Mom's failed blender experiment, the blue doodles in the corners of rooms where Ben drew. My chest tightens. Ben will never leave a mark on this place.

Mom *oohs* and *ahhs*, and Dad drifts quietly through the rooms, and I'm about to brave the threshold when I feel it.

The scratch of letters. A name being written on the slip of Archive paper in my pocket. I dig the page out—it's roughly the size of a receipt and strangely crisp—as the History's name scrawls itself in careful cursive.

Emma Claring. 7.

òMac,ó calls Dad, òyou coming?ó

I slide back a step into the hall.

òI left my bag in the car,ó I say. òIõll be right back.ó

Something ÿickers across Dadõs face, but heõs already nodding, already turning away. The door clicks shut and I sigh, and turn to face the hall.

I need to þnd this History.

To do that, I need to get to the Narrows.

And to do that, I need to þnd a door.

TWO

I'm eleven, and you are sitting across from me at the table, talking under the sound of dishes in the kitchen. Your clothes are starting to hang on you—shirts, pants, even your ring. I overheard Mom and Dad, and they said that you're dying—not the fast, stone-drop way, there and then gone, but still. I can't stop squinting at you, as if I might see the disease picking you clean, stealing you from me, bite by bite.

You're telling me about the Archive again, something about the way it changes and grows, but I am not really listening. I'm twirling the silver ring on my finger. I need it now. Fractured bits of memory and feeling are starting to get through whenever someone touches me. They're not jarring or violent yet, just kind of messy. I told you that and you told me it would get worse, and you looked sorry when you said it. You said it was genetic, the potential, but it doesn't manifest until the predecessor makes the choice. And you chose me. I hope you weren't sorry. I'm not sorry. I'm only sorry that as I get stronger, you seem to get weaker.

"Are you listening?" you ask, because it's obvious I'm not.

"I don't want you to die," I say, surprising us both, and the whole moment hardens, stops, as your eyes hold mine. And then you soften, and shift in your seat, and I think I can hear your bones moving.

“What are you afraid of, Kenzie?” you ask.

You said you passed the job to me and I can’t help but wonder if that’s why you’re getting worse now. Fading faster. “Losing you.”

“Nothing’s lost. Ever.”

I’m pretty sure you’re just trying to make me feel better, half expect you to say something like I’ll live on in your heart. But you would never say that.

“You think I tell you stories just to hear my own voice? I mean what I said. Nothing’s lost. That’s what the Archive’s for.”

Wood and stone and colored glass, and all throughout, a sense of peace . . .

“That’s where we go when we die? To the Archive?”

“You don’t, not exactly, but your History does.” And then, you start using your Pay Attention voice, the one that makes words stick to me and never let go. “You know what a History is?”

“It’s the past,” I say.

“No, Kenzie. That’s history with a little h. I mean History with a big H. A History is . . .” You pull out a cigarette, roll it between your fingers. “You might think of it as a ghost, but that’s not what it is, really. Histories are records.”

“Of what?”

“Of us. Of everyone. Imagine a file of your entire life, of every moment, every experience. All of it. Now, instead of a folder or a book, imagine the data is kept in a body.”

“What do they look like?”

“However they looked when they died. Well, before they died. No fatal wounds or bloated corpses. The Archive

wouldn't find that tasteful. And the body's just a shell for the life inside."

"Like a book cover?"

"Yes." You put the cigarette in your mouth, but know better than to light it in the house. "A cover tells you something about a book. A body tells you something about a History."

I bite my lip. "So . . . when you die, a copy of your life gets put in the Archive?"

"Exactly."

I frown.

"What is it, Kenzie?"

"If the Outer is where we live, and the Archive is where our Histories go, what are the Narrows for?"

You smile grimly. "The Narrows are a buffer between the two. Sometimes a History wakes up. Sometimes Histories get out, through the cracks in the Archive, and into those Narrows. And when that happens, it's the Keeper's job to send them back."

"What's a Keeper?"

"It's what I am," you say, pointing to the ring on your hand. "What you'll be," you add, pointing to my own ring.

I can't help but smile. You chose me. "I'm glad I get to be like you."

You squeeze my hand and make a sound somewhere between a cough and a laugh, and say, "Good thing. Because you haven't got a choice."

Doors to the Narrows are everywhere.

Most of them started out as *actual* doors, but the problem is that

buildings change—walls go down, walls go up—and these doors, once they're made, don't. What you end up with are cracks, the kind most people wouldn't even notice, slight disturbances where the two worlds—the Narrows and the Outer—run into each other. It's easy, when you know what you're looking for.

But even with good eyes, þnding a Narrows door can take a while. I had to search my old neighborhood for two days to þnd the nearest one, which turned out to be halfway down the alley behind the butcher shop.

I think of the ripple in the ÿeur-de-lis paper in the lobby, and smile to myself.

I head for the nearest stairwell—there are two sets, the south stairs at my end of the hall, and the north stairs at the far end, past the metal cages—when something makes me stop.

A tiny gap catches my eye, a vertical shadow on the dust-dull yellow wallpaper. I walk over to the spot and square myself to the wall, letting my eyes adjust to the crack that is most deþnitely there. The sense of victory fades a little. Two doors so close together? Maybe the crack in the lobby was just that—a crack.

This crack, however, is something more. It cuts down the wall between apartments 3D and 3C, in a stretch of space without any ghosted doors, a dingy patch interrupted only by a painting of the sea in an old white frame. I frown and slide the silver ring from my þnger and feel the shift, like a screen being removed. Now when I stare at the crack, I see it, right in the center of the seam. A keyhole.

The ring works like a blinder. It shields me—as much as it can—from the living, and blocks my ability to read the impressions they leave on things. But it also blinds me to the Narrows. I can't see the doors, let alone step through them.

I pull Da's key from around my neck, running a thumb over the teeth the way he used to. For luck. Da used to rub the key, cross himself, kiss his þngers and touch them to the wall ñ any number of things. He used to say he could use a little more luck.

I slide the key into the keyhole, and watch as the teeth vanish into the wall. First comes the whisper of metal against metal. Then the Narrows door surfaces, ÿoating like a body up through water until it presses against the yellow paper. Last, a single strand of crisp light draws itself around the frame, signaling the door is ready.

If someone came down the hall right now, they wouldn't see the door. But they would hear the click of the lock as I turned Da's rusted key, and then they would see me step straight through the yellow paper into nothing.

There's no sky in the Narrows, but it always feels like night, smells like night. Night in a city after rain. On top of that there's a breeze, faint but steady, carrying stale air through the halls. Like you're in an air shaft.

I knew what the Narrows looked like long before I saw them. I had this image in my head, drawn by Da year after year. Close your eyes and picture this: a dark alley, just wide enough for you to spread your arms and skim the rough stone walls on either side with your þngers. You look up and see . . . nothing, just the walls running up and up and up into black. The only light comes from the doors that line the walls, their outlines giving off a faint glow, their keyholes letting in beams of light that show like threads in the dusty air. It is enough light to see by, but not enough to see well.

Fear ÿoats up my throat, a primal thing, a physical twinge as I step through, close the door behind me, and hear the voices. Not true

voices, really, but murmurs and whispers and words stretched thin by distance. They could be halls, or whole territories, away. Sounds travel here in the Narrows, coil through the corridors, bounce off walls, þnd you from miles away, ghostlike and diffused. They can lead you astray.

The corridors stretch out like a web or a subway, branching, crossing, the walls interrupted only by those doors. City blocks' worth of doors mere feet apart, space compressed. Most of them are locked. All of them are marked.

Coded. Every Keeper has a system, a way to tell a good door from a bad one; I cannot count the number of X's and slashes and circles and dots scribbled against each door and then rubbed away. I pull a thin piece of chalk from my pocket—it's funny, the things you learn to keep on you at all times—and use it to draw a quick roman numeral I on the door I just came through, right above the keyhole (the doors here have no handles, can't even be tried without a key). The number is bright and white over the dozens of old, half-ruined marks.

I turn to consider the hall and the multitude of doors lining it. Most of them are locked—inactive, Da called them—doors that lead back into the Outer, to different rooms in different houses, disabled because they go places where no Keeper is currently stationed. But the Narrows is a buffer zone, a middle ground, studded with ways out. Some doors lead to and from the Archive. Others lead to Returns, which isn't its own world, but it might as well be. A place where even Keepers aren't allowed to go. And right now, with a History on my list, thatõs the door I need to þnd.

I test the door to the right of Door I, and to my surprise, it's unlocked, and opens onto the Coronado's lobby. So it wasn't just a ripple in the wallpaper after all. Good to know. An old woman

ambles past, oblivious to the portal, and I tug the door shut again and draw a II above the keyhole.

I take a step back to consider the numbered doors, set side by side: my ways out, and then continue down the hall, testing every lock. None of the other doors budge, and I mark each one with an X. There's this sound, a fraction louder than the others, a *thud thud thud* like mufÿed steps, but only a fool hunts down a History before þnding a place to send him, so I quicken my pace, rounding a corner and testing two more doors before one þnally gives.

The lock turns and the door opens, this time into a room made of light, blinding and edgeless. I draw back and quickly close the door, blinking away little white dots as I mark its surface with a circle and quickly shade it in. *Returns.* I turn to the next door over, and donõt even bother to test thþe lock before I draw a circle on its front, this one hollow. *The Archive.* The nice thing about the Archive doors is that theyõre always to the right of Returns, so if you can þnd one, you've found the other.

And now, itõs time to þnd Emma.

I ÿex my hands and bring my þngers to the wall, the silver ring safely in my pocket. Histories and humans alike have to touch a surface to leave an impression, which is why the ÿoors here are made of the same concrete as the walls. In fact, there aren't even seams where wall becomes ÿoor ñ itõs all one piece ñ which is why I can read the entire hallway with a touch. If Emma set a foot here, I'll see it.

The surface of the wall hums beneath my hands. I close my eyes and press down. Da used to say there was a thread in the wall, and you had to reach, reach right through the wall until you catch hold of that thread and not let go. The humming spreads up my þngers, numbing them as I focus. I squeeze my eyes shut harder and reach, and feel the thread tickling my palms. I catch hold, and my hands go numb. Behind

my eyes the darkness shifts, ÿickers, and then the Narrows take shape again, a smudged version of the present, distorted. I see myself standing here, touching the wall, and guide the memory away.

It plays like a skipping þlm reel, winding back from present to past, ÿickering on the insides of my eyelids. The name showed on my list an hour ago, when Emma Claring's escape was registered, so I shouldn't have to go back far. When I twist the memories back two hours and þnd no sign of her, I pull away from the wall and open my eyes. The past of the Narrows vanishes, replaced by an only slightly brighter but deþnitely clearer present. I head down the hall to the next branching corridor and try again: closing my eyes, reaching, catching hold, winding time forward and back, sweeping the last hour for signs of—

A History ÿickers in the frame, her small form winding down the hall to a corner just ahead, then turning left. I blink and let go of the wall, the Narrows sharpening as I follow, turn the corner, and þnd . . . a dead end. More accurately, a territory break, a plane of wall marked by a glowing keyhole. Keepers have access only to their own territories, so the speck of light serves as nothing more than a stop sign. But it does keep the Histories from getting too far away; and sitting on the ÿoor right in front of the break is a girl.

Emma Claring sits in the middle of the hall, her arms wrapped tightly around her knees. She's not wearing any shoes, only grass-stained shorts and a T-shirt; and she's so small that the corridor seems cavernous around her.

òWake up, wake up, wake up.ó

She rocks back and forth as she says it, the beat of her body against the wall making the *thud thud thud* I heard earlier. She squeezes her eyes shut, then opens them wide, panic edging into her voice when the Narrows don't disappear.

She's obviously slipping.

òWake up,ó the girl pleads again.

òEmma,ó I say, and she startles.

Two terriþed eyes swivel toward me in the dark. The pupils are spreading, the black chewing away the color around them. She whimpers, but doesn't recognize me yet. That's good. When Histories slip far enough, they start to see other people when they look at you. They see whoever it is they want or need or hate or love or remember, and it makes the confusion worse. Makes them fall faster into madness.

I take a slow step forward. She buries her face in her arms and continues whispering.

I kneel in front of her. òIõm here to help you,ó I say.

Emma Claring doesnõt look up. òWhy canõt I wake up?ó she whispers. Her voice hitches.

òSome dreams,ó I say, òare harder to shake.ó

Her rocking slows, and her head rolls side to side against her arms.

òBut do you know whatõs great about dreams?ó I mimic the tone my mother used to use with me, with Ben. Soothing, patient. òOnce you know you're in a dream, you can control it. You can change it. You can þnd a way out.ó

Emma looks up at me over her crossed arms, eyes shining and wide.

òDo you want me to show you how?ó I ask.

She nods.

òI want you to close your eyesó ñ she does ñ òand imagine a door." I look around at this stretch of hall, every door unmarked, and wish Iõd taken the time to þnd another Returns door nearby. òNow, on the door, I want you to imagine a white circle, þlled in.

There has to be something.
Something.
Anything.

"It's not a party trick, Kenzie," you snap.

I drop the bauble and it rolls across the table. You are teaching me how to read—things, not books—and I must have made a joke, given the act a dramatic flair.

"There's only one reason Keepers have the ability to read things," you say sternly. "It makes us better hunters. It helps us track down Histories."

"It's blank anyway," I mutter.

"Of course it is," you say, retrieving the trinket and turning it over between your fingers. "It's a paperweight. And you should have known the moment you touched it."

