

THE GATEWAY
CHRONICLES
BOOK 5

THE SCROLL

BY
K. B. HOYLE

TWCS 
PUBLISHING HOUSE

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ALSO BY K. B. HOYLE

Book One of *The Gateway Chronicles: The Six*
Book Two of *The Gateway Chronicles: The Oracle*
Book Three of *The Gateway Chronicles: The White Thread*
Book Four of *The Gateway Chronicles: The Enchanted*

“What can you ever really know of other people’s souls—of their temptations, their opportunities, their struggles? One soul in the whole creation you do know: and it is the only one whose fate is placed in your hands.”

C. S. Lewis

PROLOGUE

THE BOY AND THE FIRE

Six Years Ago

Colin couldn’t breathe. His father’s hands were iron gloves around his throat, threatening to do it, to finally kill him. Black dots danced before his eyes, and the side of the building slid out of focus as laughter and a babble of conversation joined with mangled strains of *Für Elise* not ten feet away.

His mind was screaming. *Come outside! Somebody open the door.*

But they didn’t. Nobody ever came to his aid. They all hated him, like his father did.

His feet twitched, his toes just brushing the ferns in the underbrush, until his dad released him to fall in a crumpled heap on the ground. Colin dragged a ragged breath into his lungs and rolled over, keeping his father always in his sight. He knew what was coming next—the explanation, the ranting and raving, and then more pain.

“You embarrassed me,” Lawrence Mackaby said as he raked his hands through his golden-blond hair. “*Embarrassed* me! How dare you make me look bad in front of a potential client?” He fumbled his cigarette lighter from his pocket and Colin flinched, cowering among the leaves. So it was to be burns again. He still bore the scars on his chest from the last time.

His father lit a cigarette and took a long drag, his hands shaking with rage. Another burst of laughter came from inside the rec hall, and Colin imagined the potential client, the wealthy parent of some camper, waiting on his dad’s return and assuming Colin’s dad had taken him outside merely for a lecture on polite behavior.

“If I lose his business because of you, you’re going to wish you had never been born,” Mr. Mackaby said, his voice eerily calm. “Stand up.”

Colin struggled to obey, but his clothes were caught in the underbrush,

holding him down as though conspiring against his father's command. Mr. Mackaby grabbed Colin by the shoulder and wrenched him up so violently Colin stumbled and almost fell again. "Stand up straight and face me like a man. Stop *crying* like a girl!"

Was he crying? He hadn't realized.

His father pointed at his chest with the cigarette. "Lift your shirt."

Colin met his father's eyes with a dull stare. *Just hit me*, he thought. *Hit me and be done with it*. The blows he could take. Sometimes he even savored the pain, imagining himself absorbing it and storing it away for some future day when he'd get his revenge. But the burns grew worse even after the fire was gone. They sizzled and festered, and they smelled of cooked flesh.

Colin fingered the hem of his shirt, not taking his eyes off his father's face. If he did it slowly enough, maybe his father would grow impatient and hit him instead.

Mr. Mackaby lunged forward and ripped Colin's shirt up and over his head so that he was blinded by fabric and his arms were pinned above him. The searing pain of the hot ash against his skin took his breath away, and then he cried out and kicked with all his might. He felt his foot connect and heard his father double over with a grunt.

Colin fell into the undergrowth, flailing against his shirt as he tried to regain his sight. He heard his father curse, and the smell of smoke intensified. He yanked his shirt back down over his chest in time to see a pile of dry pine needles go up in a blaze of fire. His father cursed again and kicked at the pile, sending the flames skittering toward the rec hall.

Colin coughed as the smoke invaded his lungs. The small fire was already blackening the siding of the building. It was his father's cigarette, his father's fault, but that wouldn't matter. Like a snake, he'd slither out of it, and Colin would be blamed.

So he ran.

His father called his name, shouted for him to come back, but Colin kept running. Going to jail for arson, or wherever they sent eleven-year-old criminals, would be worse than any punishment his father could concoct for him. He crashed through the underbrush, not paying attention to where he was going. The air around him cleared of smoke just as screams echoed from the rec hall.

But they'd get out. There were plenty of exits and tall windows. None of *them* really knew what it was to be trapped.

Before long, he glimpsed the silvery sheen of the lake through the trees and recognized where he was—the Cedar Point Trail, far removed from the chaos behind him. He slowed to a walk and caught up against a tree. His chest burned from smoke inhalation and exertion, and the actual burn on his skin felt as though it was still on fire. He bent double and held on to the tree for support as he took deep breaths. The deeper he breathed, the more his eyes welled with tears and, before he knew it, he was sobbing and clutching

at the tree bark as though his fingernails were claws.

I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, he thought, wishing his father could feel the power of his oath and burn under it as Colin had burned under the cigarette. "I'll make you sorry someday," Colin said, spitting the words like acid. "I swear it, someday I'll be powerful, and I'll make you pay!"

A chill of cold air washed down his back, and he straightened and stilled his sobs and his breathing. The forest had gone silent, and fear invaded his mind where rage had been a moment before. Colin squinted at what looked like a shadow, hovering in the woods, not belonging to any of the trees around it. It was indistinct and shapeless, but it was there.

"Hello?"

Another burst of cold air swept around his neck, and with it came words so quiet they might not have been words at all, but thoughts invading his own.

You asked for power?

Colin shivered and took a step toward the shadow. "Are you talking to me?"

That chill again. The voice. *Power is my specialty. Who has hurt you? I can help you to make it right.*

"My—my father."

Do you desire to hurt him back?

Colin squared his shoulders. "Yes."

It will take time, and if I help you, you must promise also to help me.

"I won't have to do anything . . . *illegal*, will I?" Colin suppressed the voice in the back of his head that said revenge on his father would certainly be illegal.

The shadow began to fade.

"Wait! I'll help you."

Promise.

"I promise."

The shadow darkened and then came near him. *I've been waiting a long time for you. I'm glad we're going to be friends.*

"Sure." Colin's teeth chattered as the shadow's approach brought a renewed burst of cold. "What are you? Do you have a name?"

My name is Tselloch. Let that be enough for now.

CHAPTER 1

CHANGES AT CEDAR COVE

Darcy ran into Sam's room, slammed the door, and stood with her back pressed against it. She clasped her sweaty palms in front of her mouth and felt for a moment as though she might collapse.

"Darcy? What's wrong?" Sam looked up from where she sat on the floor. She was digging through her bottom dresser drawer and had a towel wrapped around her hair, still wet from the rain. "What are you doing in here? You look pale. Are you going to be sick?" Sam sprang and hurried to Darcy's side as Amelia turned away from the window, her shoulders in a dejected slouch.

"What's going on? We just got back."

"Amelia, help me! Darcy's going to pass out—"

"No, I'm not . . . I'm really not." Darcy straightened and put a hand on Sam's shoulder as Sam reached out to steady her. "It's just, you wouldn't believe . . ." Darcy took several steps into the middle of the room and then stood and stared at her hands. "I went to talk to Simon just now."

"*What?*" Amelia paled with either fear or fury, Darcy couldn't tell which.

"I'm sorry, but after everything we went through this year in Alitheia, it just made me so mad to see him abandoning you like that! I thought, since you already told him about it, why not at least back up?"

Amelia sat down hard on the windowsill and pursed her lips, her eyes wide.

"But that's not why you're like this, though, is it?" Sam asked.

