

CHAPTER

1

LILY PROCTOR WAS NOT ASLEEP. SHE WASN'T UNCONSCIOUS or dreaming, nor had she accidentally slipped into another universe. She was here, she was alive, and for good or for bad, she was in charge. She had to keep telling herself that or she knew she'd fall apart completely. To stay calm, Lily quickly listed off the things she knew to be true.

The last thing she remembered was fighting the Hive somewhere in the center of the North American continent. In her version of the world, that meant somewhere out on the prairies of Kansas. But in this world, the center of the continent was an uncharted area, long abandoned to a little-known and nearly mythical subspecies of the Woven called the Hive.

Lily and her small band of braves had lost the battle; nearly all of those who had followed Lily west had lost their lives. The few that had survived had been anesthetized by the Hive, rather than killed, and brought to an enormous field that lay outside the gates of a city, all the way across the continent on the western coastline. Above the

main gate was a large inscription, declaring that this place was Bower City. It was a city that Lily knew shouldn't exist.

Lily also knew that Tristan, *her* Tristan, was dead. He had died fighting the Hive. She got stuck inside that thought, unable to go forward or backward. All she could do was stare at the city walls in front of her and repeat it in her head. *Tristan is dead. And he's dead because of me.*

"Lily?"

Lily turned around at the sound of her name and tried to discern who had spoken to her. Standing in a vast field of flowers that surrounded Bower City for miles were Juliet, Caleb, Breakfast, Una, and the other Tristan. They were all she had left. Everyone else had either abandoned her or died on the Trail of Tears. Even Rowan had betrayed her and left her to starve in a cage. A cage that Tristan—Lily's Tristan—had somehow broken. Tristan had saved her from Rowan. He'd saved her and now he was dead.

"Lily?" the other, and now only, Tristan repeated.

His clothes were in tatters, and his eyes were wet with tears and rimmed with red. He felt the loss of his other self deeply, but he didn't feel it the same way that Lily did. He wasn't responsible for it the way Lily was.

"What do you want to do?" Tristan asked as she stared at him blankly.

The place high up inside her chest, just below the U-shaped divot at the bottom of her throat, was rubbed raw with held-back sobs. She couldn't give in to her grief, not now, so she floated above it, her sadness burrowing deeper and deeper inside like a swallowed splinter.

Lily looked down at the bees flitting around the flowers at her feet, trying to reattach herself to the moment. Her ears buzzed and she couldn't tell if the sound came from outside her head or inside it. She stared at the bees, wondering whether they were natural or the

Worker members of the Hive. Workers looked the same as regular bees, and there was something about that—their seemingly innocuous appearance—that made them more disturbing than if they were monstrous.

“They didn’t kill us,” Lily said, not answering Tristan’s question. “The Hive.”

“It’s been said the Warrior Sisters sometimes carry people off,” Caleb said, referring to the terrifying half-human, half-bee members of the Hive. Warrior Sisters were over seven feet tall, covered in a plated exoskeleton hard as armor, and they fought with barb-tipped whips that they coated with powerful venom milked from their own stingers. “Maybe this is where they take their captives,” Caleb finished in a hushed tone, as if simply mentioning the Warrior Sisters could conjure them.

“We must have been unconscious for days,” Una added, scanning the skies. “There’s no way they could have flown us from where we were to the West Coast in less time than that.”

Lily nodded vaguely at Una’s logic. Her mouth was dry and coated with the bitter residue of a drug-sleep. She focused her witch’s sense on traces of the chemical cocktail still left in her bloodstream from the Hive’s stings and decided that it could have kept them unconscious for days. It was an ingenious substance, and Lily’s wandering mind wondered whether something so elegant could have evolved naturally. She also wondered at the intelligence of a creature that could choose to kill some and kidnap others, and supply the proper venom to do either as it saw fit.

“Where are you going?” Juliet called out in a shrill voice. She raced to catch up with Lily and took her sister by the arm. Stopped short, Lily realized she had been staggering toward the city gate.

“In there, I guess,” Lily replied, shrugging. “It’s not like we have many options.”

Juliet looked over Lily's shoulder at Caleb. "She's in shock," she told him.

"I think we all are," Breakfast added quietly. "Let's take a second and think this through before we go marching into some strange place."

Lily felt Juliet lead her back to the group. Her hands stung at Juliet's touch and she shied away. Lily's burns were only half healed from gripping the burning ground. She licked her cracked lips and imagined she could still taste the smoke and dirt of the prairie as the wildfire blazed around her. She recalled digging her fingers into the ground to anchor herself against the witch wind and dragging herself forward as the fire line moved, one agonizing fistful of burning ground at time.

"Here," Tristan said, reaching into the mechanic's pack that was still strapped across his back. "I have salve. I think I do, anyway."

Lily couldn't look him in the eye. As he cupped her hands in his and dabbed at her red and broken skin she fought the urge to pull away from him. *He's not my Tristan*, she reminded herself.

They all took a moment to tend to their injuries with Tristan's salve, although everyone seemed to be on the mend already.

"Whatever the Hive injected into us must have had an antibiotic in it," Tristan said. He paused to look at his own arms and hands, which were only slightly burned, his face twisting with puzzlement. "But even still. Considering we were fighting *inside* the fire, you'd think our injuries would be much worse."

"I thought we were dead when Lily's wildfire caught up with us," Caleb added. "But it only killed the Hive. Not us. How'd that happen?"

"I did something to you," Lily admitted. "Directed the energy. I don't really know what I did."

"Could you do it again?" Una asked, dabbing at herself with salve.

“Because it came in handy. Killed a ton of the Workers and left us barely singed.”

Lily tried to recall exactly what she’d done, but all she knew for certain was that she had broken her promise. She’d possessed her mechanics and had become something different. An Us or a We. And when members of the We had died, a part of her had died with them. Lily felt the holes in her still, like the bleeding gaps left by knocked-out teeth that she couldn’t stop probing with her tongue. The biggest and most painful was Tristan-shaped.

He should be getting ready to go to Harvard right now. But instead he’s dead.

“I don’t know. I don’t know exactly what I did,” Lily mumbled, not wanting to examine the episode anymore. Luckily, they either hadn’t felt her possess them in the chaos of the fight, or they hadn’t figured it out yet. Lily hoped they never did.

Lily looked at Juliet, who was regarding her with a furrowed brow. “What?” Lily asked defensively.

“I’ve spent my whole life around witches and I’ve never heard of anyone doing that before,” Juliet replied. “You said you were directing the energy inside of them, not just giving it to them. It’s as if you could control—” Juliet broke off with a frown and didn’t continue.

“Control what?” Lily asked, but Juliet shook her head, dismissing the thought. Lily let it go because she didn’t want Juliet, or any of them, to think about it too deeply. Caleb, especially. Lily knew he, out of all of them, would never forgive her for possessing him if he ever figured it out, and she couldn’t lose him, too. She couldn’t bear to lose anyone else. A desperate, clawing panic started to rise up in Lily’s chest. She cast her eyes up and tried to breathe.