I could. It had the telltale hollow quiet. It didn't hum against my fingers. You hand me back my ring, and I slip it on.

"Not everything holds memories," you say. "Not every memory's worth holding. Flat surfaces—walls, tables, that kind of thing—they're like canvases, great at taking in images. The smaller the object, the harder it is for it to hold an impression. But," you add, holding up the paperweight so I can see the world distorted in the glass, "if there is a memory, you should be able to tell with a brush of your hand. That's all the time you'll have. If a History makes it into the Outer—"

"How would they do that?" I ask.

"Kill a Keeper? Steal a key? Both." You cough, a racking,

wet sound. "It's not easy." You cough again, and I want to do something to help; but the one time I offered you water you growled that water wouldn't fix a damn thing unless I meant to drown you with it. So now we pretend the cough isn't there, punctuating your lectures.

"But," you say, recovering, "if a History does get out, you have to track them down, and fast. Reading surfaces has to be second nature. This gift is not a game, Kenzie. It's not a magic trick. We read the past for one reason, and one alone. To hunt."

I know what my gift is for, but it doesn't stop me from sifting through every framed photo, every random slip of paper, every piece of sentimental junk Mom chose, hoping for even a whisper, a hint of a memory of Ben. And it doesn't matter anyway because they're all useless. By the time I get to the stupid art camp cup, I'm desperate. I pick it up, and my heart ÿutters when I feel the subtle hum against my þngertips, like a promise; but when I close my eyes ñ even when I reach—there's nothing but pattern and light, blurred beyond readability.

I want to pitch the cup as hard as I can against the wall, add another scratch. I'm actually about to throw it when a piece of black plastic catches my eye, and I realize I've missed something. I let the cup fall back to the bed, and retrieve a pair of battered glasses pinned beneath the trophy and the bear.

My heart skips. The glasses are black, thick-rimmed, and only frames, no lenses, and they're the only thing here that's *really* his. Ben used to put them on when he wanted to be taken seriously. He'd

make us call him Professor Bishop, even though that was Dad's name, and Dad never wore glasses. I try to picture Ben wearing them. Try to remember the exact color of his eyes behind the frames, the way he smiled just before he put them on.

And I can't.

My chest aches as I wrap my þngers around the silly black frames. And then, just as I'm about to set the glasses aside, I feel it, faint and far away and yet right there in my palm. A soft hum, like a bell trailing off. The tone is feather-light, but it's there, and I close my eyes, take a slow, steadying breath, and reach for the thread of memory. Itõs too thin and it keeps slipping through my þngers, but þnally I catch it. The dark shifts behind my eyes, and lightens into gray, and the gray twists from a ÿat shade into shapes, and from shapes into an image.

There's not even enough memory to make a full scene, only a kind of jagged picture, a few blurred frames, the details all smeared away. But it doesn't matter, because Ben is there—well, a Ben-like shape—standing in front of a Dad-like shape with the glasses perched on his nose and his chin thrust out as he looks up and tries not to smile because he thinks that only frowns are taken seriously, and there's just enough time for the smudged line of his mouth to waver and crack into a grin before the memory falters and dissolves back into gray and gray darkens to black.

My heart hammers in my ears as I clutch the glasses. I don't have to rewind, guide the memory back to the start, because there's only one sad set of images looping inside these plastic frames; and sure enough, a moment later the darkness wobbles into gray, and it starts again. I let the stilted memory of Ben loop þve times ñ each time hoping it will sharpen, hoping it will grow into a scene instead of a

few smudged moments ñ before I þnally force myself to let go, force myself to blink, and itõs gone and Iõm back in a box-þlled bedroom cradling my dead brother's glasses.

My hands are shaking, and I can't tell if it's from anger or sadness or fear. Fear that I'm losing him, bit by bit. Not just his face—that started to fade right away—but the marks he made on the world.

I set the glasses by my bed and return the rest of Ben's things to their box. I'm about to put my ring back on when a thought stops me. *Marks.* Our last house was new when we moved in. Every scuff was ours, every nick was ours, and all of them had stories.

Now, as I look around at a room þlled not only with boxes but plenty of its own marks, I want to know the stories behind them. Or rather, a part of me wants to know those stories. The other part of me thinks that's the worst idea in the world, but I don't listen to that part. Ignorance may be bliss, but only if it outweighs curiosity. *Curiosity is a gateway drug to sympathy,* echoes Da's warning voice in my head, and I know, I know; but there are no Histories here to feel sympathy *for*. Which is exactly why the Archive wouldn't approve. They don't approve of any form of recreational reading.

But it's *my* talent, and it's not like a little light goes off every time I use it. Besides, I've already broken the rule once tonight by reading Ben's things, so I might as well group my infractions. I clear a space on the ÿoor, which gives off a low thrum when my þngertips press against the boards. Here in the Outer, the ÿoors hold the best impressions.

I reach past the hum, and my hands begin to tingle. The numbness slides up my wrists as the line between the wall and my skin seems to dissolve. Behind my closed eyes, the room takes shape again, the same and yet different. For one thing, I see myself standing in it, just like I was a few moments ago, looking down at Ben's box.

The color's been bleached out, leaving a faded landscape of memory, and the whole picture is faint, like a print in sand, recent but already fading.

I get my footing in the moment before I begin to roll the memory backward.

It plays like a þlm in reverse.

Time spins away, and the room þlls up with shadows, there and gone and there and gone, so fast they overlap. Movers. Boxes disappear until the space is bare. In a matter of moments, the scene goes dark. Empty. But not ended. Vacant. I can feel the older memories beyond the dark. I rewind faster, searching for more people, more stories. Thereõs nothing, nothing, and then the memories ÿicker up again.

Broad surfaces hold on to every impression, but there are two kinds—those burned in by emotion and those worn in by repetition ñ and they register differently. The þrst is bold, bright, deþned. This room is full of the second kind ñ dull, long periods of habit worn into the surfaces, years pressed into a moment more like a photo than a þlm. Most of what I see are photos, faded snapshots: a dark wooden desk and a wall of books, a man walking like a pendulum back and forth between the two; a woman stretched on a couch; an older couple. The room ÿares into clarity during a þght but by the time the woman has slammed the door, the scene fades back into shadow, and then dark again.

A heavy, lasting dark.

And yet, I can feel something past it.

Something bright, vivid, promising.

The numbness spreads up my arms and through my chest as I press my hands ÿush against the ÿoorboards, reaching through the span of black until a dull ache forms behind my eyes and the darkness

þnally gives way to light and shape and memory. Iõve pushed too hard, rewound too far. The scenes skip back too fast, a blur, spiraling out of my control so that I have to drag time until it slows, lean into it until it shudders to a stop around me.

When it does, I'm kneeling in a room that is my room and isn't. I'm about to continue backward, when something stops me. On the ÿoor, a few feet in front of my hands, is a drop of something blackish, and a spray of broken glass. I look up.

At þrst glance, itõs a pretty room, old-fashioned, delicate, white furniture with painted ÿowers . . . but the covers on the bed are askew, the contents of the dresser shelf—books and baubles—are mostly toppled.

I search for a date, the way Da taught me—bread crumbs, bookmarks, in case I ever need to come back to this moment ñ and þnd a small calendar propped on the table, the word MARCH legible, but no year. I scan for other temporal markers: a blue dress, bright for the faded memory, draped over a small corner chair. A black book on the side table.

A sinking feeling spreads through me as I roll time forward, and a young man stumbles in. The same slick and blackish stuff is splashed across his shirt, painted up his arms to the elbows. It drips from his þngers, and even in the faded world of the memory, I know itõs blood.

I can tell by the way he looks down at his skin, as if he wants to crawl out of it.

He sways and collapses to his knees right beside me, and even though he can't touch me, even though I'm not here, I can't help but shufÿe back, careful to keep my hands on the ÿoor, as he wraps his stained arms around his shirt. He can't be much older than I am, late teens, dark hair slicked back, strands escaping into his eyes as

he rocks back and forth. His lips move as he rocks, but voices rarely stick to memories, and all I hear is a *hushushush* sound like static.

òMackenzie,ó calls my mother. The sound of her voice is distorted, vague and bent by the veil of memory.

The man stops rocking and gets to his feet. His hands return to his sides, and my gut twists. He's covered in blood, but it's not his. There are no cuts on his arms or his chest. One hand looks sliced up, but not enough to bleed this much.

So whose blood is it? And whose *room* is it? Thereõs that dress, and I doubt that the furniture, dappled with tiny ÿowers, belongs to him, but—

òMackenzie,ó my mother calls again, closer, followed by the sound of a doorknob turning. I curse, open my eyes and jerk my hands up from the ÿoor, the memory vanishing, replaced by a room full of boxes and a dull headache. I'm just getting to my feet when Mom comes barging in. Before I can get the silver band out of my pocket and around my þnger, she wraps me in a hug.

I gasp and suddenly it's not just noise but *cold cavernous cold hollowed out too bright be bright screaming into pillow until I can't breathe be bright smallest bedroom packing boxes with B crossed out it still shows couldn't save him should have been there should have* before I can even gasp and shove her tangled stream of consciousness out of my head. I try to force a wall between us, a shaky mental version of the ring's barrier. It is fragile as glass. Pushing back worsens the headache, but at least it blocks out my mother's cluttered thoughts.

I'm left feeling nauseous as I pull away from her hug and maneuver my ring back on to my þnger, and the last of the noise drops out.

òMackenzie. Iõm sorry,ó she says, and it takes a moment for me to orient myself in the present, to realize that she isn't apologizing for that hug, that she doesn't know *why* I hate being touched. To

remember that the boy I just saw covered in blood isn't here but years in the past, and that I'm safe and still furious with Mom for throwing away Ben's things. I want to stay furious, but the anger is dulling.

òItõs okay,ó I say. òI understand.ó Even though itõs not okay and I don't understand, and Mom should be able to see that. But she can't. She sighs softly and reaches out to tuck a stray lock of hair behind my ear, and I let her, doing my best not to tense reÿexively beneath her touch.

òDinnerõs ready,ó she says.

As if everything is normal. As if we're home, instead of in a cardboard fortress in an old hotel room in the city trying to hide from my brotherõs memories. òCome set the table?ó

Before I can ask if she even knows where the table is, she guides me into the living room, where she and Dad have somehow cleared a space between the boxes. They've erected our dining table and arranged þve cartons of Chinese food in a kind of bouquet in the center.

The table is the only piece of furniture assembled, which makes us look like we're dining on an island made of packing material. We eat off dishes dug out of a box with a surprisingly informative label: KITCHEN—FRAGILE. Mom coos about the Coronado, and Dad nods and offered canned monosyllables of support; and I stare down at my food and see blurred Ben-like shapes whenever I close my eyes, so I wage a staring contest with the vegetables.

After dinner I put Ben's box in the back of my closet along with two labeled DA. I packed those myself, offered to make space for them, mostly because I was worried Mom would þnally get rid of his things if I didnõt þnd room. I never thought sheõd get rid of Benõs.

I keep out the silly blue bear, which I set beside the bed, balancing Ben's black glasses on its button nose.

I try to unpack, but my eyes keep drifting back to the center of the room, to the ÿoor where the bloodstained boy collapsed. When I pushed the boxes aside, I could almost make out a few dark stains on the wood, and now itõs all I can see when I look at the ÿoor. But who knows if the stains were drops of his blood. Not *his* blood, I remember. *Someone's*. I want to read the memory again—well, part of me wants to; the other part isnõt so eager, at least not on my þrst night in a foreign room ñ but Mom keeps þnding excuses to come in, half the time not even knocking, and if I'm going to read this, I'd like to avoid another interruption when I do it. It'll have to wait until morning.

I dig up sheets and make my bed, squirming at the thought of sleeping in here with whatever happened, even though I know it was years and years and years ago. I tell myself it's silly to be scared, but I still can't sleep.

My mind swims between Ben's blurred shape and the bloodstained ÿoor, twisting the two memories until Ben is the one surrounded by broken glass, looking down at his red-drenched self, and I sit up. My eyes go to the window, expecting to see my yard, and just beyond it the brick side of Lyndsey's house, but I see a city, and in that moment I wish I were home. I wish I could lean out my window and see Lyndsey lounging on her roof, watching stars. Late at night was the only time she let herself be lazy, and I could tell she felt rebellious for stealing even a few minutes. I used to sneak home from the Narrows—three streets over and two up behind the butcher shop—and climb up beside her, and she never asked me where I'd been. She'd stare up at the stars and start talking, pick

up mid-sentence as if I'd been there with her the whole time. As if everything were perfectly normal.

Normal.

A confession: sometimes I dream of being normal. I dream about this girl who looks like me and talks like me, but isn't me. I know she's not, because she has this open smile and she laughs too easily, like Lynds. She doesn't have to wear a silver ring or a rusted key. She doesn't read the past or hunt the restless dead. I dream of her doing mundane things. She sifts through a locker in a crowded school. She lounges poolside, surrounded by girls who swim and talk to her while she ÿips through silly magazines. She sits engulfed in pillows and watches a movie, a friend tossing up pieces of popcorn for her to catch in her mouth. She misses almost every time.

She throws a party.

She goes to a dance.

She kisses a boy.

And she's so . . . happy.

M. That's what I call her, this normal, nonexistent me.

It's not that I've never done those things, kissed or danced or just hung out. I have. But it was put-on, a character, a lie. I am so good at it—lying—but I can't lie to myself. I can pretend to be M; I can wear her like a mask. But I can't *be* her. I'll never be her.