Darcy spun to face her. "I did magic. I didn't mean to, it just happened! And Simon saw."

"You did *magic*? Like . . . *earth* magic? How could you have? We're—we're *here*. Magic doesn't exist here!" Sam's voice entered a register usually only discernible by dogs and small mammals.

“Simon saw?” Amelia whispered.

“Yes, and yes, and . . . I don’t know how it happened, unless the veil between the worlds is getting thinner.”

Knock knock. “You girls decent?” Perry asked, his voice muffled through the door.

“Come in,” Sam said, still staring at Darcy.

Perry pushed the door open. “Hey, Amelia, Simon is looking for you. Says he wants to talk. Looks like he’s been punched in the n—” Perry glanced around at the three girls and revised his statement. “Uh, face.”

“Okay,” Amelia said, breathless. She walked past Darcy and then paused in the doorway. “I’ll get the story from him, I guess.”

“What story?” Perry asked when she was gone. He leaned into the room and tugged on the corner of Sam’s towel so that it fell over her eyes.

“Quit.” Sam yanked the towel the rest of the way off, balled it up, and hugged it to her chest. “This is serious. Darcy just did magic, *here.*”

“What?” Perry broke into a disbelieving grin. “Come on.”

Darcy furrowed her brow. Raising a hand, she felt for the particles in the door, just as she’d done with the phonebook downstairs, and tugged. The door swung out of Perry’s grasp, and he stumbled forward as he lost his grip.

Perry righted himself and fixed Darcy with a severe expression.

“Oh my gosh, Darcy!” Sam said and then looked at Perry. “What do you think?”

“The veil between the worlds is thin around an open gateway,” he said.

“Right. But I’ve never been able to do *that* before,” Darcy said.

“Do you think Tselloch’s completed his gateway behind East Mooring?” Sam asked, her voice trembling.

Perry stared at Darcy another moment before turning to Sam. “I’ll take Dean and go check it out. Don’t worry, you don’t have to go out there. If we’re not back in twenty minutes, send the cavalry.” He ducked away, leaving the door open.

“I feel like I should go, too,” Darcy whispered, but she couldn’t move because Sam stepped forward and crushed her in a hug.

“I wanted a break,” Sam said, her voice muffled against Darcy’s shoulder. “I’m sorry for feeling that way, but I just wanted to come home and be done with things for a while.”

“I shouldn’t have showed you.”

“No.” Sam pulled away and wiped at her eyes. “You had to tell me—and show me—of course you did. It’s got to mean something.”

“Not necessarily. It wouldn’t be the first time something magical has happened here in our world at Cedar Cove. Think about my first night here when I felt those tingles on the beach and felt all . . . supernaturally energized.”

“Yeah, but that was something we might expect with the gateway nearby. Although you should still ask Rubidius, to be sure. But your being able to

perform magic is something different.” Sam was talking at a fast, nervous clip, and Darcy knew her thoughts were on Perry and Dean and what they might find behind East Mooring.

“Are you sure this is something new? I mean, do you think you’ve always been able to do that here and you just never realized until now?” Sam asked.

“No way. Downstairs—it was like something switched on and suddenly I could see the particles in the wood on the banister, almost as if I hadn’t ever left Ormiskos Castle and I was there instead of here.”

“It’s like the worlds are blurring together,” Sam said. “Jeez, Darcy, what if we’re almost to the end?”

Darcy frowned. “The end?”

“Of—of everything. Of going to Alitheia, of fighting Tselloch.”

Darcy blinked, silent.

“I mean, if everything is starting to blur together from there to here, somebody’s bound to notice eventually. You were able to show Simon—”

“And really freak him out,” Darcy said.

“—but somehow I think things won’t be allowed to get to that point. With other people, I mean.”

“Why not? It’s real, isn’t it? We know, Eleanor knew, Colin knows. Why not other people, too?”

“Can you imagine what would happen if the rest of the world found out about all this?”

“If Tselloch completes his gateway, everybody *will* find out.”

Sam retreated and sat on her bunk with her knees pulled up to her chest. Darcy put her hands on her hips and hung her head, waiting either for Sam to continue or for Perry and Dean to return. Somewhere in the recesses of her awareness, she heard the dinner bell clang, but neither she nor Sam moved.

Finally, Perry and Dean came back.

“Nothing,” Perry said without preamble. “No black fog or weird coldness or anything. Just a pile of rocks.”

“Did you see Colin?” Darcy asked.

“Nope. If he’s around, he’s sure not showing his face.”

“Whatever is up with Darcy’s magic, I think it’s safe to say it has nothing to do with Tselloch’s gateway,” Dean said. He rubbed a hand over his neatly shorn hair, back to military regulation length now that they’d returned from Alitheia.

“Sam?” Mrs. Palm called from the hallway, and a moment later she opened the door. “*Here* you all are. My goodness, why haven’t any of you changed out of your wet clothes? Sam, I was serious when I told you to get cleaned up. The rest of you”—she looked around—“what on earth is going on? Your parents are all wondering where you are. Lewis is the only one in the dining hall, and dinner started ten minutes ago. Where’s Amelia?”

“She’s out talking with Simon. Mom, I’m sorry. We’re just distracted

with something. I'll change my clothes and come right down."

Mrs. Palm gave them another exasperated look and said, "Well hurry up. I'll go tell all your parents you're still alive."

"Sorry!" Sam mouthed as soon as her mom's back was turned.

"It's all good," Perry whispered, even though Mrs. Palm had already exited. "I get chewed out by my mom twelve times a day. Let's go eat dinner and not worry about this till later. We did *just* get back. Darcy's probably still feeling the effects of the gateway out at Whitetail Point. Who knows, a little magic here might come in handy."



Darcy tossed and turned that night, but not because she was having nightmares. She lay up on her bunk in the small camp room of the lodge thinking only of Tellius, while her mom, dad, and brother snored softly around her. She should have been happy to be with her family again. Although they didn't know it, she had been gone for a year. But while she had missed her family, she missed Tellius in a different way this time around. She felt an almost physical pain anticipating the year that would pass before she could see him again. She loved him and he loved her. But their happiness had been quickly chased away by her resolution that she couldn't marry him. She would spare him the pain of the death of a wife and protect him from his own death, if that was indeed what "twice wed" meant.

Darcy kicked the blankets off as she struggled to breathe. It was late, but not so late she'd get in trouble for roaming the halls. She shimmied off the top bunk and tiptoed across the floor. She snagged her sweatshirt from the peg on the wall and slid it over her head before reaching for the doorknob. She felt too claustrophobic in the tiny room after her spacious chambers in the west wing of Ormiskos castle. She needed to get into a less-confined space.

Not even bothering with her sandals, she padded down the hallway, her feet making no sound on the worn carpet. The lodge was quiet but not silent. A few people talked in hushed tones in alcoves along the walls, and the icemaker in the dining hall below turned on and deposited its load with a muffled clunking. Darcy continued down the stairs, following the noise of the icemaker and the hum of the safety lights that were always left on. The air was cooler in the dining hall with its high ceilings, and Darcy breathed deep and went to the windows overlooking the boardwalk and the lake. The patio lights were off, but the light of the moon washed the water in pale ripples. Darcy leaned her forehead against the glass and closed her eyes. *Tellius.*

A snort followed by soft laughter drew her attention, and she opened her eyes and turned her head. The partition that could separate a wing of the

dining hall off into a separate room was drawn almost closed, and light poured out of the crack along the wall where it hadn't been latched. The familiar laughter came again, and Darcy walked over to the partition and peered into the light.