How could I have done this? How could I have put them all in so much danger?

You had no choice, came the answer. Lillian was there with Lily, sharing the echoing loneliness of her head.

Help me. I feel like I'm drowning, Lily replied. She looked around her, stiff as a statue. *How long have you been with me?*

Since you woke. You were reaching out, Lillian told her. Lily could feel Lillian's shock at the view they were sharing. *What are you going to do?*

Lily turned toward the city. "We only have two choices," she said. "Go into the city, or not. I have no idea what to do."

Her coven shot one another looks, obviously exchanging mindspeak.

"You're not yourself," Caleb said gently. "Each of us has tried to connect with you in mindspeak and it's like hitting a brick wall. You've totally shut us out."

As she considered it, Lily realized that she had been feeling her claimed brushing up against her mind, asking for entry, but she'd been blocking them out subconsciously. She didn't want anyone inside her mind, no one but someone who was as culpable as she was. The enormity of what Lily had done hung like a sword over her head, and only Lillian knew what that was like. Only Lillian had sent people she'd loved to their deaths.

How do you keep it from eating you up?

You don't, Lillian replied. *Let it eat you, and be grateful for the pain. If it goes away, then you know you're dead inside.*

Lily didn't feel pain. She didn't feel anything. She was numb, her head full of white noise to drown out the shouting inside. As soon as she named the numbness it went away, and hatred bubbled in her throat. Hatred for herself so thick and dark it was like drinking tar.

I can't do this.

Yes, you can. You can because you must, Lillian replied. *I'm here. I understand what it's like to wake up changed.*

“Lily?” Juliet said, moving toward her with an outstretched hand.
“Say something.”

Every choice I make gets someone killed. I don't want to make any more,
Lily thought. *I'm stuck.*

Doing nothing isn't an option, Lillian said. *You had to be ruthless when the Hive came for you, even with Tristan. He died to protect you and the rest of the coven.*

No. He died because he wasn't ready for the burden I put on him. He never should have been in this world.

You're past that. What's done is done. All that matters is the task at hand, the city in front of you, and what you're going to do about it. Don't waste Tristan's sacrifice. Swallow your guilt and get moving.

“Eyes up. Someone's coming,” Una said sharply.

The coven turned and saw a small party approaching from the direction of the city gates.

“Do we have any weapons?” Caleb asked, his hand going to the empty sheath hanging from his belt. Tristan's arm flexed to look for his knife as well, and he shook his head at Caleb, his eyes anxious.

“Easy, boys. We've still got our witch,” Una said after coming up empty for weapons herself. She turned to Lily. “How much juice you got left?”

Lily grimaced. “Nothing,” she replied. “I need salt.”

“They might be peaceful,” Juliet said optimistically. Everyone looked at Juliet sideways.

“Because peace is something we've had so much of since coming to this world,” Breakfast groused.

“There's no reason to go on the defensive. It's not like they're charging toward us with weapons drawn,” Juliet persisted, squinting in the direction of the approaching group.

Juliet. Always making the best of a terrible situation, Lillian whispered to Lily.

Yes, Lily agreed, feeling something beginning to thaw inside her as she watched this other version of her sister.

Juliet smoothed her charred linen shirt, tucking its tattered hem into her dusty wearhyde riding pants. She squared her narrow shoulders, making Lily smile. Juliet never looked more delicate than when she was trying to look tough. “Let me handle this,” Juliet said confidently.

Caleb looked like he wanted to argue, and Lily realized that if she was going to lead this coven, she had to start taking control—first and foremost, of herself.

Lillian. I need to allow my coven in, so you must leave me now or they may sense you in my mind. I'll reach out to you again when I can.

Yes, Lillian agreed. *We both have a lot of work to do.*

Lily caught the edge of Lillian's cold determination as they stared at the emissaries from the foreign city before Lillian severed contact. Lily turned her attention to her coven and reached out to Caleb in mindspeak.

Let Juliet speak to them, Caleb. She's a lot less threatening than you.

She's a lot less threatening than a kitten. And I wouldn't send either to meet a bunch of strangers.

Caleb shot Lily a half smile, and she felt him relax some.

As the foreigners approached, it was clear that they were not hostile. The two women and two men who approached were unarmed. They were dressed in flowing kimonos or tunics and adorned with jewelry. They joined Lily's coven with concerned looks on their faces.

“Do any of you need medical attention?” asked the handsome woman who seemed to lead the party.

She's an Outlander, Caleb whispered in Lily's head. But her paint is from no tribe I know.

The woman's face, hands, and bare shoulders were decorated

with painted stripes and dots. She was in her late twenties and had the kind of cut-glass features that would only look more attractive as she aged. Strands of her silky black hair were braided with multicolored thread and eagle feathers, and her arms jingled with gold bangles. Lily noticed that the brief kimono she wore was made of silk. She couldn't recall seeing anyone else in this world wearing silk before. Lily's eyes went to the smoke-colored willstone around the woman's neck and stayed there. It was not as large as Lily's smoke stone, but it was onyx black. She felt Tristan brush against her mind and allowed him entry.

That's the darkest willstone I've ever seen, Lily. It's even darker than Una's Warrior black.

What do you mean, warrior black?

Just keep your guard up, Tristan, because trust me—this witch can fight.

Lily had a theory about willstones that wasn't common knowledge, not even among highly trained mechanics like Tristan. Having three willstones, one of every color, had given Lily a unique understanding of how they worked and she'd noticed that each of her willstones seemed to be better suited to different types of magic. Her medium-size pink stone seemed to glow brightest when she performed healer magic. The small golden stone excelled at kitchen magic. It was Lily's smoke stone, the largest and most powerful of her willstones, that came to life when she performed warrior magic. Lily quickly hid her pink and golden stones but allowed her larger, if not quite as dark smoke-colored willstone to show on her breastbone.

"None of us are seriously hurt," Juliet said cordially in reply to the strange witch's question. Juliet's eyes narrowed at the woman's stone as she noticed it, and she smiled broadly to cover her hesitation. "But we need water . . . and salt for our witch."

Juliet stepped aside to give the strangers a clear view of Lily,

flanked on either side by Una, Breakfast, and Tristan, with giant Caleb looming behind her.

Nice one, Juliet.

Just a little reminder that we aren't completely helpless, Lily. I hope you don't mind.

Of course not.

"Certainly," the foreign witch replied unflinchingly. Her eyes skipped to Lily's willstone and away again as if the huge jewel were of little notice. She waved a hand and the three people accompanying her stepped forward with brightly glazed ceramic jugs of water. "My name is Grace Bendingtree. I'm the governor of Bower City. Welcome."

"Thank you, Governor Bendingtree," Juliet replied in a voice that even the smoothest politician would envy. "We're honored to meet you."

"Please, call me Grace. We don't stand on ceremony here," she said with a wide smile as she watched Lily's party drink thirstily.