M wouldn't see blood-covered boys in her bedroom.

M wouldn't spend her time scouring her dead brother's toys for a glimpse of his life.

The truth is, I know why Ben's favorite shirt wasn't in the box, or his mile patch, or most of his pencils. He had those things with him the day he died. Had the shirt on his back and the patch in his pocket and the pencils in his bag, just like any normal day. Because it was a

normal day, right up until the point a car ran a red light two blocks from Ben's school just as he was stepping from the curb.

And then drove away.

What do you do when there *is* someone to blame, but you know you'll never find them? How do you close the case the way the cops do? How do you move on?

Apparently you don't move on, you just move away.

I just want to see him. Not a Ben-like shape, but the real thing. Just for a moment. A glimpse. The more I miss him, the more he seems to fade. He feels so far away, and holding on to empty tokens—or half-ruined ones—won't make him any closer. But I know what will.

I'm up, on my feet and swapping pajamas for black pants and a long-sleeved T-shirt, donning my usual uniform. My Archive paper sits on the side table, unfolded and blank. I pocket it. I don't care if there are no names. I'm not going to the Narrows. I'm going through them.

To the Archive.

FOUR

Beyond the bedroom, the apartment is still, but as I slip into the hall I see a faint line of light along the bottom of my parents' door, and hold my breath. Hopefully Dad just fell asleep with his reading light on. The house key hangs like a prize on a hook by the front door. These ÿoors are so much older than the ones in our last house that with every step I half expect to be exposed, but I somehow make it to the key without a creak and slide it from the hook. All that's left is the door. The trick is to let go of the handle by degrees. I get through, ease 3F shut, and turn to face the third ÿoor hall.

And stop.

I'm not alone.

Halfway down the corridor a boy my age is leaning against the faded wallpaper, right beside the painting of the sea. He's staring up at the ceiling, or past it, the thin black wire from his headphones tracing a line over his jaw, down his throat. I can hear the whisper of music from here. I take a soundless step, but still he rolls his head, lazily, to look at me. And he smiles. Smiles like he's caught me cheating, caught me sneaking out.

Which, in all fairness, he has.

His smile reminds me of the paintings here. I don't think any of them are hung straight. One side of his mouth tilts up like that, like it's not set level. He has several inches of spiked black hair, and I'm pretty sure he's wearing eyeliner.

He closes his eyes and leans his head back against the wall as if to say *I never saw you.* But that smile stays, and his conspiratorial silence doesn't change the fact that he's standing between me and my brother, his back against the wall where the Narrows door should be, the keyhole roughly in the triangle of space between the crook of his arm and his shirt.

And for the þrst time Iõm thankful the Coronado is so old, because I need that second door. I do my best to play the part of a normal girl sneaking out. The pants and long sleeves in the middle of summer complicate the image, but there's nothing to be done about that now and I keep my chin up as I wander down the hall towards the north stairs (turning back toward the south ones would only be suspicious).

The boy's eyes stay closed, but his smile quirks as I pass by. Odd, I think, vanishing into the stairwell. The stairs run from the top ÿoor down to the second, where they spill me out onto the landing of the grand staircase, which forms a cascade into the lobby. A ribbon of burgundy fabric runs over the marble steps like a tongue, and when I make my way down, the carpet emits small plumes of dust.

Most of the lights have been turned off, and in the strange semi-darkness, the sprawling room at the base of the stairs is draped in shadows. A sign on the far wall whispers *CAFÉ* in faded cursive. I frown and turn my attention back to the side of the staircase where I þrst saw the crack. Now the papered wall is hidden in the heavy dark between two lights. I step into the darkness with it, running my þngers over the ÿeur-de-lis pattern until I þnd it. The ripple. I pocket my ring and pull Da's key from around my neck, using my other hand to trace down the crack until I feel the groove of the keyhole. I slot the key, and turn, and a moment after the metallic click, a thread of light traces the outline of the door against the stairs.

The Narrows sigh around me as I enter, humid breath and words so far away they've bled to sounds and then to hardly anything. I start down the hall, key in hand, until I þnd the doors I marked before, the þlled white circle that designates Returns, and to its right, the hollow one that leads to the Archive.

I pause, straighten, and step through.

The day I become a Keeper, you hold my hand.

You never hold my hand. You avoid touch the way I'm quickly learning to, but the day you take me to the Archive, you wrap your weathered fingers around mine as you lead me through the door. We're not wearing our rings, and I expect to feel it, the tangle of memories and thoughts and emotions coming through your skin, but I feel nothing but your grip. I wonder if it's because you're dying, or because you're so good at blocking the world out, a concept I can't seem to learn. Whatever the reason, I feel nothing but your grip, and I'm thankful for it.

We step into a front room, a large, circular space made of dark wood and pale stone. An antechamber, you call it. There is no visible source of light, and yet the space is brightly lit. The door we came through appears larger on this side than it did in the Narrows, and older, worn.

There is a stone lintel above the Archive door that reads SERVAMUS MEMORIAM**. A phrase I do not know yet. Three vertical lines, the mark of the Archive, separate the words, and a set of Roman numerals runs beneath. Across the room a woman sits behind a large desk, writing briskly in a ledger, a** QUIET PLEASE **sign propped at the edge of her table. She sees us, and**

sets her pen down fast enough to suggest that we're expected.

My hands are shaking, but you tighten your grip.

"You're gold, Kenzie," you whisper as the woman gestures over her shoulder with her pen at a massive pair of doors behind her, flung open and back like wings. Through them I can see the heart of the Archive, the atrium, a massive room marked by rows and rows and rows of shelves. The woman does not stand, does not go with us, but watches us pass with a nod and a whispered, cordial "Antony."

You lead me through.

There are no windows because there is no outside, and yet above the shelves there is a vaulted ceiling of glass and light. The place is vast, and made of wood and marble, long tables running down the center like a double spine, with shelves branching off to both sides like ribs. The partitions make the cavernous space seem smaller, cozier. Or at least fathomable.

The Archive is everything you told me it would be: a patchwork . . . wood and stone and colored glass . . . all throughout, a sense of peace . . .

But you left something out.

It is beautiful.

So beautiful that, for a moment, I forget the walls are filled with bodies. That the stacks and the cabinets that compose the walls, while lovely, hold Histories. On each drawer, an ornate brass cardholder displays a placard with a neatly printed name, a set of dates. It's so easy to forget this.

"Amazing," I say, too loud. The words echo, and I wince, remembering the sign on the Librarian's desk.

"It is," replies a new voice, softly, and I turn to find a man perched on the edge of a table, hands in his pockets. He's an

odd sight, built like a stick figure, with a young face but old gray eyes and dark hair that sweeps across his forehead. His clothes are normal enough—a sweater and slacks—but his dark pants run right into a pair of bright red Chucks, which makes me smile. And yet, there's a sharpness to his eyes, a coiled aspect to his stance. Even if I passed him on the street instead of here in the Archive, I'd know right away that he was a Librarian.

"Roland," you say with a nod.

"Antony," he replies, sliding off from the table. "Is this your choice?"

The Librarian is talking about me. Your hand slides from mine, and you take a step back, presenting me to him. "She is."

Roland arches a brow. But then he smiles. It's a playful smile, a warm one.

"This should be fun," he says. He gestures to the first of the ten wings branching off the atrium. "If you'll follow me . . ." And with that, he walks away. You walk away. I pause. I want to linger here. Soak up the strange sense of quiet. But I cannot stay.

I am not a Keeper yet.

There is a moment, as I pass into the circular antechamber of the Archive and my eyes settle on the Librarian seated behind the desk—a man I've never seen before—when I feel lost. A strange fear takes hold, simple and deep, that my family moved too far away, that I've crossed some invisible boundary and stepped into another branch of the Archive. Roland assured me it wouldn't happen, that

each branch is responsible for hundreds of miles of city, suburb, country, but still the panic washes through me.

I look over my shoulder at the lintel above the door, the familiar SERVAMUS MEMORIAM—according to two semesters of Latin (my fatherõs idea), it means òWe Protect the Pastó ñ etched there. Roman numerals run beneath the inscription, so small and so many that they seem more like a pattern than a number. I asked once, and was told that that was the branch number. I still cannot read it, but I've memorized the pattern, and it hasn't changed. My muscles begin to uncoil.

òMiss Bishop.ó

The voice is calm, quiet, and familiar. I turn back toward the desk to see Roland coming through the set of doors behind it, tall and slim as ever—he hasn't aged a day—with his gray eyes and his easy grin and his red Chucks. A breath of relief escapes.

òYou can go now, Elliot,ó he says to the man seated behind the desk, who stands with a nod and vanishes back through the doors.

Roland takes a seat and kicks his shoes up onto the desk. He digs in the drawers and comes up with a magazine. Last month's issue of some lifestyle guide I brought him. Mom subscribed to them for a while, and Roland insists on staying as much in the loop as possible when it comes to the Outer. I know for a fact he spends most of his time skimming new Histories, watching the world through their lives. I wonder if boredom prompts him to it, or if it's more. Roland's gray eyes are tinged with something between pain and longing.

He misses it, I think; the Outer. He's not supposed to. Librarians commit to the Archive in every way, leaving the Outer behind for their term, however long they choose to stay, and he's told me himself that being promoted is an honor, to have all that time and knowledge at your þngertips, to protect the past ñ SERVAMUS MEMORIAM and

all—but if he misses sunrises, or oceans, or fresh air, who can blame him? Itõs a lot to give up for a fancy title, a suspended life cycle, and an endless supply of reading material.

He holds the magazine toward me. òYou look pale.ó

òKeep it,ó I say, still a little shaken. òAnd Iõm þne. . . .ó Roland knows how scared I am of losing this branch—some days I think the constancy of coming here is all that's keeping me sane—but itõs a weakness, and I know it. òJust thought for a moment Iõd gone too far."

òAh, you mean Elliot? Heõs on loan,ó says Roland, digging a small tabletop radio from a desk drawer and setting it beside the QUIET PLEASE sign. Classical music whispers out, and I wonder if he plays it just to annoy Lisa, who takes the signs as literally a possible. òA transfer. Wanted a change of scenery. So, what brings you to the Archive tonight?ó

I want to see Ben. I want to talk to him. I need to be closer. I'm losing my mind.

òCouldnõt sleep,ó I say with a shrug.

òYou found your way here fast enough.ó

òMy new place has *two* doors. Right in the building."

òOnly two?ó he teases. òSo, are you settling in?ó

I trace my þngers over the ancient ledger that sits on the table. òItõs got . . . character.ó

òCome now, the Coronadoõs not so bad.ó

It's old. And it creeps me out. And something horrible happened in my bedroom. These are weak thoughts. I do not share them.

òMiss Bishop?ó he prompts.

I hate the formality when it comes from the other Librarians, but for some reason I don't mind it from Roland. Perhaps because he seems on the verge of winking when he says it. Despite his Chucks

and his questionable taste in reading material, there is something old-world about him. I sometimes wonder how many years ago Roland was promoted to his post. The lilt in his voice gets stronger when he's tired, but it's still unplaceable.

òNo, itõs not so bad,ó I say at last with a smile. òJust old.ó

òNothing wrong with old.ó

òYouõd know,ó I say back. Itõs a running line. Roland refuses to tell me how long he's been here. He can't be that old, or at least he doesn't look it—one of the perks is that, as long as they serve, they don't age—but whenever I ask him about his life *before* the Archive, his years hunting Histories, he twists the topic, or glides right over it. As for his years as Librarian, he's equally vague. I've heard Librarians work for ten or þfteen years before retiring ñ just because the age doesn't show doesn't mean they don't feel older—but with Roland, I can't tell. I remember his mentioning a Moscow branch and once, absently, Scotland.

The music ÿoats around us.

He returns his shoes to the ÿoor and begins to straighten up the desk. òWhat else can I do for you?ó

Ben. I can't dance around it, and I can't lie. I need his help. Only Librarians can navigate the stacks. òActually . . . I was hoping ñ ó

òDonõt ask me for that.ó

òYou donõt even know what I was going to ñ ó

òThe pause and the guilty look give you away.ó

òBut I ñ ó

òMackenzie.ó

The use of my þrst name makes me ÿinch.

òRoland. Please.ó

His eyes settle on mine, but he says nothing.

òI canõt þnd it on my own,ó I press, trying to keep my voice level.

òYou shouldnõt þnd it at all.ó

òI havenõt asked you in weeks,ó I say. *Because I've been asking Lisa instead.*

Another long moment, and then, þnally, Roland closes his eyes in a slow, surrendering blink. His þngers drift to a small notepad, the same size and shape as my Archive paper, and he scribbles something on it. Half a minute later, Elliot appears again, his own pad of paper at his side. He gives Roland a questioning look.

òSorry to call you back,ó says Roland. òI wonõt be gone long.ó

Elliot nods and silently takes a seat. The front desk is never left unattended. I follow Roland through the doors and into the atrium. It's dotted with Librarians, and I recognize Lisa across the way, her black bob disappearing down a side hall toward older stacks. But otherwise I do not look up at the arching ceiling and its colored glass, do not marvel at the quiet beauty, do not linger in case any pause in my step makes Roland change his mind. I focus on the stacks as he leads me to Ben.