"Sam? Lewis?" She drew the partition open and stepped into the wing.

"Darcy! I thought you went to bed," Sam said. She was leaning back in a chair at one of the round tables. Lewis sat across from her.

"I did."

"Couldn't sleep?"

Darcy shook her head.

Sam gave her a sympathetic smile. "Come sit." She patted the chair next to her. "I was telling Lewis about the time I fell asleep in Mrs. McGuffey's class last year and you had to catch me when I started to fall out of my desk."

Darcy smiled at the memory. "You never told Lewis that story?"

Sam shook her head.

"You guys sure don't talk much for being boyfriend and girlfriend."

"Actually"—Sam shot a look at Lewis—"ex boyfriend and girlfriend now. We just broke up."

Darcy raised her eyebrows. "What about what you told me in Alitheia? About, you know, not wanting to lose his friendship?"

"Sam and I could never *not* be friends," Lewis said. "I love Sam, but she's like a sister to me. I thought maybe I liked her for a while, but . . . it was just too weird. I mean, we used to play in each other's bathtubs together!"

Sam groaned and covered her face.

"We didn't plan on doing this tonight," Sam said, "but we were sitting and talking about the year and everything that happened, and about how you and Tellius are *clearly* made for each other, and it just came out."

Darcy looked from one to the other. Sam wore a tired smile on her face and Lewis looked relaxed for the first time in weeks. "All right then," she said. "I'm glad you got it over with, because it was getting really weird."

Sam laughed. "Sorry about that."

The partition opened wider, and Perry and Dean stepped in, both wearing sweats. "Fancy meeting you guys here," Perry said.

"Hey." Darcy cast them a puzzled look. "It's almost midnight. What's up?"

"Tradition," Perry said. He slid out a chair and turned it around before sitting and resting his elbows on the table, a deck of cards in one hand. "I can never sleep the night we get back from Alitheia, so I usually hang out down here and play solitaire until I get tired enough to fall asleep. I saw Dean walking on the boardwalk, so I invited him to come along." He pulled a cola out of his sweatshirt pocket and popped it open. "I didn't know you all were planning on crashing my party."

"I don't think caffeine is going to help you get sleepy," Sam said. "And

we were here first, so I think you're actually crashing *our* party."

Perry took a swig of his soda before answering. "Oh yeah? Anything interesting going on at this party of yours?"

Sam blushed and looked down. Darcy said, "Well, Sam and Lewis just broke up."

Perry raised his eyebrows and almost smiled, but then he schooled his features into a blank, uninterested expression. "I guess it's just a day for heartbreak," he said and looked at Darcy.

Darcy drew her brows together, hurt that he would reference her recent separation from Tellius in such an offhand way.

"Not exactly heartbreak," Lewis said, scratching his temple and looking embarrassed. "More like relief, actually."

"Hm." Perry began to deal the cards, acting indifferent. "Hearts, everyone? Someone will need to be on a team."

"I'll team with Darcy," Sam said. "I'm terrible at this game."

Darcy felt a stab of annoyance. She was ultra-competitive at cards and hated being on a team with anyone. Still, she knew she shouldn't be so uncharitable toward her best friend.

"You do this every year . . . by yourself?" Darcy asked as Perry continued to deal.

"Yep. Helps me to wind down."

"You know what *doesn't* help me to wind down?" Dean said, and his tone of voice caused them all to look up. Dean lifted his chin toward the window and stood.

Darcy looked out the window and followed suit so fast her chair skittered out behind her and fell over.

Colin Mackaby stood on the other side with his nose almost flattened against the screen. The light from the dining hall reflected eerily off his eyes and washed his face in a pale yellow light.

Sam gasped and backed all the way up to the wall, clutching at Darcy to keep upright.

Colin stared at them without moving, and then he smiled and turned to walk away.

"Oh no he doesn't!" Perry threw his cards down and charged out of the wing and to the patio door. The sound of Perry smashing into the crash bar echoed in the dining hall. Dean was fast on Perry's heels, and Darcy and Lewis followed, dragging Sam with them.

They caught up to Perry behind the lodge, just off the patio. He had Colin backed up against the side of the building, his forearm jammed beneath Colin's chin and his other arm cocked out, fist ready.

"Stop!" Darcy threw her hands out and caught each of them with her magic, forcing them apart.

Perry stumbled backward, looking affronted, and Colin slid a few inches down the wall, never taking his eyes off Perry. He seemed unsurprised that Darcy could perform her magic at Cedar Cove now.

“You broke my sword!” Perry shouted at Colin. “And you tried to give Darcy to Tselloch. She should have let Lontari kill you, you worthless piece of—”

“Perry, stop it!” Darcy shoved him hard. “You’re not helping anything.”

“You should listen to her,” Colin said.

Perry made to lunge at Colin again, but Dean held him back.

“You have no idea what you’re dealing with,” Colin said. He looked at each of them in turn. “It amazes me, how in the dark Pateros keeps you.”

“If you know so much, why don’t you enlighten us?” Dean said.

“You don’t even know how a gateway is formed,” Colin said, continuing as though Dean hadn’t spoken.

“And I suppose you do?” Darcy asked, trying to keep her voice level.

“Wouldn’t you like to know?”

“Yeah, I would, actually.”

“Darcy,” Sam said. “I don’t think this is the best way to learn—”

Darcy shook her off. “We need to know, both for Alitheia and for here. If he knows how, maybe he can help us.”

“Why would he help us? He’s working with Tselloch. He’s obviously trying to help Tselloch take over this world as well as Alitheia,” Lewis said.

“He doesn’t know anything,” Dean said. “He just wants us to think he does.”

“Of course I do! I’m part of it.” Colin’s expression became manic. “I’m more a part of it than any of you ever will be. I’m destined to rule Alitheia, not Darcy, not any of you, I—”

“Colin, Tselloch fed me that lie, too—”

“It’s *not* a lie!” he screamed, and spit flew from his mouth.

“Darcy saved your life,” Sam said, speaking soothingly. “Twice. She’s trying to help you.”

“She’s trying to help herself.”

Darcy huffed and rolled her eyes. There didn’t seem to be any way of breaking through to him.

“You shouldn’t judge her,” Sam said, pointing at Colin.

“If I wanted advice from a dumb blonde, I would have asked for it.”

Perry broke free of Dean’s grip and punched Colin across the face. Colin’s head recoiled against the siding, then he ducked so Perry’s second fist struck the side of the building instead. He crouched, spun, and leapt onto Perry’s back before throwing an arm around Perry’s neck and bringing Perry to his knees with a chokehold. Dean leapt forward and grappled with Colin’s shoulders.

“Do something!” Sam shouted and grabbed Darcy’s arm.

“I can’t if you’re holding on to me like that!” Darcy wriggled out of Sam’s grasp.

“What’s going on out here?” an adult shouted across the grounds.

“Help, please!” Sam waved her arms.

A flashlight clicked on and two men ran their direction. “Boys, break it

up! Boys!”

Perry shoved up with his legs and slammed Colin against the side of the building. Colin let out a sharp exhalation of pain, and Dean pried his arms off Perry’s neck and pinned them to his sides. Perry spun, coughing and gasping, and punched Colin across the face again.