"I'm Juliet Proctor. This is my sister, Lily, and her mechanics—Caleb, Tristan, Una, and Stuart."

They tipped their heads in greeting as their names were spoken and Grace faced each in turn, meeting their eyes with an open and accepting gaze.

"Welcome," Grace repeated warmly. "You look like you could all use some food and a lot of rest."

"Thank you," Juliet said, accepting the governor's invitation. For just a moment, Juliet's brow creased, and if Lily didn't know her every expression so well she would have missed the apprehension she saw there. "Is it the custom here for the governor to risk coming outside the walls to welcome everyone into the city?"

"When they arrive as you did, definitely," Grace said with laugh.

Her three attendants nodded hesitantly. Their confused faces

made it apparent that this must have been such an unusual situation that they barely knew how to react.

“It’s so rare that the Hive brings anyone anymore, and even rarer that those people survive,” Grace continued sadly. “You must be very strong.” She addressed them all, but her dark eyes lingered the longest on Lily, and softened as if she knew that Lily was suffering. “And as for the risk of coming out from behind the walls—you’ll see for yourself that things are quite different here from what you’re used to.”

Grace gestured for Lily to walk beside her, but Lily deferred and urged Juliet to take the lead. Lily wanted to observe without having to think of something to say.

“Are these your mechanics?” Juliet asked politely, tipping her chin in the direction of Grace’s silent attendants.

Grace frowned. “We don’t have mechanics here,” she said, her tone chilly.

“Pardon me,” Juliet apologized, taken aback. “Have I offended you in some way?”

Grace’s smile was brittle. “I know that you are from the East and that you do things differently there, but we don’t claim people in Bower City.” Grace cast her eyes back at Lily’s mechanics, looking as if she pitied them. “And it might be better not to talk too much about your . . . situation . . . with others while you are here.”

Lily and Una exchanged a look.

“We’ll be discreet, if that’s your wish,” Juliet said. “But may I ask why it’s such an issue?”

“I guess there’s no way to be delicate about this,” Grace said plainly. “We consider claiming mechanics a form of slavery, and owning another person is a crime here.”

Lily opened her mouth to argue, but Juliet waved her protestations away. This was not the time to get into an argument about whether or not claiming someone was the same as ownership.

“But how do witches perform magic without mechanics?” Caleb asked.

Grace stopped and turned to face him. “Witches, crucibles, and yes—even mechanics—can heal, create energy to power a city, and make products that the people need without anyone having to claim anyone else. There’s only one form of magic a witch truly needs a vessel for. Warrior magic. And we don’t think people should die because witches can’t control their lust for battle.”

“That’s very noble,” Tristan said with a raised eyebrow, “but how to do you defend yourselves without warriors?”

“We don’t,” Grace said simply. “Something else does that for us.”

They had come close enough to the city to see through the main gate. Grace turned to it now, directing their attention to the city beyond. Before Lily could get a clear look, Tristan’s arm shot out, barring Lily from going any farther. As he pulled her up into his arms and turned to bolt, she could feel fear and confusion ringing through Una, Caleb, and Breakfast; their mindspeak coming at her in a jumble.

Run!

It doesn’t make any sense . . .

Get her out of here, Tristan!

Over Tristan’s shoulder, Lily was just able to make out Warrior Sisters hovering around the entrance, their whips hanging ready by their sides.

CHAPTER

2

HER VIEW OF SKY AND FLOWERS JOSTLED CHAOTICALLY AS Tristan thundered toward what looked like a stand of trees rimming the horizon, but no matter how hard Tristan ran, the trees didn't seem to come any closer.

"It's too far!" she yelled. Tristan only dropped his head and ran harder.

Lily looked over his shoulder and saw one of the emissaries catching up to Tristan. He was waving his arms over his head and shouting, "Wait!"

Tristan wasn't waiting. But there was something about the emissary that made Lily beat against Tristan's chest, some combination of surprise and openness that made her believe that there was more to this situation than peril.

"Tristan, stop," she yelled. "Let's talk to them, at least."

Tristan finally slowed to a stop. Lily slid out of his arms, avoiding his eyes. She watched the emissary instead.

He was about Tristan's height, but his build was less bulky and his bone structure much lighter. He had black hair and eyes, and Asian

features, although Lily couldn't quite place his heritage. She guessed he was only a few years older than they were. The emissary wisely came to a halt several paces away from Tristan.

"I know it's a shock, but please come back and let us explain about the Hive," he said in a thoroughly rational tone. "I promise no harm will come to you."

Tristan hesitated, but Lily stepped forward, avoiding contact with him. "Let's at least hear them out," she said, still not looking at him. "Not like we've got any other choice."

They followed the emissary back to the group and Grace explained the strange arrangement between the people of Bower City and the Hive. For over a hundred years the Hive had been "choosing" people, flying them to the coast as they had with Lily and her mechanics, and leaving them there. The Hive had allowed those chosen humans to build a city and go about their lives as long as they did so in a diligent and orderly fashion. "That's all they want?" Caleb asked, sneering his disbelief. "Order?"

"I swear it," Grace replied. She gestured down to the bright blossoms at her feet. "They don't even demand that we maintain these fields of flowers to provide them with food. We do it voluntarily. It's our gift to them for giving us so much."

Lily looked around at her coven, silently asking them what they thought.

"They're right there," Una said, gesturing toward the Warrior Sisters hovering around the gate. "They could have killed us at any time."

"She's right," Breakfast said, backing her up.

Tristan nodded reluctantly, but Caleb was the hardest to convince. Lily could feel his hatred for the Hive, and for all Woven, like a hard lump inside of him—an infection that had calcified. She

couldn't blame him. The Woven had killed most of the people he'd ever known.

Where else are we going to go? Lily asked him in mindspeak.

I don't like it. There's something off about all of this, Caleb replied.

I don't like it either, Lily replied. Then she shrugged a defeated shoulder and followed Grace, who was leading the rest of her coven toward the walled city.

Skittish as a herd of spooked horses, Lily and her coven had to pass under an arch of hovering Warrior Sisters in order to enter Bower City. The hum of their wings puckered her skin and sent bolts of static down her legs. Lily looked up. The Sisters' black-faceted eyes glinted with oil-slick rainbows and their bulbous heads twitched lightning fast atop their long stalk necks. They looked back down at her, and Lily couldn't tell what they thought or felt—or if they thought or felt anything at all.

"It's okay. Really," Grace soothed. "The Hive craves order above all things and, if you behave peacefully, they won't bother you. All we need to live in harmony with them is to live in harmony with one another."

Caleb didn't argue entering the city, but as they walked through the gates, he couldn't help but comment. "Harmony," he whispered as he ducked under the dangling tips of a Warrior Sister's cat-o'-nine-tails whip. "You sure they're not tone-deaf?"

Lily curled up a cheek in a wry half smile, thinking that Caleb had struck on what was bothering her about them. The Sisters may have some of the physical attributes of people, but there was something distinctly alien about them. Lily couldn't read emotion in them, nor could she imagine them understanding and enjoying something as fundamentally human as music.