I've tried to memorize the route—to remember which of the ten wings we go down, to note which set of stairs we take, to count the lefts and rights we make down the halls—but I can never hold the pattern in my head, and even when I think I have, it doesn't work out the next time. I don't know if it's me, or if the route changes. Maybe they reorder the shelves. I think of how I used to arrange movies: one day best to worst, the next by color, the next title . . . Everyone in these stacks died in the branch's jurisdiction, but beyond that, there doesnõt seem to be a consistent method of þling. In the end, only Librarians can navigate these stacks.

Today Roland leads me through the atrium, then down the sixth wing, through several smaller corridors, across a courtyard, and up a short set of wooden steps before þnally coming to a stop in a spacious

reading room. A red rug covers most of the ÿoor, and chairs are tucked into corners; but it is, for the most part, a grid of drawers.

Each drawerõs face is roughly the size of a cofþnõs end.

Roland approaches a wall of drawers and brings his hand gently against one. Above his þngers I can see the white placard in its copper holder. Below the copper holder is a keyhole.

And then Roland turns away.

òThank you,ó I whisper as he passes.

òYour key wonõt work,ó he says.

òI know.ó

òItõs not him,ó he adds softly. òNot really.ó

òI know,ó I say, already stepping up to shelves. My þngers hover over the name.

BISHOP, BENJAMIN GEORGE

2003–2013

FIVE

I trace my fingers over the dates and it is last year again and I'm sitting in one of those hospital chairs that look like they might actually be comfortable but they're not because there's nothing comfortable about hospitals. Da has been gone three years. I am þfteen now, and Ben is ten, and heõs dead.

The cops are talking to Dad and the doctor is telling Mom that Ben died on impact and that word—*impact*—makes me turn and wretch into one of the hospital's gray bins.

The doctor tries to say there wasn't time to feel it, but that's not true. Mom feels it. Dad feels it. I feel it. I feel like my skeleton is being ripped through my skin, and I wrap my arms around my ribs to hold it in. I walked with him, all the way to the corner of Lincoln and Smith like always, and he drew a stick-þgure Ben on my hand like always and I drew a stick-þgure Mac on his like always and then he told me it didn't even look like a human being and I told him it wasn't and he told me I was weird and I told him he was late for school.

I can see the black scribble on the back of his hand through the white sheet. The sheet doesn't rise and fall, not one small bit, and I can't take my eyes off it as Mom and Dad and the doctors talk and there is crying and words and I have neither because I'm focusing on the fact that I will see him again. I twist my ring, a spot of silver above black þngerless knit gloves that run to my elbows because I cannot cannot cannot look at the stick-þgure Ben on the back of my

hand. I twist the ring and run my thumb over the grooves and tell myself that it's okay. It's not okay, of course.

Ben is ten and he's dead. But he's not gone. Not for me.

Hours later, after we get home from the hospital, three weak instead of four strong, I climb out my window and run down dark streets to the Narrows door in the alley behind the butcher's.

Lisa is on duty at the desk in the Archive, and I ask her to take me to Ben. When she tries to tell me that it's not possible, I order her to show me the way; and when she still says no, I take off running. I run for hours through the corridors and rooms and courtyards of the Archive, even though I have no idea where I'm going. I run as if I'll just know where Ben is the way the Librarians know where things are, but I don't. I run past stacks and columns and rows and walls of names and dates in small black ink.

I run forever.

I run until Roland grabs my arm and shoves me into a side room, and there on the far wall halfway up, I see his name. Roland lets go of me long enough to turn and close the door, and that's when I see the keyhole beneath Ben's dates. It's not even the same size or shape as my key, but I still rip the cord from my throat and force the key in. It doesn't turn. Of course it doesn't turn. I try again, and again.

I bang on the cabinet to wake my brother up, the metallic sound shattering the precious quiet, and then Roland is there, pulling me away, pinning my arms back against my body with one hand, mufÿing my shouts with the other.

I have not cried at all, not once.

Now I sink down on the ÿoor in front of Benõs cabinet, Rolandõs arms still wrapped around me, and sob.

Å Å Å

I sit on the red rug with my back against Ben's shelf, tugging my sleeves over my hands as I tell my brother about the new apartment, about Mom's latest project and Dad's new job at the university. Sometimes when I run out of things to tell Ben, I recite the stories Da told me. This is how I pass the night, time blurring at the edges.

Sometime later, I feel the familiar scratch against my thigh, and dig the list from my pocket. The careful cursive announces:

Thomas Rowell. 12.

I pocket the list and lean back against the shelves. A few minutes later, I hear the soft tread of footsteps and look up.

òShouldnõt you be at the desk?ó I ask.

òPatrickõs shift now,ó says Roland, nudging me with a red Chuck. òYou canõt stay here forever.ó He slides down the wall beside me. òGo do your job. Find that History."

òItõs my second one today.ó

òItõs an old building, the Coronado. You know what that means.ó

òI know, I know. More Histories. Lucky me.ó

òYouõll never make Crew talking to a shelf.ó

Crew. The next step above Keeper. Crew hunt in pairs, tracking down and returning the Keeper-Killers, the Histories who manage to get out, through the Narrows and into the real world. Some people stay Keepers their whole lives, but most shoot for Crew. The only thing higher than Crew is the Archive itself—the Librarian post—though it's hard to imagine why someone would give up the thrill of the chase, the game, the þght, to catalog the dead and watch lives through other people's eyes. Even harder to imagine that every Librarian was a þghter þrst; but somewhere under his sleeves, Roland bears marks of Crew just like Da did. Keepers have the marks, too,

the three lines, but carved into our rings. Crew marks are carved into skin.

òWho says I want to make Crew?ó I challenge, but thereõs not much þght behind it.

Da worked Crew, until Ben was born. And then he went back to

òOf course not,ó says Roland in his ofþcial Librarian tone before sliding back into his usual warmth. òBut you canõt see Ben, either, and it never stops you from trying."

I close my eyes, searching for the right words. òDa is etched so clearly in my memory, I don't think I could forget anything about him, even if I tried. But with Ben, it's only been a year and I'm already forgetting things. I keep forgetting things, and it terriþes me.ó

Roland nods, but doesn't answer, sympathetic but resolute. He can't help me. He *won't*. I've come to Ben's shelf two dozen times in the year since he died, and Roland's never given in and opened it. Never let me see my brother.

òWhere is Daõs shelf, anyway?ó I ask, changing the subject before the tightness in my chest grows worse.

òAll members of the Archive are kept in Special Collections.ó

òWhere is that?ó

He arches an eyebrow, but nothing more.

òWhy are they kept separately?ó

He shrugs. òI donõt make the rules, Miss Bishop.ó

He gets to his feet and offers me his hand. I hesitate.

òItõs okay, Mackenzie,ó he says, taking my hand, and I feel nothing. Librarians are pros at walling off thoughts, blocking out touch. Mom touches me and I can't keep her out, but Roland touches me and I feel blind, deaf, normal.

We start walking.

òWait,ó I say, turning back to Benõs shelf. Roland waits as I pull the key from around my neck and slip it into the hole beneath my brother's card. It doesn't turn. It never turns.

But I never stop trying.

Å Å Å

I'm not supposed to be here. I can see it their eyes.

And yet here I am, standing before a table in a large chamber off the atrium's second wing. The room is marble-floored and cold, and there are no bodies lining the walls, only ledgers, and the two people on the other side of the table speak a little louder, unafraid to wake the dead. Roland takes his seat beside them.

"Antony Bishop," says the man on the end. He has a beard, and small, sharp eyes that scan a paper on the table. "You are here to name your . . ." He looks up, and the words trail off. "Mr. Bishop, you do realize there is an age requirement. Your granddaughter is not eligible for another"—he consults a folder, coughs—"four years."

"She's up for the trial," you say.

"She'll never pass," says the woman.

"I'm stronger than I look," I say.

The first man sighs, rubs his beard. "What are you doing, Antony?"

"She is my only choice," answers Da.

"Nonsense. You can name Peter. Your son. And if, in time, Mackenzie is willing and able, she will be considered—"

"My son is not fit."

"Maybe you don't do him justice—"

"He's bright, but he's got no violence in him, and he wears his lies. He's not fit."

"Meredith, Allen," says Roland, steepling his fingers. "Let's give her the chance."

The bearded man, Allen, straightens. "Absolutely not."

My eyes flick to Da, craving a sign, a nod of encouragement, but he stares straight ahead.

“I can do it,” I say. “I’m not the only choice. I’m the best.”

Allen’s frown deepens. “I beg your pardon?”

“Go home, little girl,” says Meredith with a dismissive wave. You warned me they would resist. You spent weeks teaching me how to hold my ground.

I stand taller. “Not until I’ve had my trial.”

She makes a strangled sound of dismay, but Allen cuts in with, “You’re. not. eligible.”

“Make an exception.”

Roland’s mouth quirks up. It bolsters me.

“Give me a chance.”

“You think this is a sport? A club?” snaps Meredith, and then her eyes dart to you. “What could you possibly be thinking, bringing a child into this—”

“I think it’s a job,” I cut in, careful to keep my voice even. “And I’m ready for it. Maybe you think you’re protecting me, or maybe you think I’m not strong enough—but you’re wrong.”

“You are an unfit candidate. And that is the end of it.”

“It would be, Meredith,” says Roland calmly, “if you were the only person on this panel.”

“I really can’t condone this. . . .” says Allen.

I’m losing them, and I can’t let that happen. If I lose them, I lose you. “I think I’m ready, and you think I’m not. Let’s find out who’s right.”

“Your composure is impressive.” Roland stands up. “But you are aware that not all Histories can be won with words.” He rounds the table. “Some are troublesome.” He rolls up his sleeves. “Some are violent.”

The other two Librarians are still trying to get a word

in, but I don't hear them. My focus is on Roland. Da told me to be ready for anything, and it's a good thing he did, because between one moment and the next, Roland's posture shifts. It's subtle—his shoulders loosen, knees unlock, hands curl toward fists—but I see the change a fraction before he attacks. I dodge the first punch, but he's fast, faster even than Da, and before I can strike back a red Chuck connects with my chest, sending me to the floor. I roll back and over into a crouch, but by the time I look up, he's gone.

I hear him the instant before his arm wraps around my throat, and manage to get one hand between us so I don't choke. He pulls back and up, my feet leaving the ground, but the table is there and I get my foot on top and use it as leverage, pushing up and off, twisting free of his arm as I flip over

taking you from me. You've told me, made it clear, this is the only way I can keep you close. I will not lose that.

"I do," I answer evenly.

Roland straightens. "Then I approve the naming."

Meredith makes a stifled sound of dismay.

"She held composure against you, Meredith, and that is something," says Roland, and finally his smile breaks through. "And as for her fighting, I'm in the best position to judge, and I say she has merit." He looks past me then, to you. "You've raised quite a girl, Antony." He glances over at Allen. "What do you say?"

The bearded Librarian raps his fingers on the table, eyes unfocused.

"You can't actually be considering . . ." mutters Meredith.

"If we do this, and she proves herself unfit in any way," says Allen, "she will forfeit the position."

"And if she proves unfit," adds Meredith, "you, Roland, will remove her yourself."

Roland smiles at the challenge.

I step forward. "I understand," I say, as loud as I dare.

Allen stands slowly. "Then I approve the naming."

Meredith glowers for a moment before standing too. "I am overruled, and as such, I must approve the naming."

Only then does your hand come to rest against my shoulder. I can feel your pride in your fingertips. I smile.

I will show them all.

For you.

SIX

I yawn as roland leads me back through the Archive. I've been here for hours, and I can tell I'm running out of night. My bones ache from sitting on the ÿoor, but it was worth it for a little time with Ben.

Not Ben, I know. Ben's *shelf*.

I roll my shoulders, stiff from leaning so long against the stacks, as we wind back through the corridors and into the atrium. Several Librarians dot the space, busy with ledgers and notepads and even, here and there, open drawers. I wonder if they ever sleep. I look up at the arched stained glass, darker now, as if there were a night beyond. I take a deep breath, and am starting to feel better, calmer, when we reach the front desk.

A man with gray hair, black glasses, and a stern mouth behind a goatee is waiting for us. Roland's music has been shut off.

òPatrick,ó I say. Not my favorite Librarian. Heõs been here nearly as long as I have, and we rarely see eye to eye.

The moment he catches sight of me, his mouth turns down.

òMiss Bishop,ó he scolds. Heõs Southern, but heõs tried to obliterate his drawl by being curt, cutting his consonants sharp. òWe try to discourage such recurrent disobedience."

Roland rolls his eyes and claps Patrick on the shoulder.

òSheõs not doing any harm.ó

Patrick glares at Roland. òShe not doing any good, either. I should

report her to Agatha.ó His gaze swivels to me. òHear that? I should report you."

I don't know who this Agatha is, but I'm fairly certain I don't want to know.

òRestrictions exist for a reason, Miss Bishop. There are no visiting hours. Keepers do not attend to the Histories here. You are not to enter the stacks without *good* reason. Are we clear?ó

òOf course.ó

òDoes that mean you will cease this futile and rather tiresome pursuit?ó

òOf course not.ó

A cough of a laugh escapes from Roland, along with a wink. Patrick sighs and rubs his eyes, and I can't help but feel a bit victorious. But when he reaches for his notepad, my spirits sink. The last thing I need is a demerit on my record. Roland sees the gesture, too, and brings his hand down lightly on Patrick's arm.

òOn the topic of attending to Histories,ó he offers. òDonõt you have one to catch, Miss Bishop?ó

I know a way out when I see it.