“Stop, Perry.” Sam grabbed his wrist as he wound back again. “Dean’s got him. He’s done.”

The two men arrived—a camp counselor and a man they didn’t know—and Dean released Colin, who staggered and cupped his bleeding nose.

“Are you okay, son?” the camp counselor asked.

Colin spat out a wad of blood and nodded.

“Aren’t you Frank’s boy?” the other man asked, shining his flashlight in Perry’s face. “Do you make it a habit to team up on someone two to one?” He shifted the light to Dean’s face.

“They didn’t exactly team up,” Sam said. “Colin was choking Perry, and Dean pulled him off.”

The man looked around at them. “I don’t know what started all this, but you ought to be ashamed of yourselves. Do you need the medic?” he asked Colin.

Colin spat again. “No.”

“It’s after curfew anyways,” the camp counselor said. “You shouldn’t even be out here. I’ll have to report this to the camp administrator.”

“And I’m telling your father, Perry,” the other man said.

Perry straightened and looked the man in the eyes. “Yes, sir.”

“Now get inside, all of you.”

They stepped up onto the boardwalk, and the boards were cool and prickly with sand beneath Darcy’s bare feet. Colin hopped off the other side and headed toward the forest.

“Hey! I told you to get inside,” the counselor said.

“My family owns East Mooring,” Colin said, turning back.

Sam stopped walking and frowned. “Owns it? Cedar Cove doesn’t sell off their cabins.”

Colin’s expression became smug. “They do when they’re having financial trouble. So now I can come here whenever I want, any time of the year. In fact, you could say I have *twice as much* time here as anybody else.”

“Right, well, get off to your cabin then,” the counselor said. “You’re still not allowed to roam the camp this late at night.”

“And put some ice on that nose,” the other man added.

Colin guffawed and melted into the darkness of the trees.

“So now they *own* East Mooring?” Sam whispered to Darcy as they trooped back inside. “That can’t be good.”

“No, but there’s nothing we can do about it,” Darcy said. “What do you think he meant by having ‘twice as much time here as anybody else?’”

“Probably that he can be here any time of year he wants, not just

summer,” Dean said. “Perry, your knuckles—you’re bleeding.”

“I see it,” Perry said. He rotated his shoulder and grimaced, and then he held his hand before his face. “Can you get me some ice?”

“Sure.”

Lewis leaned against a table and watched Dean walk to the icemaker, his expression distant. The two men were still standing on the patio just outside the door, talking together. Darcy figured they would stay there until the rest of them left the dining hall and went to bed.

“What if . . .” Darcy crossed her arms and studied her bare feet, dirty from the unplanned trek outside.

“What?” Sam asked.

“What if time *doesn't* stop when we go to Alitheia?” Darcy looked up. “What if it just keeps going?”

“Do you mean like, we’re time travelers as well as interworld travelers?” Lewis asked.

Darcy grimaced. “Sort of. I mean . . . we’ve always *assumed* time stopped, but we’ve never really known. The first time I entered Alitheia, I came back after half an hour and Sam didn’t realize I’d been gone. So I assumed some sort of supernatural time stoppage had occurred. But isn’t it just as likely that the half hour I spent in Alitheia also passed in our world, and when I stepped back through the gateway, time went back to the moment I’d left?”

“That would mean our families discover us missing every year—that they think we’re dead every year!” Sam shuddered. “I don’t even want to consider that. Why do you bring it up?”

“Because of what Colin said. And because there has to be some explanation for how he’s been able to get to Alitheia while we’re there. If time here *stopped* and our entire trip only took the blink of an eye, he would never have the time to get through while we were there.”

Dean returned with the bag of ice, and Perry held it to his knuckles. “But he’s never actually been *in* Alitheia before, at least not until this past year. Remember? Tselloch just borrowed his image to appear as Colin to you,” Perry said.

“Yeah, but like you said, until this past year. That was *him*—*he* came through that gateway outside of Fobos. He was physically in Alitheia. How could he have done that if time here stops while we’re gone? He couldn’t have.”

“But if his family owns that cabin now and they can come here whenever they want,” Sam said, realization dawning, “then they could have been here at Cedar Cove several weeks ago, while we were in Alitheia. Colin could have gone through Tselloch’s gateway and then through Tselloch’s world to get into Alitheia when we were there. Oh my gosh.” She sat, as though her legs suddenly couldn’t hold her. “Darcy . . . our families!”

Lewis paled, but he shook his head. “It really makes no difference to

them, Sam.”

“How can you say that?”

“No, listen. If this is true, then they don’t remember the year they spent without us. For them, it’s like the slate is wiped clean. They start over.”

“What, like we come back and everyone goes on to live an alternate reality?” Perry asked.

“Something like that, maybe,” Lewis said.

“Why do *we* remember both years?” Dean asked.

“Because we spend one of them in Alitheia. We couldn’t exactly forget about that, or we’d have to start all over again every year,” Darcy said. She rubbed her face and dragged her hands through her hair. “Or maybe it’s because we belong to both worlds. I don’t know.”

“Colin remembers, too, doesn’t he?” Sam asked. “Why would *he* remember?”

Darcy squinted. “Maybe because of his connection with Tselloch?”

“Time travel.” Lewis muttered the words. “We need a physicist in here to explain this.”

“All I know is it’s awful if it’s true!” Sam rocked back and forth. “Even though our families don’t remember, I still feel bad thinking about what they go through every year. This is going to make it really difficult to leave for Alitheia next year.”

“*If* it’s true,” Darcy said. “Colin knows. I’ll get it out of him one way or another.”

“Don’t end up alone with him, Darcy,” Perry said. “If he can get from here to there, he can still deliver you to Tselloch. In fact, don’t go *anywhere* alone for the rest of this week.”

Darcy rolled her eyes. “I’m not *that* stupid.”

Lewis cocked an eyebrow at her.

“Well, okay, so I *was*, but that was before our last trip to Alitheia. I won’t go running anymore. I honestly don’t feel the need to now. It’s like . . . I don’t know . . . I feel less despairing and more determined. I couldn’t sleep tonight because I was anticipating how much I’m going to miss Tellius, and because I’m worried about him, not because I was worried about having nightmares.”

“You came down here alone,” Sam said.

“But this is the *lodge*. Do you really think Colin would kidnap me out of the lodge?”

Lewis’s expression became condescending.

“Oh, all right. I’ll be extra careful, and I won’t even roam the lodge by myself. Satisfied?”

“Hold her to it, Sam,” Lewis said.

Darcy huffed. “Am I allowed to go to the bathroom by myself?”

“I didn’t think girls ever went to the bathroom by themselves,” Lewis said.

“Ha ha. Look, Sam, Lewis is suddenly an expert on girls.”

Sam giggled.

“But seriously, Darcy,” Lewis said, sobering. “Just be careful, okay?”

“Being careful is going to make it really difficult to get any useful information out of Colin—”

“Promise, Darcy,” Sam said.

“Okay, okay. I promise.”

CHAPTER 2

ELEANOR'S GIFT

Tellius. Darcy came fully awake in the darkness of her bedroom and blinked up at the murky ceiling lost in the shadows above her. She breathed evenly and tried to squelch her sense of unease. She hadn't been dreaming. Something was wrong. It wasn't a magic sensation—all her magical ability was lost when her family had left Cedar Cove. This was intuition.