When Lily got her first good look at the inside of Bower City,

she had the nagging feeling she'd been there before. The brightly painted buildings were topped with terra-cotta roofs, and every windowsill and trellis spilled over with flowers. Blossoms dripped from every gable, and the pristine streets were edged not with grass, but with carpets of wildflowers. Even the trees that lined the street—each housed in its own enormous pot—were of the flowering kind, and the air tasted bittersweet with pollen.

“Do you like our city?” Grace asked after an appropriately long pause.

“It’s so”—Una looked around, her face puckered with confusion—“clean,” she finished.

Grace laughed—a throaty, warm sound—and flashed her straight white teeth. “I told you. Order. Symmetry. Peace. The Hive is diligent about keeping things neat, to the benefit of all who live under them.”

Looking down at cobbled streets that were so spotless she reckoned she could eat off of them, Lily couldn’t find one thing that was out of place. Not a hinge on the cheerful shutters leaked a red stain of rust. No flaking paint or loose tiles on any of the vaguely Italian-villa-style houses. Everything was picture perfect.

“Like Disneyland,” Breakfast muttered.

“Exactly,” Lily agreed, nodding. That explained her *déjà vu*. She stifled a memory of singing animatronic dolls before she got that saccharine tune stuck in her head. She hated Disneyland.

“Except with a vaguely Mediterranean flair instead of storybook-Swiss-chalet,” Breakfast added.

“I wonder where we are, exactly.”

Breakfast shrugged. “Somewhere between San Francisco and LA, I’m guessing. Where all the farms and vineyards are.”

Tristan gave Lily and Breakfast a puzzled look, and Lily averted her eyes and shook her head as if to say that it didn’t matter. He seemed

entranced with Bower City, and Lily had to agree it was a beautiful place. Even the sunshine seemed, well, *shinier* than it did back east.

As they threaded their way through the grid system of the streets, Lily saw open-air trolleys gliding soundlessly up and down the center of the road. People wearing brightly dyed tunics and kimonos hopped on and off the rail system with ease, the men's voluminous capes and women's silk ribbons trailing behind them. If the beautifully attired and heavily perfumed citizens thought anything was odd about the bedraggled appearance of Lily's coven, they hid it well.

Questioning glances were quickly followed by averted eyes as the busy people went about their day. Occasionally, Lily would catch a glimpse of a Warrior Sister perched high on top of a building, but they seemed to stay away from street level. They were there, though. Lily could feel their presence echoing down the scrubbed streets, like the mounting pressure of a storm that had yet to break.

Lily wondered how large the city was. She glanced up the street, but couldn't see an edge to it. She noticed that the grid system curved ever so gently in a pleasing fashion, rather than adhering to boxy ninety-degree angles. It struck Lily as being a more organic, although still highly structured way, of building a city. Rather like a honeycomb.

"Is anyone tired? Do you need to rest?" Grace asked.

Lily shook her head. She just wanted them to get wherever it was they were going so she could be alone for a few moments. Her frustration passed to Juliet.

I think she's taking us the scenic route, Juliet said in mindpeak.

I have a feeling this whole city is the scenic route, Lily replied.

After a few more minutes of striding by manicured buildings and down immaculate streets, they came to a large plaza with a huge fountain in the center. Skirting around the plaza were a number of gracefully columned buildings, the largest of which had a sprawling

staircase. Many groups of people stood on the steps, talking in clusters.

“This is our Forum,” Grace told them. “Where we make government policy. Or try to, at any rate. Mostly we just argue.”

All eyes seemed to turn toward them and conversations stopped as they entered the plaza. Grace led the newcomers up the grand staircase, and as they passed, the chatter struck up again in urgent undertones. Lily nodded to herself, finally understanding why Grace had chosen to walk a bunch of battle-weary, shocked, and grieving people through the city. She and her coven were on parade. This wasn’t about them. It was for the people of Bower City.

Lily glanced up and tried to make eye contact with the members of the closest cluster, but they all looked away nervously. They were playacting. Pretending that this was just another day, but their forced nonchalance carried more tension than if they had gathered around, pointing and staring.

Grace and her attendants brought the coven through a forest of marble columns, and into a huge domed room. It was a colossal building, something that belonged on top of a hill in Italy or Greece.

Lily craned her neck to look up at the oculi in the center of the dome, which flooded the room with air and sunlight. Something large flew past, sending a swift shadow across the gleaming marble floor. The faintest hum followed, tickling the back of Lily’s neck.

They’re watching us, Una said in mindspeak.

Lily nodded, and glanced at Caleb, who was eyeing the oculi warily.

“This is the Governor’s Hearing Hall,” Grace told them.

“Nice office, Gracie,” Breakfast muttered under his breath. The acoustics of the room amplified his voice, and his mutter came out loud and clear to everyone in the room. Breakfast cringed.

“And we call it the Hearing Hall because you can hear even the

slightest whisper,” she continued, smiling at him. “So even the smallest voice matters.”

They crossed the circular expanse of the Hearing Hall and went through one of three doors that were evenly spaced along the curved back wall. They walked down a long hallway, through another door, and into a private home.

Finally, Juliet said. The rest of the coven echoed her relief.

“You’re welcome to stay with me for as long as you like,” Grace said as she led them into a palatial living space. “I’ll give you a chance to clean up and rest, and we’ll speak later.”

“Thank you,” Lily replied, finally stepping forward to stand next to her sister.

“My pleasure,” Grace said, and left them with one of her emissaries.

It was the same young man who had chased after her and Tristan. He stepped forward and smiled at her. Now that they were no longer running for their lives, Lily couldn’t help but notice that he was extremely attractive.

“We have two rooms ready for you upstairs, if you’ll follow me,” he said in a pleasing voice.

“I didn’t catch your name,” Lily said, looking at his willstone. It was a deep rose color—almost burgundy. *He’s a healer*, she thought. *A powerful one.*

“My name is Toshi Konishi,” he replied. “And I’m up here,” he said, pointing to his face. Lily tore her gaze off his willstone and met his amused eyes, her face flushing.

“Sorry,” she stammered, “I’m just surprised by the color of your willstone. Is it common here for a rose stone to be so pigmented?”

“No,” Toshi replied. A slow smile crept up his face as he held Lily’s eyes. “Bedrooms,” he said, turning suddenly, “are this way. We’ve readied one apartment for the men and one for the women, but you’re

welcome to make your own adjustments to the sleeping arrangement as you like.”

Toshi pushed the doors open to the first suite of rooms and revealed a common area with deep-seated leather club chairs and furniture made of dark, glossy wood.

Lily and her coven looked at the wealth and comfort around them blankly.

“The two sitting rooms are connected,” Toshi said, leading the girls through the man cave and opening up a set of double doors.

The girls’ sitting room had a large white couch and a velvet settee, and it was made bright and airy by a large balcony and many fresh flower arrangements.