òIndeed,ó I say, turning toward the door. I can hear the two men talking in low, tense voices, but I know better than to look back.

I þnd and return twelve-year-old Thomas Rowell, fresh enough out that he goes without many questions, let alone a þght. Truth be told, I think he is just happy to þnd someone in the dark halls, as opposed to some*thing*. I spend what's left of the night testing every door in my territory. By the time I þnish, the halls ñ and several spots on the ÿoor ñ are scribbled over with chalk, mostly Xs but here and there a circle. I work my way back to my two numbered doors, and discover

a third, across from them, that opens with my key.

Door I leads to the third ÿoor and the painting by the sea. Door II leads to the side of the stairs in the Coronado lobby.

But Door III? It opens only to black. To nothing. So why is it unlocked at all? Curiosity pulls me over the threshold, and I step through into the dark and close the door behind me. The space is quiet and cramped and smells of dust so thick, I taste it when I breathe in. I can reach out and touch walls to my left and right, and my þngers encounter a forest of wooden poles leaning against them. A closet?

As I slide my ring back on and resume my awkward groping in the dark, I feel the scratch of a new name on the list in my pocket. Again? Fatigue is starting to eat into my muscles, drag at my thoughts. The History will have to wait. When I step forward, my shin collides with something hard. I close my eyes to cut off the rising claustrophobia; þnally, my hands þnd the door a few feet in front of me. I sigh with relief and turn the metal handle sharply.

Locked.

I could go back into the Narrows through the door behind me and take a different route, but a question persists: Where *am* I? I listen closely, but no sound reaches me. Between the dust in this closet and the total lack of anything resembling noise from the opposite side, I think I must be somewhere abandoned.

Da always said there were two ways to get through any locked door: by key or by force. And I don't have a key, so . . . I lean back and lift my boot, resting the sole against the wood of the door. Then I slide my shoe left until it butts up against the metal frame of the handle. I withdraw my foot several times, testing to make sure I have a clear shot before I take a breath and kick.

Wood cracks loudly, and the door moves; but it takes a second

strike before it swings open, spilling several brooms and a cleaning bucket out onto a stone ÿoor. I step over the mess to survey the room and þnd a sea of sheets. Sheets covering counters and windows and sections of ÿoor, dirty stone peering out from the edges of the fabric. A switch is set into the wall several feet away, and I wade through the sheets until I get near enough to ÿip the lights.

A dull buzzing þlls the space. The light is faint and glaring at the same time, and I cringe and ÿip the switch back off. Daylight presses in with a muted glow against the sheets over the windows—it's later than I thought—and I cross the large space and pull a makeshift curtain down, showering dust and morning light on everything. Beyond the windows is a patio, a set of suspiciously familiar awnings overhead—

òI see youõve found it!ó

I spin to þnd my mother and father ducking under a sheet into the room.

òFound what?ó

Mom gestures to the space, its dust and sheets and counters and broken broom closet as if showing me a castle, a kingdom.

òBishopõs Coffee Shop.ó

For a moment, I am genuinely speechless.

òThe caf® sign in the lobby didnõt give it away?ó asks Dad.

Maybe if I'd come through the lobby. I am still dazed by the fact I've stepped out of the Narrows and into my mother's newest pet project, but years of lying have taught me to never look as lost as I feel, so I smile and roll with it.

òYeah, I had a hunch,ó I say, rolling up the window sheet. òI woke up early, so I thought I'd take a look."

Itõs a weak lie, but Mom isnõt even listening. Sheõs ÿitting around the space, holding her breath like a kid about to blow out birthday

candles as she pulls down sheets. Dad is still looking at me rather intently, eyes panning over my dark clothes and long sleeves, all the pieces that don't line up.

òSo,ó I say brightly, because Iõve learned if I can talk louder than he can think, he tends to lose his train of thought, òYou think thereõs a coffee machine under one of these sheets?ó

He brightens. My father needs coffee like other men need food, water, shelter. Between the three classes he's set to teach in the history department and the ongoing series of essays he's composing, caffeine ranks way up there on his priority list. I think that's all it took for Mom to get him to support her dream of owning a caf®: an invitation from the local university and the guarantee of continuous coffee. Brew it, and they will come.

I try to stiÿe a yawn.

òYou look tired,ó he says.

òSo do you,ó I shoot back, pulling the covers off a piece of equipment that might have once been a grinder. òHey, look.ó

òMackenzie . . .ó he presses, but I ÿip the switch, and the machinery does in fact grind to life, drowning him out with a horrible sound like it's eating its own parts, chewing up metal nuts and bolts and gobbling down air. Dad winces, and I turn it back off, sounds of mechanic agony echoing through the room along with a smell like burning toast.

I can't help glancing back at the cleaning closet, and Mom must have followed my gaze because she heads straight for it.

òI wonder what happened here,ó she says, swinging the door on its broken hinges.

I shrug and head over to an oven, or something like it, and pry the door open. The inside is stale, and scorched.

òI was thinking that we should bake some mufþns,ó says Mom.

òôWelcomeõ mufþns!ó She doesnõt say it like *welcome* but rather like *Welcome!* òYou know, to let everyone know that weõre here. What do you think, Mac?ó

In response, I nudge the oven door, and it swings shut with a bang. Something dislodges and lands with a *tinktinktinktink* across the stone before rolling up against her shoe.

Her smile doesn't even falter. It turns my stomach, her sickly-sweet-everythingõs-better-than-þne pep. Iõve seen the inside of her mind, and this is all a stupid act. I lost Ben. I shouldn't have to lose her, too. I want to shake her. I want to say . . . but I don't know what to say. I don't know how to get through to her, how to make her see that she's making it worse.

So I tell the truth. òI think itõs falling apart.ó

She misses my meaning. Or steps around it. òWell then,ó she says cheerfully, stooping to fetch the metal bolt. òWeõll just use the apartment oven until we get this one in shape."

With that she turns on her heel and bobs away. I look around, hoping to þnd Dad and with him some measure of sympathy or at least commiseration, but he's on the patio, staring up at the awnings.

òChop chop, Mackenzie,ó Mom calls back through the door. òYou know what they say—"

òIõm pretty sure no one says it but you ñ ó

ò ñ Up with the sun and just as bright.ó

I look out the window at the light and cringe, and follow.

We spend the rest of the morning in the apartment baking *Welcome!* mufþns. Or rather, Dad ducks out to run some errands, and Mom makes mufþns while I do my best to look busy. I could really use a few hours of sleep and a shower, but every time I make a move to leave, Mom thinks up something for me to do. While she's distracted pulling a fresh batch from the oven, I dig the Archive list

from my pocket. But when I unfold it, it's blank.

Relief washes over me before I remember that there should be a name on here. I could swear I felt the scrawl of a new History being added when I was stuck in the caf® closet. I must have imagined it. Mom sets the tray of mufþns on the counter as I refold the paper and tuck it away. She drapes a cloth over them, and out of nowhere I remember Ben standing on his toes to peek beneath the towel and steal a pinch even though it was always too hot and he burned his þngers. Itõs like being punched in the chest, and I squeeze my eyes shut until the pain passes.

I beg off baking duty for þve minutes just to change clothes ñ mine smell like Narrows air and Archive stacks and caf® dust. I pull on jeans and a clean shirt, but my hair refuses to work with me, and I þnally dig a yellow bandana out of a suitcase and fashion a headband, trying to hide the mess as best I can. I'm tucking Da's key beneath my collar when I catch sight of the dark spots on my ÿoor and remember the bloodstained boy.

I kneel down, trying to tune out the clatter of baking trays beyond the door as I slide off my ring and bring my þngertips to the ÿoorboards. The wood hums against my hands as I close my eyes, and reach, and—

òMackenzie!ó Mom calls out.

I sigh, and blink, pulling back from the ÿoor. I straighten up just as Mom knocks briskly on the door. òHave I lost you?ó

òIõm coming,ó I say, shoving the ring back on as her footsteps fade. I cast one last glance at the ÿoor before I leave. In the kitchen, the mufþns are already wrapped in blossoms of cellophane. Mom is þlling a basket, chattering about the residents, and thatõs when I get an idea.

Da was a Keeper, but he was a detective too, and he used to say

you could learn as much by asking people as by reading walls. You get different answers. My room has a story to tell, and as soon as I can an ounce of privacy, I'll read it; but in the meantime, what better way to learn about the Coronado than to ask the people in it?

òHey, Mom,ó I say, pushing up my sleeves, òIõm sure youõve got a ton of work to do. Why donõt you let me deliver those?ó

She pauses and looks up. òReally? Would you?ó She says it like she's surprised I'm capable of being nice. Yes, things have been rocky between us, and I'm offering to help because it helps me—but still.

She tucks the last mufþn into a basket and nudges it my way.

òSure thing,ó I say, managing a smile, and her resulting one is so genuine that I almost feel bad. Right up until she wraps me in a hug and the high-pitched strings and slamming doors and crackling paper static of her life scratches against my bones. Then I just feel sick.

òThank you,ó she says, tightening her grip. òThatõs so sweet.ó I can barely hear the words through the grating noise in my head.

òItõs . . . really . . . nothing,ó I say, trying to picture a wall between us and failing. òMom,ó I say at last, òI canõt breathe.ó And then she laughs and lets go, and I'm left dizzy but free.

òAll right, get going,ó she says, turning back to her work; and Iõve never been so happy to oblige.

I start down the hall and peel the cellophane away from a mufþn, hoping Mom hasn't counted them out as I eat breakfast. The basket swings back and forth from the crook of my arm, each mufþn individually wrapped and tagged. *Bishop's*, the tag announces in careful script. A basket of conversation starters.

I focus on the task at hand. The Coronado has seven ÿoors ñ one lobby and six levels of housing—with six apartments to a ÿoor, A through F. That many rooms, and odds are someone knows something.

And maybe someone does, but nobody seems to be home. Thereõs the ÿaw in both my motherõs plans and in mine. Late morning on a weekday, and what do you get? A lot of locked doors. I slip out of 3F and head down the hall. 3E and 3D are both quiet, 3C is vacant (according to a small slip of paper stuck to the door), and though I can hear the mufÿed sounds of life in 3B, nobody answers. After several aggressive knocks on 3A, I'm getting frustrated. I drop mufþns on each doorstep and move on.

One ÿoor up, itõs more of the same. I leave the baked goods at 4A, B, and C. But as I'm heading away from 4D, the door swings open.

òYoung lady,ó comes the voice.

I turn to see a vast woman þlling the door frame like bread in a loaf pan, holding the small, cellophaned mufþn. She looks like she could crush me. Easily.

òWhat is your name? And what is this adorable little treat?ó she asks. The mufþn looks like an egg, nested in her palm.

òMackenzie,ó I say, stepping forward. òMackenzie Bishop. My family just moved in to 3F, and we're renovating the coffee shop on the ground ÿoor.ó

òWell, lovely to meet you, Mackenzie,ó she says, engulþng my hand with hers. She is made up of low tones and bells and the sound of ripping fabric. òMy name is Ms. Angelli.ó

òNice to meet you.ó I slide my hand free as politely as possible.

And then I hear it. A sound that makes my skin crawl. A faint meow behind the wall that is Ms. Angelli, just before a clearly desperate cat þnds a crack somewhere near the womanõs feet and squeezes through, tumbling out into the hall. I jump back.

òJezzie,ó scorns Ms. Angelli, òJezzie, come back here.ó The cat is small and black, and stands just out of reach, gauging its owner. And then it turns to look at me.

I hate cats.

Or really, I just hate *touching* them. I hate touching any animal, for that matter. Animals are like people but þfty times worse ñ all id, no ego; all emotion, no rational thought—which makes them a bomb of sensory input wrapped in fur.

Ms. Angelli frees herself from the doorway, and nearly stumbles forward onto Jezzie, who promptly ÿees toward me. I shrink back, putting the basket of mufþns between us.

òBad kitty,ó I growl.

òOh, shecs a lover, my Jezzie.ó Ms. Angelli bends to fetch the cat, which is now pretending to be dead, or paralyzed by fear, and I get a glimpse of the apartment behind her.

Every inch is covered with antiques. My þrst thought is *Why would anyone have so much stuff?*

òYou like old things,ó I say.

òOh, yes,ó she says, straightening. òIõm a collector.ó Jezzie is now tucked under her arm like a clutch purse. òA bit of an artifact historian,ó she says. òAnd what about you, Mackenzie ñ do you like old things?ó

Like is the wrong word. They're *useful*, since they're more likely to have memories than new things.

òI like the Coronado,ó I say. òThat counts as an old thing, right?ó

òIndeed. A wonderful old place. Been around more than a century, if you can believe it. Full of history, the Coronado."

òYou must know all about it, then.ó

Ms. Angelli þdgets. òAh, a place like this, no one can know everything. Bits and pieces, really, rumors and tales . . ." She trails off.

òReally?ó I brighten. òAnything unusual?ó And then, worried my enthusiasm is a little too strong, I add, òMy friend is convinced a place like this has to have a few ghosts, skeletons, secrets."

Ms. Angelli frowns and sets Jezzie back in the apartment, and locks the door.

òIõm sorry,ó she says abruptly. òYou caught me on my way out. I've got an appraisal in the city."

òOh,ó I fumble. òWell, maybe we could talk more, some other time?ó

òSome other time,ó she echoes, setting off down the hall at a surprising pace.

I watch her go. She clearly knows *something*. It never really occurred to me that someone would know and not want to share. Maybe I should stick to reading walls. At least they can't refuse to answer.