She sat up and swung her feet to the floor, shivering in the coldness. It was late March, just a couple of weeks after her seventeenth birthday, and snow still blanketed the streets outside. She hunched over her knees and rubbed her arms. This was a practice of futility on her right arm, as usual. The coldness that had begun in her fingertips in the dungeon long ago had now spread almost to her shoulder. She wouldn't last much longer, although she had no idea what would happen if the coldness overtook her heart while she was in her own world. She couldn't become a tsellodrin here. Maybe she would just die.

But she wasn't concerned with her coldness at the moment. What had awoken her was the uncanny sense that something was wrong with *Tellius*. Somehow, she knew he was in danger.

She shivered again and put her forehead to her knees, hugging her legs now instead of her arms. *Please, Pateros, please . . . please help him.*

She took a deep breath and felt just slightly less out of control. Still, she wouldn't get back to sleep now, even if she tried. She pulled on her robe and went downstairs. The street outside the front bay window was turning gray as dawn crept nearer. Darcy brewed herself a cup of coffee in the kitchen and curled up in the big pink armchair in the living room to watch the sunrise.

It was Saturday, so she didn't have to be up for school. Her mom would wonder why she was up so early, would ask questions, and as usual, Darcy

wouldn't have satisfactory responses for her. No, she couldn't explain why her right hand was always cold. No, she couldn't say where she got the scar on her left palm. No, she couldn't explain why she excelled at fencing and archery. And no, she wouldn't say why she wouldn't date.

She didn't act like a typical teenager. She knew it, and her mother noticed it, but there was nothing she could do about that. She didn't *feel* seventeen. She felt twenty, and she was in love with a king who ruled a kingdom in a parallel, magical realm. But her mom would have her committed to a nuthouse if she heard her say *that*.

Darcy sipped her coffee and stared with blank eyes out the window. Every now and then a car passed by, making a shushing sound through the slush on the roads. A blob of red appeared on her driveway, just visible in the dim light and obscured by the condensation on the glass. Darcy watched it bob around outside for a full minute before she realized she *knew* that red blob.

She jumped up and ran to the door before opening it and poking her head out into the frigid morning air. "Sam! What are you *doing*?"

Sam, wearing her red winter cap with earflaps and tassels, was hopping from foot to foot at the bottom of the stairs and hugging herself to stay warm. "You're up already! Great!" She leapt up the steps and bustled past Darcy into the entryway.

"Yeah . . . how did you know?" Darcy closed the door as delicately as she could, aware of how the sound would carry upstairs to her parents' room.

"I didn't know, not exactly, but I thought maybe." Sam blew on her hands and then sniffed. "I snuck out. I had to see you as soon as possible."

"Why? Please start making some sense."

Sam dug her hand into her coat pocket and pulled out a metal square. "Look what showed up in my pillowcase."

Darcy stared dumbly as her vision tunneled in on the object. Although she'd once owned it here, it had become a part of her other reality, the one that existed in Alitheia. To see it in her world after all this time sent chills up her back.

She took the compact and sat on the pink ottoman in the living room. "You said this showed up in your *pillowcase*?"

Sam took the chair opposite Darcy. "Yeah. I rolled over on top of it in my sleep. Of course, I woke up right away. I couldn't believe my eyes. You didn't bring it back with you, did you?"

"No. It's always stayed in Alitheia."

"But it belongs here, doesn't it? Didn't it belong to your grandma?"

"Yes, but it was Eleanor's first, remember?" Darcy turned it over and rubbed the initials *E. M. S.* with her thumb. "Why now?" she whispered. "Why would this suddenly appear—and in your pillowcase of all places—in the middle of March?"

"Well, why are you up? Maybe it has something to do with that. I mean, I *am* the Companion, and it's my job to help and support you. If this showed

up now, it must mean you need it now.” Sam pulled off her hat and ran her fingers through her hair, mussing up the curls.

“I’m up because I had a . . . I don’t know, a *sense*, I guess, that something is wrong with Tellius. I think he’s in danger.”

Sam wrinkled her nose. “But this compact can’t help with that. It shows your inner reflection, and that’s all, right?”

Darcy clicked it open and looked in the reflective surface. “As far as I know. But that part doesn’t work here. Maybe it would at Cedar Cove where the magic is leaking through, but not here.”

“Can you think of *any* other reason why it might have appeared?”

Darcy closed her eyes, struggling to recall the last time she’d seen the mirror compact in Alitheia. She’d talked with Eleanor about it, but what had happened next?

She opened her eyes as the memory came sifting back. “I gave it to Eleanor because she wanted to use it. Or do something with it. No, wait . . . she told me she and my grandma used to pretend the compact was a window between worlds. You *don’t* think . . .”

“Try it!” Sam came around and sat beside her on the ottoman. “Maybe she enchanted it to actually *be* a window between the worlds.”

“Okay, but how do I—”

“Just experiment. Here.” Sam leaned over Darcy’s shoulder and spoke into the mirror. “Alitheia,” she said, but nothing happened. She sat back and frowned.

“That might be too big of an area to show. And maybe it shows people, not places.” Darcy held the compact up to her face and whispered, “Tellius.”

They both gasped as the surface of the mirror rippled like water that had been disrupted. The ripples smoothed out, and there he was, his face taking up the frame of the mirror. His expression was creased with worry, and he had dark circles beneath his eyes. Darcy squeaked and almost dropped the compact. Her hands shook so hard that Sam placed her fingers over them to hold them still.

“I—I can’t believe that—that I’m looking at him!” She placed a hand over her mouth. “Can he see me? Can he hear us?”

“I don’t think so,” Sam whispered. She touched the surface of the mirror. It was solid, like a miniature television screen. “Look, his lips are moving, but we can’t hear him saying anything.”

“Do you think he’s okay?” Darcy’s voice warbled and she burst into tears. “I’m sorry! I miss him so much!”

Sam put her arm around Darcy’s shoulders. “It’s okay. It’s *okay*. I understand. And I really think he’s okay, too. See?” Glimpses of the background became visible as Tellius moved around, and Sam pointed to the edge of the image. “That’s Ormiskos Castle, recognize the shelves? He’s in the library.”

Darcy nodded and wiped her nose on the back of her hand, starting to

gain control of herself. “Thank you, Eleanor,” she whispered.

The image flickered and went out, leaving the mirror reflecting only their faces and the white of the living room wall behind them.

“What happened?” Darcy shook it, then said again, “Tellius.” But his face did not reappear.

“Maybe it timed out or something,” Sam said. “Eleanor must have had enough difficulty getting an enchantment to work this far from Cedar Cove, let alone one that would last for a long time. Keep it and try again in a few hours.”

Darcy sighed and nodded. She closed the compact and held it to her heart, which was still beating fast.

“Do you feel any better? This must have shown up now to give you some assurance. Maybe Pateros doesn’t want you to go back to beating yourself up and running every night just to be able to sleep.”

“Yeah, maybe. I do feel better . . . somewhat. At least I know he’s alive and he’s at the castle. It doesn’t mean he’s not in danger, though.”

“No, but don’t dwell on that, Darcy. There’s nothing you can do to help him until we go back. We only have three and a half more months. Just hang in there.”

A door opened on the landing above the staircase and Darcy’s mom called down the stairwell, “Darcy? Are you down there? Who are you talking to at this hour?”

“Shoot.” Darcy looked at Sam and whispered, “How can I explain this?” Sam shrugged. “I, uh . . . couldn’t sleep, Mom,” Darcy said. “Sorry if I woke you.”