“Your rooms are on the other side,” Toshi told them. A worried frown creased his forehead as he registered the listless expressions around him. “Is this arrangement not to your liking? If you don’t find the rooms suitable, just let me know what you require.”

“They’re lovely. We’ve been traveling for a long time,” Lily said in explanation. “And we’ve lost . . . a lot.”

“I’m sorry,” Toshi replied, his concern deepening. “I’m sure you need your rest. What you’ve done—just getting here—it’s amazing.”

Lily’s head filled with the mountains they’d climbed, the rivers they’d crossed, and the lives that she had lost along the way. She smiled at Toshi uncomfortably and went out onto the balcony as her coven broke away from one another silently and went off to be by themselves. Lily took a deep breath. A wisteria vine framed the wrought-iron casement and spilled over the railing like lavender locks of hair tumbling down a woman’s shoulder.

She felt Toshi join her on the veranda. “I mean it,” he said softly. “What you’ve accomplished is nothing short of a miracle. Those you’ve lost would be proud to see that at least you made it.”

Lily didn’t turn to look at him. She thought of Tristan’s body lying

somewhere in a burnt-out field, probably already rotting in the sun, and wanted to say that pride had nothing to do with it. *I did that*, she thought.

Lily trained her dry, staring eyes on the city that rolled out in front of her. Like a patchwork quilt, interlocking blocks of color were saved from looking too busy by the orderliness of the pattern, and beyond the bright blanket that was Bower City, Lily saw a ribbon of sparkling blue.

“The ocean,” she whispered.

“I can take you there if you’d like,” he offered carefully.

Lily kept her attention on the view, neither accepting nor declining his offer. “Are those *ships*?” she asked, squinting into the distance.

“Yes.”

Lily turned to face him. “From where?”

“All over,” he said, shrugging. He suddenly understood. “The East is cut off from the rest of the world because of the Woven plague. No other countries will risk contamination through contact with you, but there’s no chance of that with Bower City.” He brow creased with a thought. “There are restrictions, of course, and immigration is carefully watched, but we trade with the rest of the world.”

“Carefully watched by who?” Lily could feel heat rising to her cheeks. She gritted her teeth, resisting the urge to scream.

“The Hive,” he said. “The Hive watches over everything in Bower City.” Toshi’s worried frown was back. “I should warn you to watch your temper. They react strongly to anger.”

Lily looked down at the purple blossoms surrounding her. The bees buzzing in and out of them began turning their attention from the flowers to Lily. More came. Toshi didn’t notice, but one had landed on his sleeve. Lily pointed at it.

“Careful,” she warned.

Toshi didn’t even look. “You don’t have to fear being stung

accidentally. As long as you don't attack them, they'll leave you alone. But you must try and maintain a calm demeanor here in Bower City."

Lily moved her elbows away from the wisteria. "And if you step on one?"

"They're smarter than that," he assured her. "I've lived here my whole life and they've never stung me."

Lily relaxed a little, and then considered that maybe she shouldn't. Watching the Worker go back to picking her way through the petals was not reassuring. They were always there. Always watching. No matter how much she wanted to find a room, lock the door, and start crying and throwing things at the wall, she couldn't. She had to remain "calm."

For all the fresh air, this place is more suffocating than the oubliette, she said in mindspeak to Lillian.

When she looked up again, Lily noticed that Toshi was standing very close to her. He seemed to notice it, too, and jerked away from her, embarrassed.

"Well, I'm sure you're tired," he said, taking his leave. "Would you like me to send up some food now?"

"Yes. Please," Lily said, following him back inside. "And thank you, Toshi."

He opened the door and paused before going through it. When he looked back at Lily he seemed surprised. "It was my pleasure," he said, and then left.

Lily stayed on the closed door, replaying the conversation in her head.

"Thinking of adding him to your collection?" Tristan asked. His hair was still wet from a shower and he was dressed in one of the silk tunics the men here wore, the laces at his wrists still undone. He looked furious.

"No! I was—he was—" Lily stammered. "It's not my fault."

“Forget it,” he said, turning away in a huff and going back to his room.

“And I don’t have a collection!” Lily called after him.

She heard him shout, “I said forget it!” from deep within the other apartment and sighed.

Caleb came through the adjoining doors, cringing at Tristan’s wake. “That could have gone better,” he said.

“It’s not my fault,” Lily repeated.

“It’s a weird witch-mechanic thing. I know that,” Caleb replied. “Tristan does, too. He’s just angry that the line to you got longer.”

“There’s no line,” Lily argued, but Caleb continued as if he didn’t hear her.

“Don’t worry about Tristan. He’s just mad at you because it’s a convenient distraction. It’s easier to be angry at you than to be sad about, well, everything.”

“Not here it isn’t,” Lily said, noticing that more Workers were coming in through the window. She pointed it out to Caleb and told him how the Hive had reacted when she’d started to feel anger.

They can feel our emotions? Caleb looked disturbed.

I doubt that, but they can certainly sense them somehow, she replied. *And they don’t allow anger. Tristan’s blocking me. Tell him to calm down and show him why.*

Caleb took a moment to converse with Tristan in mindspoke, and then turned back to her. *I really hate this place.*

Get ready to hate it some more.

Lily brought Caleb out onto the balcony and showed him the ships in the harbor. She told him they were from all around world and watched as he stared at them, his breath stalled in his chest and his jaw lax with surprise. His eyes flew out over the water as he imagined other countries, other continents—all of them Woven-free.

“How does Bower City keep the Woven from contaminating

other countries?" he asked. "Because all you need is one to climb inside a crate that gets loaded on a ship—"

"The Hive," Lily replied. "I'm pretty sure that, apart from them, there are no Woven out west. I don't think they let anything past them, maybe as far to the east as where they picked us up. That's about halfway."

"No Woven over half of the continent," he whispered. It was almost too much for him to accept. "How could we not know that?"

The Workers had settled down after Tristan's outburst. They went back to gathering nectar, buzzing in and out of the wisteria, their brightly striped bodies weighing down the blossoms.

Toshi mentioned "restrictions" on immigration, Lily told him in mind-speak. If the Hive only allows a few people to come to the city, I doubt it lets many out.

Caleb's eyes angled up the edge of their roof as a Sister escaped out of his line of sight. *Many—or any?* he asked.

We'll see.

A porter arrived with a rolling cart piled high with food, drawing Lily and Caleb back inside. The smell of hot food drew the rest of the coven out of their beds and baths and into Lily's sitting room. While they passed plates around, Lily shared in mindspeak what she had learned from Toshi.

Una eyed the nearest flower arrangement warily and saw a Worker waddle out of the wide throat of a bloom. She elbowed Lily and tipped her chin at it.

Lily gave a faint nod and stood. They'd been sitting there silently for too long. "I think I'm the only one who hasn't had a bath yet," she said.

Converse out loud, but be careful, she told her coven in mindspeak. I don't know how much the Workers can or can't understand and I don't want the Hive to know anything private about us—especially not about where

Breakfast, Una, and I come from. As far as anyone in Bower City is concerned, we come from this world.