My footsteps echo on the concrete stairs as I ascend to the þfth ÿoor, where not a single person appears to be home. I leave a trail of mufþns in my wake. Is this place empty? Or just unfriendly? Iõm already reaching for the stairwell door at the other end of the hall when it swings open abruptly and I run straight into a body. I stumble back, steadying myself against the wall, but I'm not fast enough to save the mufþns.

I cringe and wait for the sound of the basket tumbling, but it never comes. When I look up, a guy is standing there, the basket safely cradled in his arms. Spiked hair and a slanted smile. My pulse skips.

The third-ÿoor lurker from last night.

òSorry about that,ó he says, passing me the basket. òNo harm, no foul?ó

òYeah,ó I say, straightening. òSure.ó

He holds out his hand. òWesley Ayers,ó he says, waiting for me to shake.

I'd rather not, but I don't want to be rude. The basket's in my

right hand, so I hold out my left awkwardly. When he takes it, the sounds rattle in my ears, through my head, deafening. Wesley is made like a rock band, drums and bass and interludes of breaking glass. I try to block out the roar, to push back, but it only makes it worse. And then, instead of shaking my hand, he gives a theatrical bow and brushes his lips against my knuckles, and I can't breathe. Not in a pleasant, butterÿies-and-crushes way. I literally cannot breathe around the shattering sound and the bricklike beat. My cheeks ÿush hot, and the frown must have made its way onto my face because he laughs, misreading my discomfort, and lets go, taking all the noise and pressure with him.

òWhat?ó he says. òThatõs custom, you know. Right to right, handshake. Left to right, kiss. I thought it was an invitation."

òNo,ó I say curtly, ònot exactly.ó The worldõs quiet again, but Iõm still thrown off and having trouble hiding it. I shufÿe past him toward the stairs, but he turns to face me again, his back to the hall.

òMs. Angelli, in 4D,ó he continues. òShe always expects a kiss. Itõs hard with all the rings she wears." He holds up his left hand, wiggles his þngers. Heõs got a few of his own.

òWes!ó calls a young voice from an open doorway halfway down the hall. A small, strawberry-blond head pops out of 5C. I want to be annoyed that she didn't answer when I knocked, but I'm still resisting the urge to sit down on the checkered carpet. Wesley makes a point of ignoring her, his attention still trained on me. Up close I can conþrm that his light brown eyes are ringed with eyeliner.

òWhat were you doing in the hall last night?ó I ask, trying to bury my unease. His expression is blank, so I add, òThe third ÿoor hall. It was late."

òIt wasnõt *that* late,ó he says with a shrug. òHalf the cafõs in the city were still open."

òThen why werenõt you in one of them?ó I ask.

He smirks. òI like the third ÿoor. Itõs so . . . yellow.ó

òExcuse me?ó

òItõs yellow.ó He reaches out and taps the wallpaper with a painted black nail. òSeventh is purple. Sixth is blue. Fifth,ó he gestures around us, òis clearly red.ó

I wouldn't go so far as to say it's clearly any color.

òFourth is green,ó he continues. òThird is yellow. Like your bandana. Retro. Nice."

I bring a hand up to my hair. òWhatõs second?ó I ask.

òItõs somewhere between brown and orange. Ghastly.ó

I almost laugh. òThey all look a bit gray to me.ó

òGive it time,ó he says. òSo, you just move in? Or do you enjoy roaming the halls of apartment buildings, hocking"—he peers into the basket ñ òbaked goods?ó

"Wes," says the girl again, stamping her foot, but he ignores her pointedly, winking at me. The girl's face reddens, and she disappears into the apartment. A moment later she emerges again, weapon in hand.

She sends the book spinning through the air with impressive aim, and I must have blinked, or missed something, because the next minute Wesley's hand has come up and the book is resting in it. And he's still smiling at me.

òBe right there, Jill.ó

He brushes the book off, and lets it fall to his side while he peers into the mufþn basket. òThis basket nearly killed me. I feel I deserve compensation." His hand is already digging through the cellophane, past ribbons and tags.

òHelp yourself,ó I say. òYou live here, then?ó

òCanõt say that I do ñ oooooh. Blueberry.ó He lifts a mufþn and

reads the label. òSo you are a Bishop, I presume.ó

òMackenzie Bishop,ó I say. òThree F.ó

òNice to meet you, Mackenzie,ó he says, tossing the mufþn up into the air a few times. òWhat brings you to this crumbling castle?ó

òMy mother. Sheõs on a mission to renovate the caf®.ó

òYou sound so enthused,ó he says.

òItõs just old . . .ó *That's enough sharing,* warns a voice in my head.

One dark eyebrow arches. òAfraid of spiders? Dust? Ghosts?ó

òNo. Those things donõt worry me.ó *Everything is loud here, like you.*

His smile is teasing, but his eyes are sincere. òThen what?ó

Iõm spared by Jill, who emerges with another book. Part of me wants to see this Wesley try to stave off a second blow while holding a book and a blueberry mufþn, but he turns away, conceding.

òAll right, all right, Iõm coming, brat.ó He tosses the þrst book back to Jill, who fumbles it. And then he casts one last look back at me with his crooked smile. òThanks for the mufþn, Mac.ó He just met me, and he's already using a nickname. I'd kick his ass, but there's a slight affection to the way he says it, and for some reason I don't mind.

òSee you around.ó

Several moments after the door to 5C has closed, I'm still standing there when the scratch of letters in my pocket brings me to my senses. I head for the stairs and pull the paper from my jeans.

Jackson Lerner. 16.

The History is old enough that I can't afford to put it off. They slip so much faster the older they get—distress to destruction in a matter of hours; minutes, even. I get back to the third ÿoor, ditching the basket in the stairwell, and pocket my ring as I reach the painting

of the sea. I pull the key's cord over my head, wrapping it several times around my wrist as my eyes adjust to make out the keyhole in the faint wall crack. I slot the key, and turn. A hollow click; the door ÿoats to the surface, lined in light, and I head back into the forever night of the Narrows.

I close my eyes and press my þngertips against the nearest wall, reaching until I catch hold of the memories, and behind my eyes the Narrows reappear, bleak and bare and grayer, but the same. Time rolls away beneath my touch, but the memory sits like a picture, unchanging, until the History þnally ÿickers in the frame, blink-and-you-miss-it quick. The þrst time I *do* miss it, and I have to drag time to a stop and turn it forward, breathing out slow, slow, inching frame by frame until I see him. It goes like *empty empty empty empty empty empty body empty empty*—gotcha. I focus, holding the memory still long enough to identify the shape as a teenage boy in a green hoodie ñ it must be Jackson ñ and then I nudge the memory forward and watch him walk past from right to left, and turn the þrst corner. Right.

I blink, the Narrows sharpening around me as I pull back from the wall, and follow Jackson's path around the corner. Then I start again, repeating the process at each turn until I close the gap, until I'm nearly walking in his wake. And then, just as I'm reading the fourth or þfth wall, I *hear* him, not the muddled sounds of the past but the shufÿing steps of a body in the now. I abandon the memory and track the sound down the hall, whipping around the corner where I þnd myself face to face with ñ

Myself.

Two distorted reÿections of my sharp jaw and my yellow bandana pool in the black that's spreading across the History's eyes, eating up the color as he slips.

Jackson Lerner stands there, staring at me with his head cocked, a mop of messy reddish brown hair falling against his cheeks. Beneath his bright green hoodie, he has that gaunt look boys sometimes get in their teens. Like they've been stretched. I take a small step back.

òWhat the hellõs going on here?ó he snaps, hands stuffed into his jeans. òThis some kind of fun house or something?ó

I keep my tone empty, even. òNot really, no.ó

òWell, it blows,ó he says, a thin layer of bravado masking the fear in his voice. Fear is dangerous. òI want to get out of here.ó

He shifts his weight, as solid as ÿesh and blood on the stained ÿoor. Well, as solid as ÿesh, anyway. Histories donõt bleed. He shifts again, restless, and then his blackening eyes drift down to my hand, to the place where my key dangles from the cord wrapped around my wrist. The metal glints.

òYou got a key.ó Jackson points, gaze following the keyõs small, swinging movements. òWhy donõt you just let me out? Huh?ó

I can hear the change in tone. Fear slides into anger.

òAll right.ó Da would tell me to stay steady. *The Histories will slip;* you *can't afford to.* I glance around at the nearest doors.

But they all have chalk Xs.

òWhat are you waiting for?ó he growls. òI said, let me out.ó

òAll right,ó I say again, sliding back. òIõll take you to the right door."

I steal another step away. He doesn't move.

òJust open this one,ó he says, pointing to the nearest outline, X and all.

òI canõt. We need to þnd one with a white circle and then ñ ó

òOpen the damn door!ó he yells, lunging for the key around my wrist. I dodge.

òJackson,ó I snap, and the fact I know his name causes him to

pause. I try a different approach. òYou have to tell me where you want to go. These doors all go to different places. Some don't even open. And some of them do, but the places they lead are very bad."

The anger written across his face fades into frustration, a crease between his shining eyes, a sadness in his mouth. òI just want to go home."

òOkay,ó I say, letting a small sigh of relief escape. òLetõs go home.ó

He hesitates.

òHurry up,ó he says, waiting by the door, running a þnger over the chalk as his gaze continues down the hall. I reach out to slide the key into the lock.

òWait,ó he says. òWhatõs that?ó

I look up. He's pointing at another door, one at the very end of the hall. A white circle has been drawn above the keyhole, large enough to see from here. Damn.

òJackson ñ ó

He spins on me. òYou lied. Youõre not taking me home.ó He steps forward, and I step back, away from the door.

òI didnõt ñ ó

He doesn't give me a chance to lie again, but lunges for the key in my hand. I twist out of the way, catching his sleeved wrist as he reaches out. I wrench it behind his back, and he yelps but somehow, by some combination of þghterõs luck and sheer will, twists free. He turns to run, but I catch his shoulder and force him forward, against the wall.

I keep my arm þrmly around his throat, pulling back and up with enough force to distract him from the fact he is six inches taller than me and still has two arms and two legs to þght back with.

òJackson,ó I say, trying to keep my voice level, calm. òYouõre being ridiculous. Any door with a white circle can take you—"

And then I see metal, and jump back just in time, the knife arcing through the air, fast. This is wrong. Histories never have weapons. Their bodies are searched when they're shelved. So where did he get it?

I kick up and send him reeling backward. It only buys a moment, but a moment's long enough to get a good look at the blade in his hand. It gleams in the dark, well-kept steel as long as my hand, a hole drilled in the grip so it can be spun. It is a *lovely* weapon. And there

is no way it belongs to a punk teen with a worn-out hoodie and a bad attitude.

But whether it's his, or he stole it, or someone gave it to him—a possibility I don't even want to consider—it doesn't change the fact that right now he's the one holding a knife.

And I've got nothing.

SEVEN

I am eleven, and you are stronger than you look.

You take me out into the summer sun to show me how to fight. Your limbs are weapons, brutally fast. I spend hours figuring out how to avoid them, how to dodge, roll, anticipate, react. It's get out of the way or get hit.

I'm sitting on the ground, exhausted and rubbing my ribs where you got a touch, even though I saw you try to pull back.

"You said you'd teach me how to fight," I say.

"I am."

"You're only showing me how to defend."

"Trust me. You need to know that first."

"I want to learn how to attack." I cross my arms. "I'm strong enough."

"Fighting isn't really about using your strength, Kenzie. It's about using theirs. Histories will always be stronger. Pain doesn't stick, so you can't hurt them, not really. They don't bleed, and if you kill them, they don't stay dead. They die, they come back. You die, you don't."

"Can I have a weapon?"

"No, Kenzie," you snap. "Never carry a weapon. Never count on anything that's not attached to you. It can be taken. Now, get back up."

Å Å Å

There are times when I wish I broke Da's rules. Like right now, staring at the sharp edge of a knife in the hands of a slipping History. But I don't break Da's rules, not ever. Sometimes I break the Archive's rules, or bend them a bit, but not his. And they must work, because I'm still alive.

For now.

Jackson þdgets with the knife, and I can tell by the way he holds it he's not used to the weapon. Good. Then at least I stand a chance of getting it away from him. I tug the yellow bandana from my hair, and pull it tight between my hands. And I force my mouth to smile, because he might have the advantage as far as sharp things go, but even when the game turns physical, it never stops being mental.

òJackson,ó I say, pulling the fabric taut. òYou donõt need to ñ ó

Something moves in the hall beyond him. A shadow there and then gone, a dark shape with a silver crown. Sudden enough to catch my attention, dragging it from Jackson for only a second.

Which is, of course, the second he lunges.

His limbs are longer than mine, and it's all I can do to get out of the way. He þghts like an animal. Reckless. But heõs holding the knife wrong, too low, leaving a gap on the hilt between his hand and the blade. The next slice comes blinding quick, and I lean back but hold my ground. I have an idea, but it means getting close, which is always risky when the other person has a knife. He jabs again, and I try to twist my body, to get my arms to one side, one above and one below the knife; but I'm not fast enough, and the blade skims my forearm. Pain burns over my skin, but I've almost got this—and sure enough, on the next try he jabs wrong and I dodge right, lifting one arm and lowering the other so the knife slices into the circle of space made by my limbs and the bandana. He sees the trap too late, jerks back; but I swing my hand down, looping the fabric around the knife, the gap

on the hilt. I snap it tight and bring my boot to the front of his green hoodie as hard as I can, and he stumbles, losing his hold on the knife.