“Is someone down there with you?”

“Yes, it’s Sam.”

Silence. Then Mrs. Pennington descended into the foyer, wrapped in her fluffy pink bathrobe. “Sam. And I suppose you couldn’t sleep either and just *happened* to come over to see if Darcy was up?”

“Actually, yes.” Sam gave a nervous giggle.

Darcy’s mom looked back and forth between them for several seconds. “I swear, girls, you do the strangest things. Sometimes I wonder if you live on another planet.”

“I’m sorry we woke you, Mrs. Pennington. I shouldn’t have come over so early. I’ll go home.”

“Oh, never mind, Sam. You’re always welcome here.” She yawned and shook her head. “Just be *quiet*, you two. Why don’t you go talk in the family room, hm? I’d like to get a few more hours of sleep.” Her mom turned away but then paused with one foot on the step. “Since you’re up, Darcy, your father is going to want you to help him out at the store today.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Darcy said.

Mrs. Pennington gave her one last lingering look, her forehead creasing, and then she climbed the stairs, muttering under her breath.



Darcy worked at the store that day—dusting and vacuuming and polishing and trying not to think about the compact tucked into the pocket of her jeans. She was barely able to keep from obsessively checking it all day long. But later that night, when she was alone in her room, she pulled it out and spoke his name.

Tellius's face rippled back into view, and Darcy smiled and touched the surface. His expression was grim, and he appeared to be bending over and reading or writing something. She counted the freckles on his nose and studied the movement of his eyes as he skimmed his parchment. She recognized now that he looked older. She hadn't noticed it that morning, but he was eighteen now and almost a year and a half into his reign.

The image blinked out again, but Darcy didn't feel the same sense of despair she had that morning. She lay back on her bed and flung one arm up over her head. She clasped the compact in her other hand and rested it on her chest. "Thank you," she whispered again.

She woke up that way the next morning, fully dressed on top of her comforter with one arm up over her head and the other hanging over the edge of the bed, empty. She rolled to the side and sat up, feeling groggy and discombobulated. Her hand closed on thin air, and her heart pounded. She dropped to her knees beside her bed and spotted the compact where it had fallen just under the sideboard.

She folded it between her hands and exhaled, relieved that Tellius was alive and well, before climbing back onto her bed and opening it again. She was about to speak his name when she noticed the frayed edge of a sliver of parchment sticking out the crack at the edge of the mirror. She frowned and tried to work it out with her fingernail, but it was wedged in beyond her grip. After several minutes, she finally used her tweezers to snag the end of it. She pulled carefully so as not to tear it.

She sat back on her bed and unfolded the tiny note. The flowing handwriting belonged to Eleanor, and the words were crammed onto both sides of the paper. Darcy turned it one way, then another, trying to find where it began. Finally she found "Dearest Darcy," and put her nose close to the paper to read.

"I hope this compact finds you well. The enchantment I wrought upon it was difficult, especially in my current state. Still, I know you are in love with Tellius and that your heart yearns for Alitheia all the long year you are away. My parting gift for you is this mirror between the worlds. Speak the name of the person you wish to see, and he or she will appear. It will work in both directions, so when you return to Alitheia, you can view your family, should you please."

Darcy coughed as though she'd been punched in the gut. So it was true. Time did not stop while they were in Alitheia. Eleanor must have suspected

all along.

She read on.

“The enchantment will work easily in Alitheia, but in your world it will be much more difficult the farther you are from the gateway. Use it infrequently to keep the magic intact and to keep yourself from growing obsessed with it and losing touch with your world. I do not know when or how the compact will come to you, but I am certain it will be when you need it most. With all my love, and with deepest regards for your future marriage to Tellius, Eleanor.”

Darcy fingered the note and bit her lip. *My future marriage to Tellius.* But there would be no wedding, at least not anytime soon. And with the Oracle’s addendum that she’d be twice wed and twice dead, Darcy couldn’t bear the danger Tellius would face should they hurry up and get married. But the Oracle had a penchant for causing confusion and, for all anybody knew, her second death might be nothing more than her eventual passing in old age. But that didn’t solve the problem of her *first* death.

Darcy groaned and flopped onto her back. She couldn’t dwell on these things. She didn’t want to die—of *course* she didn’t—but Eleanor had pegged her right on the nose. She was in love with Tellius, and her heart yearned to be in Alitheia forever. Alitheia was home, and she had to save it. If, by dying, she could do so, then she trusted when the time came, she would somehow muster the courage.

Her fingers itched to summon Tellius’s vision again for the reassurance and comfort it would offer her, but she took Eleanor’s words to heart. If there was any danger of the magic wearing out, she shouldn’t use it every day.

“I’ll use it once a week,” she whispered to herself. “That shouldn’t be too much.” She sat up and folded Eleanor’s note back into its tiny square, then she placed it inside the compact and closed it with a soft click. After tucking the compact under her pillow, she lay back down and rested her head on it.

CHAPTER 3

THE LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

“Have you tried to see anybody else in it yet?” Lewis asked.

School had let out for the summer just that afternoon, and Darcy, Sam, and Lewis were celebrating by enjoying the beautiful weather. They were walking his mom’s new puppy, an ugly little white cotton ball that Mrs. Acres had incongruously named Philip. Darcy loved animals, but she thought this thing looked more like a lab rat with a perm than like a dog, and its nasty disposition didn’t help.

“Philip, no!” Lewis yanked on the leash, pulling the dog away from the mud puddle he’d been about to leap into. Philip growled. “Yeah, you can growl all you want, but I’m not giving you a bath when we get home.”

Sam giggled. “Be nice to him, Lewis. He’s just a puppy.”

“A puppy who peed in my bed this morning.”

“What was he doing in your bed?” Darcy asked, squinting at Lewis.

“Jonathan dumped him there while I was still sleeping. He was supposed to be watching him, but he thought it would be *funny* to put him in with me instead.”

Sam laughed but then sobered when Lewis glowered at her. “I’m sorry you got peed on,” she said.

“Yeah, whatever—Philip, *no!*” Philip yelped as Lewis yanked him away from another puddle. The sidewalk was mostly dry after a week of soaking rain, but plenty of muddy puddles lingered just off the edges of the pavement. “Darcy, you never answered my question.”

“Sorry. No, I haven’t even looked in it for a week. Eleanor warned me against wearing out the magic. And with final exams this week and everything else, I didn’t have much time to think about it. I was going to give it another go tonight.”

“Why don’t you do it when we get back to my house?” Lewis asked. “I

still haven't seen how it works."

"Um . . . sure, I guess," Darcy said, but she felt a stab of disappointment. Lewis looking on might feel like an intrusion on her personal moment with Tellius, but she couldn't begrudge him a chance to see the magic in action.

"Lewis, I think Darcy wants to do it alone," Sam said.

"Do you?" he asked.

Darcy shrugged and gave a wry smile, suddenly feeling silly. "No, it's okay. I don't need to hog it."

"You don't have to, Darcy—"

"Sam, it's okay."

They stepped to the curb and stopped, looking up and down the street. A black Camaro drove by, way too fast on the residential drive, and a whistle issued from the cracked window, followed by a catcall.

"Somehow I don't think that was for me," Lewis said. He cast a sideways look at Darcy and Sam.

"I don't think it was for me either," Darcy said.