Does that include Toshi? Tristan asked in mind speak.

Lily didn't bother to respond. She knew he was fishing for something to feel other than sad, and he needed someone to blame. It wasn't helping matters that Lily couldn't look him in the eye. Not yet. Not so soon after.

She went through to the bedrooms and found that Juliet and Una had left her the largest room, and understood why when she studied the flower arrangements. The bouquets were made up exclusively of every different kind of lily that Lily could recognize. Her smile at Una's and Juliet's sweet gesture to leave this room for her turned hesitant as she considered whether or not their host's flower choice had been intentional or coincidental. Lilies are commonly used in arrangements, so it wouldn't be a stretch of the imagination to think that this was just a happy accident. More to the point, there was no way anyone in Bower City could have known Lily's name ahead of time. Still, it nagged at her.

Lily undressed self-consciously while she filled the generous soaking tub. One of the casement windows had been left slightly ajar and a tall glass vase held a bunch of enormous, long-stemmed tiger lilies by the full-length mirror. Lily couldn't see them, but she knew the Workers were there, free to come and go out the open window.

The bath soap she drizzled into the water was so heavily perfumed it made Lily sneeze. The scent was lovely, but so concentrated she knew that her skin would smell like it for the rest of the day.

Either the Workers liked it, or it made the people easier for the Hive to track. Either way, Lily found herself unable to enjoy it knowing that it was, somehow, for the Hive.

As she soaked, Lily watched as the last of the burns on her hands faded away. She looked more carefully at the decanter of soap, and

saw that it contained a strange chemical that was almost like the burn salve, but that she had never encountered before. The water grew cold as she tried to pick its composition apart with what she had learned of medicines. The most she could discern was that it had regenerative properties. She was so engrossed in trying to figure it out she nearly called out for Rowan to come and take a look. The thought of him stopped her breath, and she dropped the image of him as if it had stung her.

He betrayed me.

Lillian was listening. The memory of Rowan taking her willstones and locking her in a cage flew from Lily's mind to Lillian's.

He didn't want you to turn into me, Lillian replied. After what I did to him, can you blame him?

Lillian shared a memory of her own . . .

. . . I can hear Rowan coming down the hallway. Gavin is trying to stop him, but it's like a sparrow trying to distract a bull. I'm aching to see him, and I dread it. All I want is to be held and comforted, healed and cared for by Rowan. But he can never touch me again or he'll see. He already knows something's wrong because he keeps reaching out to me and I won't let him in my mind. If I let him touch me, he'll see the illness I brought back from the cinder world, and there's no way I'll be able to keep the whole story from him. No way I'll be able to hide what happened in the barn.

He bursts through the door, his riding clothes still travel stained from the Outlands. He's been looking for me since I disappeared three weeks ago and his eyes are tired and his skin is pale with worry. He's gorgeous. My throat closes and I swallow the urge to say his name. I want to beg for him to come to me and make it all better, but I'm not a little girl anymore, and no one can make it all better ever again.

The only thing I can do is take steps to make sure that my world

doesn't become one of the millions of cinder worlds I see closing in around us. I've seen that the number of cinder worlds is growing as versions of Alaric detonate their thirteen bombs inside the Thirteen Cities. It's only a matter of time before that happens here. Unless I am ruthless.

"Where have you been?" Rowan asks. His voice is shaking. He knows something is terribly wrong. He knows that we, and everything we ever were to each other, are over. He just doesn't know he knows it yet.

"I can't tell you," I reply.

He laughs, like the thought of one of us not being able to tell the other anything is ridiculous. I stare at him until his face changes. "You're serious," he says, still not really believing it.

He enters the room and tries to come to me. I do something I haven't done since I was eight and he was ten. I possess his body and stop him in his tracks.

"That's far enough," I whisper. When I let him go he draws a panicked breath, not because he's winded, but to reassure himself that he can breathe again on his own.

"What's going on?" He's terrified. Now he knows. I'm going to break his heart, and he has no idea why. It's like watching someone fall—his panicked face slipping farther and farther away as he tries to hold on to nothing. I'm thin air, less than smoke, and he slides right through me.

If I love him more than I love myself, he'll never know. Not even when he finds out that I've arrested his father and sent the order to hang him at dawn . . .

That's enough, Lily said, ending the memory. *I don't want to think about him.* She pushed the image of Rowan's face forcibly out of her mind.

You never want to think about him anymore.

No. I don't.

Lily had shelved all thought of him since he betrayed her. The entire trip cross-country she'd skirted around the mountain of emotion any thought of Rowan entailed, and she still didn't have the strength to climb.

Lily got out of her bath and wrapped a thick towel around her. She opened the closet and found three light kimono-style dresses for her to choose from. As she slid her fingers across the buff-colored silk of one of them she imagined how perfectly this particular shade suited her redheaded complexion. A sapphire-blue kimono, and one more in jade green hung next to it. She took the green one off the hanger, slipped in on, and stood in front of the mirror to tie the darker emerald obi around her waist. It matched her eyes perfectly.

She rubbed some conditioning cream into her curls and wound them up into a twist. She stabbed the twist with one of the many ornate pins, combs, and clips that were offered in tray by the sink. *A strange thing to offer*, she thought. *Unless you knew your guest had a lot of unruly hair.*

Lily took one last look at herself, resisting the urge to sneer at the pampered woman reflected back at her. The way she looked couldn't have been more at odds with what she felt, and the disconnect disgusted her. She wanted to look as warped as she felt.

Hide two of your willstones, Lillian reminded her.

Lily tucked her pink and golden stones into a fold of her obi and adjusted her smoke stone so it lay prominently on her breastbone.

On her way out of her room, Lily passed by the bed with its crisp linen sheets and wondered why she wasn't tired. Instead of resting, she went back out to the sitting area and found her coven fed, bathed, and dressed in their host's colorful clothes. Toshi had rejoined them, and he must have just said something funny because everyone

was laughing. Even Tristan, she noticed. Laughter didn't feel right, and Lily stepped into the room irritated by the sound.

"Lily," Toshi said. He stood and smiled, his eyes washing up and down her. "That color looks lovely on you."

"I was just thinking that it's a tricky color, jade green. You almost have to be a redhead to pull it off." She watched Toshi carefully. "Are there many redheads in Bower City?"

"No," he said. "There are some fairer people of Russian descent, but mostly we have darker complexions."

"What an amazing coincidence, then," Lily remarked.

"I guess so," he replied. There wasn't even a flicker of discomfort in him and Lily wondered if maybe that's all it was. Coincidence. "I was just telling your coven that I'd be happy to show you some of the city," Toshi continued when it became clear that Lily was not going to comment further. "You seemed interested in the docks."

"I'd like to see them," Juliet said.