The fabric goes slack and the blade tumbles into my grip, handle hitting my palm right as he dives forward, tackling me around the waist and sending us both to the ÿoor. He knocks the air from my lungs like a brick to the ribs, and the blade goes skittering into the dark.

At least itõs a fair þght now. He might be strong, made stronger by slipping, but he clearly didn't have a grandfather who saw combat training as a bonding opportunity. I free my leg from under him and manage to get my foot against the wall, for once thankful that the Narrows are so narrow. Pushing off, I roll on top of Jackson, just in time to dodge a clumsily thrown þst.

And then I see it on the ÿoor, right above his shoulder.

A keyhole.

I never marked it, so I don't know where it leads, or if my key will even work, but I have to do something. Ripping my wrist and my key free of his grip, I drive the metal teeth down into the gap and turn, holding my breath until I hear it click. I look down into Jacksonõs wild eyes just before the door falls open, plunging us both downward.

Space changes, suddenly, and instead of falling down we fall forward, sprawling onto the cold marble of the Archive's antechamber ÿoor.

I can see the front desk in the corner of my eye, a QUIET PLEASE sign and a stack of papers and a green-eyed girl looking over it.

òThis is not the Returns room,ó she says, her voice edged with amusement. She has hair the color of sun and sand.

òI realize that,ó I growl as I try to pin a hissing, cussing, clawing Jackson to the ÿoor. òA little help?ó

I've got him down for all of two seconds before he somehow gets his knee and then his shoe between our bodies.

The young Librarian stands up as Jackson uses his boot to pry me off, sending me backward to the hard ÿoor. Iõm still on the ground, but Jackson is halfway to his feet when the Librarian rounds the desk and cheerfully plunges something thin and sharp and shining into his back. His eyes widen, and when she twists the weapon there's a noise, like a lock turning or a bone breaking, and all the life goes out of Jackson Lernerõs eyes. She withdraws, and he crumples to the ÿoor with the sickening thud of dead weight. I can see now that what she holds is not a weapon exactly, but a kind of key. It's gleaming gold and has a handle and a stem, but no teeth.

òThat was fun,ó she says.

There's something like a giggle in the corners of her voice. I've seen her around the stacks. She always catches my eye because she is so devastatingly young. Girlish. Librarian is top rank, so the vast majority are older, seasoned. But this girl looks like she's twenty.

I drag myself to my feet. òI need a key like that.ó

She laughs. òYou couldnõt handle it. Literally.ó She holds it out, but the moment my þngers touch the metal, they go pins-and-needles numb. I pull back, and her laugh trails off as the key vanishes into the pocket of her coat.

òStumble through the wrong door?ó she asks just before the large doors behind the desk ÿy open.

òWhat is going on?ó comes a very different voice. Patrick storms in, the eyes behind his black glasses ÿicking from the Librarian to Jacksonõs body on the ÿoor to me.

òCarmen,ó he says, his attention still leveled on me. òPlease take care of that."

She smiles and, despite her size, hauls the body up and through a

pair of doors built right into the curving walls of the antechamber. I blink. I never noticed those before. And the moment they've closed behind her, I can't seem to focus on them. My eyes roll off.

òMiss Bishop,ó says Patrick tersely. The room is quiet except for my heavy breathing. òYouõre bleeding on my ÿoor.ó

I look down, and realize he's right. Pain rolls up my arm as my eyes slide over the place where Jacksonõs knife cut through fabric and grazed skin. My sleeve is stained red, a narrow line running down my hand and over my key before dripping to the ÿoor. Patrick is gazing distastefully at the drops as they hit the granite.

òDid you have a problem with the doors?ó asks Patrick.

òNo,ó I say, aiming for a joke. òThe doors were þne. I had a problem with the *History*."

Not even a smile.

òDo you need medical attention?ó he asks.

I feel dazed, but I know better than to show it. Certainly not in front of him.

Every branch staffs a medically trained Librarian in the interest of keeping work-related injuries quiet, and Patrick is the man for this branch. If I say yes, then he'll treat me; but he'll also have an excuse to report the incident and there won't be anything Roland can do to keep it off the books. I don't have a clean record anyway, so I shake my head.

òIõll live.ó A swatch of yellow catches my eye, and I recover my bandana from the ÿoor and wrap it around the cut. òBut I really liked this shirt," I add as lightly as possible.

He frowns and I think he's going to chew me out, or report me, anyway ñ but when he speaks again itõs only to say, òGo clean up.ó

I nod, and turn back to the Narrows, leaving a trail of red behind.

EIGHT

I am a mess.

I scoured the Narrows, but Jacksonõs knife was nowhere to be found; as for the strange shadow I saw during the þght, the one with the silvery crown . . . maybe my eyes were playing tricks on me. That happens, now and then, with the ring off. Press against a surface wrong, and you can see the present and past at once. Things can get tangled.

I wince, focusing on the task at hand.

The cut on my arm is deeper than I thought, and it bleeds through the gauze before I can get the bandage on. I toss another ruined wrap in the plastic bag currently serving as the bathroom trash bin and run the cut under cool water, digging through the extensive þrst aid kit I've assembled over the years. My shirt is sitting in a heap on the ÿoor, and I take in my reÿection, the web of þne scars across my stomach and arms, and the bruise blossoming on my shoulder. I am never without the marks of my job.

Pulling my forearm from the water, I dab the cut, þnally getting it gauzed and wrapped. Red drops have made a trail along the counter and into the sink.

òI christen thee,ó I mutter to the sink as I þnish bandaging the cut. I take the trash bag and add it to the larger one in the kitchen, making sure all evidence of my þrst aid is buried, just as Mom appears, a slightly smooshed but still cellophaned mufþn in one hand, and the basket in the other. The mufþns inside have cooled,

a þlm of condensation fogging up the wrappers. Damn. I knew I forgot something.

òMackenzie Bishop,ó she says, dropping her purse on the dining room table, which is still the only fully assembled piece of furniture. òWhat is this?ó

òA ôWelcomeõ mufþn?ó

She drops the basket beside it with a thud.

òYou said you would *deliver* them. Not drop them on people's doormats and leave the basket in the stairwell. And where have you been?ó she snaps. òThis couldnõt have taken you all morning. You can't just disappear. . . ." She's an open book: anger and worry too thinly veiled behind a tight-lipped smile that she means to look casual but that looks pained. òI asked for your help.ó

òI knocked, but nobody was home,ó I snap back, pain and fatigue tightening around me. òMost people have jobs, Mom. Normal jobs. Ones where they get up and go to the ofþce and come home.ó

She rubs her eyes, which means that whatever she's about to say sheõs been rehearsing. òMackenzie. Look. I was talking to Colleen, and she said that you'd need to grieve in your own way—"

òYouõre kidding me.ó

ò ñ and when you add that to your age, and the natural desire for rebellion—"

òStop.ó My head is starting to hurt.

ò ñ I know you need space. But you also need to learn discipline. Bishop's is a family business."

òBut it wasnõt a family *dream*."

She ÿinches.

I want to be oblivious to the pain written on her face. I want to be selþsh and young and normal. M would be that way. She would

need space to grieve. She would rebel because her parents were simply uncool, not because one was wearing a horrifying happy mask and the other was a ghost. She'd be distant because she was preoccupied with boys or school, not because she's tired from hunting down the Histories of the dead or distracted by her new hotel-turned-apartment, where the walls are þlled with crimes.

òSorry,ó I say, adding, òColleenõs right, I guess.ó The words try to crawl back down my throat. òMaybe I just need a little time to adjust. It's a lot of change. But I didn't mean to bail."

òWhere were you?ó

òTalking to a neighbor,ó I say. òMs. Angelli. She invited me in, and I didn't want to be rude. She seemed kind of lonely, and she had this amazing place full of old stuff, and so I just stayed with her for a while. We had tea, and she showed me her collections."

Da would call that an extrapolation. It's easier than a straight lie, because it contains seeds of truth. Not that Mom would be able to tell if I told her a blatant lie, but it makes me feel a fraction less guilty.

òOh. That was . . . sweet of you,ó she says, looking wounded because I'd rather have tea with a stranger than talk to her.

òI should have kept better track of timeó ñ and then, feeling guiltier ñ òIõm sorry.ó I rub my eyes and begin to lean toward the bedroom. òIõm going to go unpack a little.ó

òThis will be good for us,ó she promises. òThis will be an adventure." But while it sounded cheerful coming from Dad, it leaves her lips like a breath being knocked out of her. Desperate. òI promise, Mac. An adventure."

òI believe you,ó I say. And because I can tell she wants more, I manage a smile and add, òI love you.ó

The words taste strange, and as I make my way to my room and

then to my waiting bed, I canõt þgure out why. But as I pull the sheets over my head, it hits me.

It's the only thing I said that wasn't a lie.

I'm twelve, six months shy of becoming a Keeper, and Mom is mad at you because you're bleeding. She accuses you of fighting, of drinking, of refusing to age gracefully. You light a cigarette and run your fingers through your shock of peppered hair and let her believe it was a bar fight, let her believe you were looking for trouble.

"Is it hard?" I ask when she storms out of the room. "Lying so much?"

You take a long drag and flick ash in the sink, where you know she'll see it. You're not supposed to smoke anymore.

"Not hard, no. Lying is easy. But it's lonely."

"What do you mean?"

"When you lie to everyone about everything, what's left? What's true?"

"Nothing," I say.

"Exactly."

The phone wakes me.

òHey, hey,ó says Lyndsey. òDaily check-in!ó

òHey, Lynds.ó I yawn.

òWere you sleeping? Such a slacker!ó

òIõm trying to fulþll your motherõs image of me.ó

òDonõt mind her. So, hotel update? Found me any ghosts yet?ó

I sit up, swing my legs off the bed. I've got the bloodstained boy

in my walls, but I donõt think thatõs really shareable. òNo ghosts yet, but I'll keep looking."

òLook harder! A place like that? Itõs got to be full of creepy things. It's been around for, like, a hundred years."

òHow do you know that?ó

òI looked it up! You donõt think Iõd let you move into some haunted mansion without scoping out the history."

òAnd what did you þnd?ó

òWeirdly, nothing. Like, *suspiciously* nothing. It was a hotel, and the hotel was converted into apartments after World War Two, a big boom time moneywise. The conversion was in a ton of newspapers, but then a few years later the place just falls off the map . . . no articles, nothing."

I frown, getting up from the bed. Ms. Angelli admitted that this place was full of history. So where is it? Assuming *she* can't read walls, how did she learn the Coronadoõs secrets? And why was she so defensive about sharing them?

òI bet itõs like a government conspiracy,ó Lynds is saying. òOr a witness protection program. Or one of those horror reality þlms. Have you checked for cameras?ó

I laugh, but silently wonder as I look down at the blood-spotted ÿoor if the truth is worse.

òHave you at least got tenants who look like they belong in Hitchcock or King?ó

òWell, so far Iõve met a morbidly obese antiques hoarder, and a boy who wears eyeliner."

òThey call that guyliner,ó she says.

òYes. Well.ó I stretch, and head for the bedroom door. òIõd call it stupid, but he's rather nice to look at. I can't tell if the eyeliner makes him attractive, or if he's good-looking in spite of it."

òAt least youõve *got* nice things to look at."

I step around the ghostly drops on the ÿoor and venture out into the apartment. It's dusk, and none of the lights are on.

òHow are *you* doing?ó I ask. Lyndsey possesses the gift of normalcy. I bathe in it. òSummer courses? College prep? Learning new languages? New instruments? Single-handedly saving countries?ó

Lyndsey laughs. Itõs so easy for her. òYou make me sound like an overachiever."

I feel the scratch of letters and pull the list from my jeans.

Alex King. 13.

òThatõs because you *are* an overachiever," I say.

òI just like to stay busy.ó

Come over here, then, I think, pocketing the list. *This place would keep you busy.*

I distinctly hear the thrum of guitar strings. òWhatõs that noise?ó I ask.

òIõm tuning, thatõs all.ó

òLyndsey Newman, do you actually have me on speaker just so you can talk and tune a guitar at the same time? Youõre jeopardizing the sanctity of our conversations."

òRelax. The parents have vacated. Some kind of gala. They left in fancy dress an hour ago. What about yours?ó

I þnd two notes on the kitchen counter.

My mother's reads: *Store! Love, Mom.*

My father's reads: *Checking in at work. —D*

òSimilarly out,ó I say, òbut minus the fancy dress and the togetherness."

I retreat to the bedroom.

òThe place to yourself?ó she says. òI hope youõre having a party.ó

òI can barely hear over the music and drinking games. I better tell them to quiet down before someone calls the cops."

òTalk soon, okay?ó she says. òI miss you.ó She really means it.

òI miss you, Lynds.ó I mean it too.

The phone goes dead. I toss it onto the bed and stare down at the faded spots on my bedroom ÿoor.

Questions eat at me. What happened in this room? Who was the boy? And whose blood was he covered in? And maybe itõs not my job, maybe itõs an infraction to þnd out, a misuse of power, but every member of the Archive takes the same oath:

SERVAMUS MEMORIAM.

We protect the past. And the way I see it, that means we need to understand it.

And if neither Lyndsey's search engines nor Ms. Angelli are going to tell me anything, I'll have to see for myself. I tug the ring from my þnger, and before I can chicken out, I kneel, press my hands back to the ÿoor, and reach for the past.