Sam blushed and looked down. "Oh, come on, guys. I mean, I'm glad I lost all my weight, but is being skinny seriously all guys look for in a girl?"

"Yes," Darcy and Lewis said at the same time.

"Lewis!"

He laughed. "Okay, you know we're joking. It's all the *jerks* look for in a girl."

"Speaking of which . . ." Darcy nodded up the street where the Camaro was making a reappearance, driving much slower this time.

The car slowed to a stop in front of them, window fully down now, and Brandon Cooper, the tormentor of Darcy's freshman year, leaned out. "Hey, Samantha! When are you going to go on that date with me?"

Sam had stepped back from the curb and positioned herself behind Darcy.

"Leave her alone, Brandon," Darcy said.

"Hey, if she doesn't want me, *you* could always—"

"No."

He shrugged. "Whatever, Furniture Girl. Your loss."

Brandon Cooper was the only person at their school who still called her "Furniture Girl," but it didn't seem to bother him that his insult was outdated. He looked in his mirror at another car that was approaching and revved his engine. "I'm gonna keep asking!" He pointed at Sam, winked, and drove off with squealing tires as the oncoming car blared its horn.

Sam groaned. "I'm sorry I ever felt jealous of the attention he showed you," she said. "Maybe I should eat donuts every morning."

Darcy laughed. "I'll get my mom to make her French toast for you," she said as they crossed the road and jogged into Lewis's cul-de-sac. Philip panted along on his stubby little legs in their wake.

"Ooh, yeah! Do that." Sam loved the bacon-fat-drenched concoction Darcy's mom made.

"It won't help though," Darcy said.

“What do you mean?”

They stopped outside Lewis’s front door and held back as he wrestled with the key.

“It won’t help in getting jerks like Brandon off your back. You’re gorgeous, and they all know it.”

“Darcy . . .” Sam shook her head. “I’m nowhere *near* as pretty as you are.”

Darcy snorted. Sweet Sam, totally and completely oblivious. “Really, you have no idea.”

“But you’ve got such pretty brown hair, and gray eyes! I’m so *normal* next to you.”

Lewis cleared his throat and they looked up. The door stood open, and Philip was straining at the leash to escape into the living room. “You’re both very attractive,” Lewis said, rolling his eyes. “Can we go inside now?”

“Sorry.” Sam preceded them through the door and scooped up Philip to unhook his collar. “*Such* a good boy, yes you are,” she said in a singsong voice, nuzzling his neck.

“Careful, he only lets my mom do that,” Lewis said, shutting the door behind Darcy.

Philip snapped at Sam’s nose. “Hey!” She yanked away and held him at arm’s length.

“Told you so.”

Sam put Philip back on the floor, and he scampered over to Darcy and circled around her feet, sniffing and wagging his tail. “Oh, you like me, do you?” Darcy shook her foot at him to shoo him away.

“Animals always like you, Darcy,” Sam said. She sat on the bench by the door and removed her shoes. Mrs. Acres had very strict rules about shoes in the house.

“And I usually like animals, especially dogs, but *you* are not a dog,” Darcy said. “*You* are a rat that is pretending to be a dog, and *you* are not very ni—”

“Excuse me?”

Darcy looked up, horrified, into Mrs. Acres’s severe expression. “I’m sorry. I was just—”

“Lewis, I didn’t say you could have friends over. I said you could walk the dog.”

Darcy exchanged a grimace with Sam.

“We can leave,” Sam said.

“Mom, they’re only staying a few minutes,” Lewis said.

Mrs. Acres pursed her lips. “All right. But we *are* going over those college applications tonight.”

“Yes, Mom.” Lewis sighed and muttered something under his breath after his mom collected Philip and walked away.

“We really can leave, you know,” Sam whispered. “We didn’t mean to get you in trouble.”

“Never mind,” Lewis said. “She’s just stressed about me leaving for college, that’s all.”

“It’s still over a year off!”

“Yeah, well, it’s a big deal, you know?”

Together they trundled up the stairs to Lewis’s room.

Darcy chewed her lip and sat in his desk chair. She tucked one foot under her leg and spun herself in a slow circle with the toes of her other foot.

“What are you thinking, Darcy?”

She met Sam’s eyes. “Nothing.”

“You’re wondering if you’ll even *go* to college, aren’t you?” Sam said.

Darcy hesitated, but there wasn’t any point in denying it. “Yeah.” She had packets upon packets of college materials piled on her desk back home, all of them unopened.

Lewis sighed and shoved his own pile off to the corner of his desk, clearing a space to perch on. “It’s hard enough for *me* to focus on preparing for college. I don’t know how you can even begin to think about it.”

“How’s your coldness?” Sam asked, reaching for Darcy’s hand, but Darcy pulled out of her reach.

“You know I don’t like it when you do that. I’m fine, okay?” She crossed her arms, wishing she was home, alone in her room. “We came up here to check the compact, didn’t we? So let’s do that.”

She scooted the chair closer to Lewis, and Sam hovered over her shoulder. Darcy pulled out the compact and held it up.

Her stomach gave a sudden drop, and she went rigid with the preternatural sense that something wasn’t right. She closed her eyes and breathed deeply. Then she opened them and said, “Tellius.”

Tellius rippled into view. His head was thrown back, exposing the underside of his chin and the line curving down his neck to his collarbone. His arms were spread eagle, but his hands hung limp on the ends of his wrists. His face was out of sight.

Lewis murmured something and Sam placed a hand on Darcy’s shoulder. “Is that him? What—”

Something struck him, and blood splattered his right shoulder. His arms and chest lurched, and his hands clenched before going limp again. His head lolled, and a steady trickle of blood ran down his chest and soaked his white shirt.

Darcy shrieked and almost dropped the compact. She watched, horrified, as Tellius’s shoulders rolled forward and his arms fell to his sides. She could see the stained back of a wooden chair behind him.

“Tellius!” she screamed, jumping to her feet.

Lewis hopped down from the desk and clapped his hand over her mouth, but it was too late.

“What is going on in here?” Mrs. Acres demanded, throwing the door open.

Lewis snatched his hand away from Darcy’s mouth, and Sam wrenched

the compact from her grasp.

Darcy couldn't breathe except for in short gasps, and her vision blurred under the weight of tears and dizziness.

Mrs. Acres's expression changed to alarm. "Darcy! Are you okay?"

"I—I—I—" Darcy swallowed and then moaned, pressing her knuckles to her mouth.

"I'm calling your mother." Mrs. Acres backed out of the room.

Inarticulate noises competed in Darcy's throat. She stumbled forward, wanting to shout "No!" but the word wouldn't come. She whimpered and turned back to Sam, holding out her hands.

"It's stopped working," Sam whispered, handing the compact back.

Lewis stared at her, his mouth agape.

"Tellius." Darcy's voice came out in a rasp. The screen flickered and rippled, and then she saw him again. He was being dragged across a cobblestone floor, his eyes closed, his hands up above his head. Then blackness roiled over the picture and the compact went blank again. "Tellius," Darcy said again, firmer this time, but the screen remained blank.

She shook the compact furiously, sobs catching in her throat.

"Give it time," Sam said, but tears were streaming down her face, too. "Darcy—"

Darcy gave an enraged scream. It wasn't fair that she was stuck here while horrible things were happening to Tellius. She had to get to him somehow. She spun on her heel and barreled out of Lewis's room, down his stairs, and out the door.