Lily looked around at her coven and saw that they were curious about the city. They should have been tired, but no one was. She gestured for Toshi to lead the way. He brought them down the grand staircase they had come up, but then took them in the opposite direction across the high-ceilinged entry room and out through a different door rather than going through the Hearing Hall. It let out onto a wide boulevard. Across the street was a well-manicured park, surrounded by stately villas.

"So is this the nice part of town, or the nicer part of town?" Una asked.

"Nice-er, I'm guessing," Breakfast said. He waved the air toward his face and inhaled. "I smell money."

"Right?" Toshi flashed his ready smile, his eyes crinkling around the sides. "This area is where most of the legislators have their homes

because it's close to the Forum," Toshi told them. "But where I grew up, we called it Bullshit Row."

He won a chuckle from Una and Breakfast.

"Where'd you grow up?" Lily asked, purposely interrupting the light moment. The sound of laughter grated on her.

"I'm bringing you near there, actually," he said, his eyes drifting down. "We have to catch a trolley, though. It's a long way away."

At the end of the block they crossed a street busy with foot traffic and waited at the curb. Lily studied the tracks that ran parallel to the sidewalk, but couldn't find a third rail. There were no wires overhead, either.

"What fuels the trains?" she asked.

"They're electric," Toshi answered. "Rechargeable power packs on the bottom allow for about twelve hours of use before they need to visit an energy depot."

"And what powers the energy depots?" she asked.

"Electricity from crucibles and witches, just like in your city," he answered with a shrug.

"And mechanics?"

"Since we can't transmute, we aid them by monitoring their bodies while they work, but mostly mechanics focus on creating new materials, medicines, and other things the city needs. We may not be claimed, but we contribute."

"Like the bath soap," Lily said.

"Interesting stuff," Tristan agreed, his eyes hooded in thought.

"That formula was created by a mechanic. Many years ago," Toshi said. He watched the street as he spoke, his expression neutral—even disinterested.

Lily smiled at the trick. The quickest way to make something seem boring is to act bored by it.

"What else does it do?" she persisted. "Besides heal and energize?"

“Slows aging. Helps the body fight off sickness . . .” He trailed off. “It’s something all citizens have in our baths.”

A trolley swung into view and Toshi turned to it and pointed. “They only stop completely every fifteen blocks, but they slow enough for people to hop on and off if they see you waiting. Is everyone okay to jump on?”

They all nodded their assent. As the trolley neared, it slowed just enough for their party to step up into it. Lily felt Toshi take her elbow as she hopped aboard.

“Take the rail,” he said, guiding her hand to the brass rail that stood out at about head level.

“What about old people, or the handicapped?” Juliet asked. “How do they get off and on?”

“See the inside track?” Toshi pointed to a rail line that ran down the middle of the street. Awnings with benches under them were provided every few blocks and Lily saw a woman with a baby and an armload of packages waiting at one of them. “That one stops completely every five blocks. It goes much slower so it can be accessed by people who are less mobile. But we don’t really have that many people who need to use it because of an infirmity. Our medicine is quite advanced here.”

“You got that soap,” Una said.

“We got that soap,” he agreed, chuckling.

Lily’s eyes fell down to his dark garnet-colored stone and guessed that he must have been part of some of the medical advances here. There was so much potential in his stone she could see it glimmering inside the facets of his willstone, like whispers shushing down a dark hallway. The train slowed for more pedestrians to jump aboard, making them sway where they stood. The motion tipped her closer to Toshi, and jarred her out of staring at his stone. She looked up to meet his eyes and saw a slow smile spreading on his lips.

Caught, she looked away quickly and busied herself by searching the crowds for anyone that could be considered less mobile. She saw older people, but no one seemed infirm. Even the most silver-haired among the citizens had straight backs, robust complexions, and the vigorous strides of much younger people.

So this is what you can accomplish when several generations of mechanics are free to focus on healing rather than fighting, Lillian said. *Rowan would love it here.*

Lillian shared another memory of Rowan before Lily could block her out . . .

. . . I sneak up behind Rowan. The room is darkened. His shoulders are set with concentration, and the magelight coming from his willstone is a deep red. He's casting a complicated spell that has all of him ensorcelled. I hate that something other than me has so much of his breathtaking focus. I admit it. I'm jealous of anything that takes his eyes off me, and I'm going to punish him for it.

I still the air around me. I place my feet delicately. I quiet my breathing, ready to pounce—

"I know you're there, Lillian," he drawls without even turning around from his workbench.

"How do you *do* that?" I huff. I've never once been able to surprise him.

"You're louder than a herd of buffalo," he teases, spinning around on his stool to face me. I launch myself at him anyway. He catches me, already protesting as I pepper his face with kisses.

"Come on, Lillian," he groans. "I have so much work to do."

"It's so late, though. Come to bed," I reply, pouting as he pulls away.

"I don't have time to work on this during the day," he says, hassled. "We've been so focused on keeping the other Covens in line. I've had to officiate *three* duels in the past *two* days."

"Exeter and Richmond are at it again," I say, sighing. "It's lucky

for us they're content with singular duels instead of demanding to send their mechanics against each other in full skirmishes."

"I don't think that's far off," he says, a troubled frown creasing his brow. He rolls his eyes. "Witches. Always looking for an excuse to fuel your mechanics."

"We do like to fight," I admit with a shrug. The beakers in front of him catch my eye. "What are you working on, anyway?"

"Well, I don't know yet," he says, smiling sheepishly. "I've isolated an interesting compound from a squid—"

"A squid?" I interrupt scathingly. "You're throwing me over for a squid?"

He chuckles, shaking his head. "I can't win with you."

"Of course you can," I say, pulling on one of his hands and tugging him along with me toward our bedroom. My smile is a promise. "I'll let you win right now."

His laugh is a purr in his throat. He stops short and pulls me back to him, wrapping me up against his chest. "You always get your way," he whispers as he lowers his mouth to mine. . . .

Lily snapped back to the here and now, a flush staining her cheeks. *Enough, Lillian. Why show me that?*

To remind you how much you miss him. You should forgive him.

Lily blocked her other self out.

Rowan. He had been younger in Lillian's memory. There was so much they had shared that Lily didn't know about. They'd essentially run a country together. Lily felt herself choking on the wild, sick feeling that thought gave her. She didn't know if it was jealousy or longing or the shock of feeling physically close to Rowan again, but it threw her and left her feeling bare and off balance. She looked up to see Toshi watching her, the barest hint of a smile on his lips. Lily looked away uncomfortably and trained her eyes on the scenery scrawling past.

They rode the trolley for over twenty minutes, passing through

different neighborhoods. The style of the buildings changed from Italian villa to downtown loft to Japanese wooden temples, complete with rock gardens and sliding screens rather than walls. There was even a Chinatown, teeming with people. All of the neighborhoods were orderly, perfectly maintained, and immaculate. Flowers were everywhere, spilling from windows, rooftops, and lining the streets. There were many parks, and Lily noticed that in all of the parks were four towers, one in the vicinity of each corner. The towers were taller than any building, but still shorter than the greentowers in the east, and they weren't covered in vegetation. They were thin structures, barely noticeable, with a flat surface on top.