NINE

There is a girl sitting on a bed, knees pulled up beneath her chin.

I run the memories back until I þnd the small calendar by the bed that reads MARCH, the blue dress on the corner chair, the black book on the table by the bed. Da was right. *Bread crumbs and bookmarks.* My þngers found their way.

The girl on the bed is thin in a delicate way, with light blond hair that falls in waves around her narrow face. She is younger than I am, and talking to the boy with the bloodstained hands, only right now his hands are still clean. Her words are a murmur, nothing more than

I drag my hand along the ÿoor until I can see them through the doorway, and then I wish I couldn't. He's on top of her, and they are a tangle of glass and blood and þghting limbs, her slender bare feet kicking under him as he pins her down.

And then the struggle slows. And then it stops.

He drops the shard beside her body and staggers to his feet, and I can see her then, the lines carved across her arms, the far deeper cut across her throat. The shard pressed into her own palm. He stands over her a moment before turning back toward the bedroom. Toward me. He is covered in blood. *Her* blood. My stomach turns, and I have to resist the urge to scramble away. He is not here. I am not there.

You killed her, I whisper. Who are you? Who is she?

He staggers into the room, and for a moment he breaks, slides into a crouch, rocking. But then he gets back up. He looks down at himself, the glitter of broken glass at his feet, and over at the body, and begins to wipe his bloody hands slowly and then frantically on his bloody shirt. He scrambles over to the closet, and yanks a black coat from a hook, forcing it on and pulling it closed. And then he runs, and I'm left staring at the girl's body in the hall.

The blood is soaking into her pale blond hair. Her eyes are open, and in that moment, all I want is to cross to her and close them.

I pull my hands from the ÿoor and open my eyes, and the memory shatters into the now, taking the body with it. The room is my room again, but I still see her in that horrible light-echo way, like she's burned into my vision. I shove my ring on, tripping over half the boxes as I focus on the simple need to get the hell out of this apartment.

I slam the door to 3F closed behind me and lean back against it, sliding to the ÿoor and pressing my palms against my eyes, breathing

into the space between my chest and knees.

Revulsion claws up my throat and I swallow hard and picture Da taking one look at me and laughing through smoke, telling me how silly I look. I picture the council who inducted me seeing straight through the worlds and declaring me unþt. I am not M, I think. Not some silly squeamish girl. I am more. I am a Keeper. I am Da's replacement.

It's not the blood, or even the murder, though both turn my stomach. It's the fact that he *ran*. All I can think is Did he get away? Did he get away with that?

Suddenly I need to move, to hunt, to do *something*, and I get up, steadying myself against the door, and pull the list from my pocket, thankful to have a name.

But the name is gone. The paper is blank.

òYou look like you could use a mufþn.ó

I shove the paper back in my jeans and look up to þnd Wesley Ayers at the other end of the hall, tossing a still-wrapped *Welcome!* mufþn up and down like a baseball. I donõt feel like doing this right now, like putting on a face and acting normal.

òYou still have that?ó I ask wearily.

òOh, I ate mine,ó he says, heading toward me down the hall. òI swiped this one from 6B. They're out of town this week."

I nod.

When he reaches me, his face falls. òYou all right?ó

òIõm þne,ó I lie.

He sets the mufþn on the carpet. òYou look like you need some fresh air."

What I need are answers. òIs there a place here where they keep records? Logs, anything like that?ó

Wesleyõs head tilts when he thinks. òThereõs the study. Mostly old

books, classics, anything that looks, well, like it belongs in a study. But it might have something. It's kind of the opposite of fresh air, though, and there's this garden I was going to show—"

òTell you what. Point me to the study, and then you can show me whatever you want."

Wesley's smile lights up his face, from his sharp chin all the way to the tips of his spiked hair. òDeal.ó

He bypasses the elevator and leads me down the ÿight of concrete steps to the grand staircase, and from there down into the lobby. I keep my distance, remembering the last time we touched. He's several steps below me, and from this angle, I can just see beneath the collar of his black shirt. Something glints, a charm on a leather cord. I lean, trying to see—

òWhere are you going?ó comes a small voice. Wesley jumps, grabs his chest.

òJeez, Jill,ó he says. òWay to scare a guy in front of a girl.ó

It takes me several seconds to þnd Jill, but þnally I spot her in one of the leather high-backed chairs in a front corner, reading a book. The book comes up to the bridge of her nose. She skims the pages with sharp blue eyes, and every now and then turns her attention up, as if she's waiting for something.

òHe spooks easily,ó calls Jill behind her book.

Wesley runs his þngers through his hair and manages a tight laugh. òNot one of my proudest traits.ó

òYou should see what happens when you really surprise him,ó offers Jill.

òThatõs enough, brat.ó

Jill turns a page with a ÿourish.

Wesley casts a glance back at me and offers his arm. òOnward?ó

I smile thinly but decline to take it. òAfter you,ó I say.

He leads the way across the lobby. òWhat are you looking for, anyway?ó

òJust wanted to learn about the building. Do you know much about it?ó

òCanõt say I do.ó He guides me down a hall on the other side of the grand stairs.

òHere we are,ó he says, pushing open the door to the study. Itõs stuffed to the brim with books. A corner desk and a few leather chairs furnish the space, and I scan the spines for anything useful. My eyes trail over encyclopedias, several volumes of poetry, a complete set of Dickens. . . .

òCome on, come on,ó he says, crossing the room. òKeep up.ó

òStudy þrst,ó I say. òRemember?ó

òI pointed it out.ó He gestures to the room as he reaches a pair of doors at the far side of the study. òYou can come back later. The books aren't going anywhere."

òJust give me a ñ ó

He ÿings the doors open. Beyond the doors, thereõs a garden, ÿooded with twilight and air and chaos. Wesley steps out onto the moss-covered rocks, and I drag my attention from the books and follow him out.

The dying light lends the garden a glow, shadows weaving through vines, colors dipping darker, deeper. The space is old and fresh at once, and I forget how much I've missed the feel of green. Our old house had a small yard, but it was nothing like Da's place. He had the city at his front but the country at his back, land that stretched out in a wild mass. Nature is constantly growing, changing, one of the few things that can't hold memories. You forget how much clutter there is in the world, in the people and things, until you're surrounded by green. And even if they don't hear and see and feel the past the way

I do, I wonder if normal people feel this, too—the quiet.

òôThe sun retreats,õó Wes says softly, reverently. òôThe day, outlived, is o'er. It hastens hence and lo, a new world is alive.' "

My eyebrows must be creeping up, because when he glances back over his shoulder at me, he gives me his slanted smile.

òWhat? Donõt look so surprised. Beneath this shockingly good hair is something vaguely resembling a brain." He crosses the garden to a stone bench woven over with ivy, and brushes away the tendrils to reveal the words etched into the rock.

òItõs *Faust*,ó he says. òAnd itõs possible I spend a good deal of time here."

òI can see why.ó Itõs bliss. If bliss had gone untouched for þfty years. The place is tangled, unkempt. And perfect. A pocket of peace in the city.

Wesley slides onto the bench. He rolls up his sleeves and leans back to watch the streaking clouds, blowing a blue-black chunk of hair from his face.

òThe study never changes, but this is place is different every moment, and really best at sun fall. Besides"—he waves a hand back at the Coronado ñ òI can give you a proper tour some other time.ó

òI thought you didnõt live here,ó I say, looking up at the dimming sky.

òI donõt. But my cousin, Jill, does, with her mom. Jill and I are both only children, so I try to keep an eye on her. You have any siblings?ó

My chest tightens, and for a moment, I don't know how to answer. No one's asked that, not since Ben died. In our old town, everyone knew better, skipped straight to pity and condolences. I don't want either from Wesley, so I shake my head, hating myself even as I do because it feels like I'm betraying Ben, his memory.

òYeah, so you know how it is. It can get lonely. And hanging around this old place is better than the alternative."

òWhich is?ó I þnd myself asking.

òMy dadõs. New þanc®e. Satan in a skirt, and all. So I end up here more often than not." He arches back, letting his spine follow the curve of the bench.

I close my eyes, relishing the feel of the garden, the cooling air and the smell of ÿowers and ivy. The horror hidden in my room begins to feel distant, manageable, though the question still whispers in my mind: *Did he get away?* I breathe deep and try to push it from my thoughts, just for a moment.

And then I feel Wesley stand, and come up beside me. His þngers slide through mine. The noise hits a moment before his rings knock against mine, the bass and beat thrumming up my arm and through my chest. I try to push back, to block him out, but it makes it worse, the sound of his touch crushing even though his þngers are feather light on mine. He lifts my hand and gently turns it over.

òYou look like you lost a þght with the moving equipment,ó he says, gesturing to the bandage on my forearm.

I try to laugh. òLooks like it.ó

He lowers my hand and untangles his þngers. The noise fades, my chest loosening by degrees until I can breathe, like coming up through water. Again my eyes are drawn to the leather cord around his neck, the charm buried beneath the black fabric of his shirt. My gaze drifts down his arms, past his rolled sleeves, toward the hand that just let go mine. Even in the twilight I can see a faint scar.

òLooks like youõve lost a couple þghts of your own,ó I say, running my þngers through the air near his hand, not daring to touch. òHow did you get that?ó

òA stint as a spy. I wasnõt much good.ó

A crooked line runs down the back of his hand. òAnd that?ó

òScuff with a lion.ó

Watching Wesley lie is fascinating.

òAnd that?ó

òCaught a piranha bare-handed.ó

No matter how absurd the tale, he says it steady and simple, with the ease of truth. A scratch runs along his forearm. òAnd that?ó

òKnife þght in a Paris alley.ó

I search his skin for marks, our bodies drawing closer without touching.

òDove through a window.ó

òIcicle.ó

òWolf.ó

I reach up, my þngers hovering over a nick on his hairline.

òAnd this?ó

òA History.ó

Everything stops.

His whole face changes right after he says it, like he's been punched in the stomach. The silence hangs between us.

And then he does an unfathomable thing. He smiles.

òIf you were clever,ó he says slowly, òyou would have asked me what a History was."

I am still frozen when he reaches out, and brushes a þnger over the three lines etched into the surface of my ring, then twists one of his own rings to reveal a cleaner but identical set of lines. The Archiveõs insignia. When I donõt react ñ because no ÿuid lie came to me and now it's too late—he closes the gap between us, close enough that I can *almost* hear the bass again, radiating off his skin. His

thumb hooks under the cord around my throat and guides my key out from under my shirt. It glints in the twilight. Then he fetches the key from around his own neck.

òThere,ó he says cheerfully. òNow weõre on the same page.ó

òYou knew,ó I say at last.

His forehead wrinkles. òIõve known since the moment you came into the hall last night."

òHow?ó

òYour eyes went to the keyhole. You did a decent job of hiding the look, but I was watching for it. Patrick told me there would be a new Keeper here. Wanted to see for myself."

òFunny, because Patrick didnõt tell *me* there was still an old one."

òThe Coronado isnõt really my territory. It hasnõt been anyoneõs for ages. I like to check in on Jill, and I keep an eye on the place while I'm at it. It's an old building, so you know how it goes." He taps a nail against his key. òI even have special access. Your doors are my doors."

òYouõre the one who cleared my list,ó I say, the pieces þtting together. òThere were names on my list, and they just disappeared.ó

òOh, sorry.ó He rubs his neck. òI didnõt even think about that. This place has been shared for so long. They always keep the Coronado doors unlocked for me. Didn't mean any harm."

A moment of quiet hangs between us.

òSo,ó he says.

òSo,ó I say.

A smile begins to creep up the side of Wesley's face.

òWhat?ó I ask.

òOh come on, Mac . . .ó He blows at a chunk of hair hanging in his face.

òCome on, what?ó I say, still sizing him up.

òYou donõt think itõs cool?ó He gives up and þxes his hair with his þngers. òTo meet another Keeper?ó

òIõve never met one except for my grandfather.ó It sounds naive, but it never occurred to me to think of others. I mean, I knew they existed, but out of sight, out of mind. The territories, the branches of the Archive—I think they're all designed to make you feel like an only child. Unique. Or solitary.

òMe either,ó Wes is saying. òWhat a broadening experience this is.ó He squares his shoulders toward me. òMy name is Wesley Ayers, and I am a Keeper." He breaks out into a full grin as soon as he says it. òIt feels good to say out loud. Try.ó

I look up at him, the words caught in my throat. I have spent four years with this secret bottled in me. Four years lying, hiding, and bleeding, to hide what I am from everyone I meet.

not alone. The words dance in my mind and in his eyes and against our rings and our keys, and now I smile too.

òThank you,ó I say.

òMy pleasure,ó he says, looking up at the sky. òItõs getting late. Iõd better go."

For one silly, nonsensical moment, I'm scared of his leaving, scared he'll never come back and I'll be left with this, this . . . loneliness. I swallow the strange panic and force myself not to follow him to the study door.

Instead I keep still and watch him tuck his key back beneath his shirt, roll his ring so the three lines are hidden against his palm. He looks exactly the same, and I wonder if I do too and how that's possible, considering how I feel—like some door in me has been opened and been left ajar.

òWesley,ó I call after him, instantly berating myself when he stops and glances back at me.

òGood night,ó I say lamely.

He smiles, and closes the gap between us. His þngers brush over my key before closing around it, guiding it back under the collar of my shirt. It vanishes, the metal cold against my skin.

òGood night, Keeper,ó he says.

And then he's gone.