She ran all the way back to her house, but it wasn't until she got into her car, slammed the door, and reached for the ignition that she realized she'd left her shoes in Lewis's foyer. For several minutes, all she could hear was the pounding of her heart like a bass drum in her ears. Then she decided she didn't care. She could drive to Michigan barefoot. She could stop at a gas station along the way and pick up some flip-flops—she'd need gas soon anyway.

She turned the key and cranked her car to life before gripping the steering wheel until her knuckles turned white. She couldn't do any of those things. Her purse was inside and, even if she had it, she didn't have any cash or credit cards. And even should she make it all the way to Cedar Cove in the upper peninsula of Michigan without her parents sending the cops after her, the gateway wouldn't be open. It was weeks too early.

Darcy's mom came running down the driveway, looking concerned. Darcy turned away from the window and tucked her knees up to her chest. With heaving sobs, she pressed her face to her knees.

"Darcy?" Her mom tapped on the glass. "Mrs. Acres called me. What's

wrong? Where are you going?”

Darcy’s sobs continued unabated. She couldn’t answer even if she wanted to.

Tap tap tap. “Darcy.” Her mom sounded exasperated now. “Do I need to call your father?”

There was the muffled sound of talking as her mom stepped away from the car, and then Sam’s voice came through the glass. “I brought your shoes. It’s okay, I told your mom about the breakup.”

Darcy sniffed and looked over her shoulder. Sam’s eyes were wide, and Mrs. Pennington stood just over Sam’s shoulder, watching her.

Darcy moaned and fumbled for her keys. With numb fingers, she cut off the ignition.

“I didn’t know you had a boyfriend, sweetheart!” Darcy could hear the relief in her mother’s voice. Her daughter was, after all, pursuing normal teenage activities.

Darcy opened her door and got out of the car, feeling heavy, like she was wearing weights on her wrists and ankles. “Thanks,” she whispered as she took her shoes from Sam’s hands. There was so much left unsaid, so much that didn’t need to be said between them.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Her mom followed her as she wandered into their garage.

Darcy managed the barest shake of her head. She climbed the steps into the house and dropped her shoes on the floor of the mudroom. All she wanted was to be alone.



Darcy sped up as she rounded the corner. She was short of breath and her leg muscles ached, but she welcomed the pain. She’d taken up running again to stave off her dark thoughts, and Sam didn’t even try to get her to stop. Her brother, Roger, accompanied her most nights and, by unspoken agreement, he never asked what was bothering her. Her mom still thought she was broken up over a failed relationship with some boy at school, and her dad was too consumed by work and money troubles to notice her decomposing state of mind.

Tellius hadn’t shown up in the compact again. Darcy had pleaded and screamed. She’d shaken it madly, rubbed it as if it were a genie lamp, asked nicely, and demanded, but he never returned. Her deepest fear was that he didn’t show up again because he was dead. She could summon Rubidius or Yahto Veli, anyone else she wanted, but she was never able to determine from their expressions exactly *what* was going on in Alitheia. They always looked serious and very often sad. Their sadness worried her the most.

Her prayers to Pateros became longer ordeals. She felt as though she was speaking to thin air, and she might have been. She knew Pateros existed in

Alitheia and that he answered petitions there, but she didn't know if he had any power to hear her or act on her behalf while she was in her world. She wondered, too, if he even cared. He'd been silent on their last visit to Alitheia.

July crept nearer like a slow-moving freight train, carrying its load of secrets and concerns. After a while, Darcy felt numb to the wait. How much anxiety could she take before she broke? It was better just to cut off her feelings as best she could.

She tripped over a raised edge of the sidewalk and almost fell.

"You all right?" Roger asked over his shoulder. He didn't slow down.

"Yeah." She resumed her footing just soon enough to turn up their driveway, and she stopped outside the garage door with her hands on her hips, dripping sweat and breathing heavily. One more run down. If she ran every night between now and when they left for Cedar Cove, there were sixteen more runs until she could return.

Her cell phone buzzed in its holder on her arm as she climbed the stairs to the house. Roger held open the door for her—he was much more the gentleman now that he was through his snarky adolescence. She thanked him before checking the screen. It was Amelia.

"Hey," she said into the phone as she latched the door.

"Darcy, hey! How are you holding up?"

Darcy sat on the cold linoleum with her back against the wall. She tucked the cell phone between her ear and shoulder so her hands were free to unlace her running shoes. Her face and shoulder were so sweaty the phone almost slipped to the floor.

"I'm . . . well, you know." She kicked her shoes off and sighed. Roger stretched his hamstrings at the other end of the foyer, his eyes flickering to her and back to his task. She couldn't talk about Tellius in front of Roger, nor did she want to. "How's everything with Simon?" she asked.

Amelia snorted. "He's getting there. I think he *wants* to believe Alitheia is real, but that's a hard conclusion to come to, you know? I mean, all he's seen is that little bit of magic you did at Cedar Cove. Believing in another world is another thing entirely."

Darcy nodded even though Amelia couldn't see her. She was thankful for the distraction of her friend's romantic drama.

"I'm glad we decided to take a break for a few months before getting back together," Amelia continued. "He had a tough semester, and he needed some time to think it all through."

Amelia stopped talking, and Darcy listened to the strands of classical music whispering through the background at Amelia's house. She could lose herself, worn out from her run as she was, resting on the floor with soft classical music. She could close her eyes and forget everything for a while, waking only to find herself in Alitheia.

"Um, are you there?" Amelia asked, her voice quiet.

Darcy sighed. "Yes."

“Hang in there, Darcy,” Amelia said. “We’ll be back soon, and everything will be all right. You’ll see.”

Darcy closed her eyes and replayed the image of Tellius’s beaten and broken body for the umpteenth time. “I wish I could believe that,” she whispered.

It was Amelia’s turn to be silent. At last she sighed and said, “Just a few more weeks, okay? And”—her voice hardened—“be thinking about how to approach Colin. It’s about time we *made* him tell us what’s going on.”

“We can’t *make* Colin do anything,” Darcy said. “If Perry and Dean can’t talk to him without fighting him, then it’s not even worth trying.”

“You’ll have to take that up with them. You know Perry hasn’t given up on his grudge.”

“I know, but he’s going to have to be civil, at least.”

Amelia gave a hollow laugh. “Does Colin deserve that?”

“Maybe not, but we can’t fight him anymore.” Darcy felt Roger’s eyes on her and looked over at him.

“Who are you fighting?” Roger mouthed.

Darcy made a face at him and waved him away.

“Well, you’re probably right about that,” Amelia said.

“Amelia, I’m sorry, but I can’t really talk right now,” Darcy said. Roger was no longer making any pretense of not eavesdropping.

“Oh, that’s okay.”

“I’ll see you soon.”

“A little over two weeks!”

“I know. Bye,” Darcy said and hung up. “What’s your problem, Roger?”

“You. You’re weird. You talk about weird stuff with your friends.”

“You don’t have to listen in.”

“Kinda hard not to. Why can’t you just text like a normal person?”

“None of your business.” The real reason Darcy didn’t text her friends about Alitheia was because she was afraid her mom would find her conversations. Then she’d *really* have some explaining to do.

“So that was Amelia, huh?”

“You know it was if you were listening the whole time.”

“She still single?”

Darcy rolled her eyes. “Seriously?”

“What’s the use in having an older sister if I can’t hit on her friends?”

Darcy grabbed her shoe and threw it at him. “You’re an idiot.”

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