"What are those?" Lily asked Toshi, pointing to one of the spindly towers.

"Oh, those are for the Hive," he said, unconcerned. "The Sisters rarely come down to street level." He turned toward the ocean. "Just a few more blocks."

The light was lying long across the city by the time they arrived at the docks. Ships of all shapes and sizes crowded into port, some of them so gigantic that they rose up from the water like windowless skyscrapers, hemming in the horizon. Cranes unloading shipping containers and warehouses to store goods stretched past Lily's field of view. From every high vantage point a cluster of Sisters hovered, barely visible, their whips ready at their side.

Caleb and Tristan took in the enormous scope of the port with a mixture of awe and anger.

"So, is every other country in the world in on this?" Tristan asked, his bitterness strangling him.

"Most of our trade is with China, Russia, and Japan, but yes," Toshi answered. He was sensitive to their charged emotions, but not pitying. "The whole world knows about Bower City, and they know about the thirteen 'untouchable' cities in the east. They also know

about Outlanders, and how you live out in the wilds with the Woven. You're legendary, actually. There's a lot of respect for your people around the world."

"But no help," Caleb said. His mouth twisted into a sneer. "Not one country has ever thought to try to lend us a hand? My people are *dying* out there."

Toshi didn't try to make excuses. "Everyone knows," he repeated gently.

Caleb made a sound between a laugh and a sob and turned away. Breakfast started to go after him, but Una's hand shot out to stop him.

"Let him be," she said aloud. Lily could tell by the jumble of emotions that played across their faces that Una and Breakfast were sharing mindspeak, but they didn't include her.

Tristan was staring at Toshi, his anger at the world distilling into one person.

Come on, Tristan. It isn't Toshi's fault, Lily said in mindspeak. Tristan didn't answer. He broke away from the group and wandered, still reeling, down to the water's edge. Juliet, who was hiding her shock with silence, followed him. Una and Breakfast slowly peeled off to go their own way. Lily found Toshi watching her as they walked to a more open-looking part of the wharf that had smaller ships that didn't loom over them and block out the sky. Lily looked down at a few bobbing docks that were unoccupied by vessels but teeming with sea lions. They barked at the humans and flapped their flippers.

"I have a feeling a lot just happened between all of you," he said. "Especially Caleb and Tristan."

"Somehow it was easier to think the rest of the world had disappeared, or that they didn't know, rather than own up to the fact that they'd abandoned us to genocide." She gestured to the huge ships, the signs of progress. "We all suspected that the world was still turning, but it's hard to swallow when you see just how much."

Toshi nodded, his lips pursed. “And you can feel what your coven feels right now?”

“Some of it.”

“What’s that *like*?” He was trying not to seem too eager, but his eyes were hungry. Lights danced inside his willstone like a tingle. Lily looked away at the tidy dock and the scrubbed hulls of the ships. Even the sea lions looked well groomed.

“It’s annoying,” she snapped, her tone intentionally harsh. “Are we done here?”

“Sure,” Toshi said, his face falling. She remembered, too late, that he had said he was going to show them where he grew up.

“You were raised down by the docks?” she asked, trying to salvage the situation. “That must have been—”

He shook his head once. “Some other time.” He flashed one of his dazzling smiles and Lily wondered if he’d been insulted at all. He started leading her back up to the street. “We should get going, anyway. We have other plans for you tonight.”

“We do?”

“New arrivals, chosen by the Hive? The whole city wants to meet you. Unfortunately, you only get to meet the boring half tonight.”

“Ah. Bullshit Row?” she guessed.

“Exactly. Important people first, I guess.”

“I thought *everyone* was important in Bower City.” She was baiting him, hoping to find a crack in the high-gloss shellac that coated everything here. “What did Grace say when she paraded us through the Hearing Hall? It was built like that ‘so even the smallest voice can be heard.’”

“Oh, the smallest voices are the most important,” he said impishly. “Especially mine.” Lily couldn’t hold back a laugh. Pleased that he’d gotten what he wanted, Toshi started looking down the

street for a trolley. “So, do we call for your coven, or . . . how does this work?”

“I already did. They’re coming.”

He looked away. The hungry shine was back. “Convenient.”

“For some things.” Lily sought out the hole that had been Tristan, worrying it like a hangnail. “Most of the time it just hurts.”

CHAPTER

3

“IT’S LIKE BODY ORIGAMI,” LILY SAID.

Juliet made an exasperated sound, looked down at the instructions, and then back up at Lily’s obi. The kimonos they’d been loaned for that afternoon’s outing to the docks were point-and-click, but the fancy dress kimonos for that evening’s ball were an entirely different matter.

“No—you have to fold *that* down twice, and then twist it. Can that be right?” Juliet studied the obi. “Yeah. That’s it. Down twice, then twist, then tie.” She did it for Lily. “There.”

Lily looked at herself in the mirror. She looked glorious in the petal-pink, crimson-red, and soft-cream kimono with a cherry blossom pattern. Her hair was swept up in lacquered combs and her face was subtly painted. The more layers of luxury this place seemed to pile on top of her, the more smothered she felt. She didn’t want to look beautiful. She resisted the perverse urge to spit at the liar in the mirror.

“I’m hot,” she said.

“You’ll live,” Juliet replied unforgivingly and then switched to mindspeak. *You were quiet today.*

So were you.

I had nothing to add, Juliet replied. Then, she suddenly changed her mind. *Why the perimeter wall? Why is this city walled off like Salem if they’re not afraid of the Woven?*

I don’t know, Juliet. There must be something they’re not telling us.

Una barged into Lily’s bathroom—yards of icy-blue silk in an ocean-wave pattern hanging off her—looking like a kid in her mother’s date-night robe. “I’ve had it with this thing,” she said flatly.

“Juliet, you do hers and I’ll do yours.”

They formed a train. Lily helped her sister wrap, tie, and rewrap her yellow kimono with a sunset pattern fairly easily, but Una was in worse shape. She had to strip down to the bottom layer and start over.

“No wonder the Japanese are so smart,” Una muttered. “You need a frigging PhD to get into their dang clothes.”

Careful, Una. You don’t know if they have PhD’s here, Lily reminded her in mindspeak. She couldn’t see it, but she knew at least one Worker was inside the trumpet of an enormous tiger lily blossom in her bathroom.

That was careless of me, but this place is so nerve-racking, Una replied. *And all the perfume is giving me a headache.*

You don’t trust perfect, Lily said in mindspeak.

My mom liked to pretend that things were perfect. That we were perfect. I pretended along with her for longer than I should have.

Lily glanced down at the rows of thin white scars on inside of Una’s forearm. They were hidden hatch marks that she’d given herself with a razor blade when she was a little girl—one for every time her mother’s boyfriend had touched her. Una knew she was looking at them.

"I'd like a drink," Una announced.

"The boys have already started," Lily told her, needlessly, though. Una and Breakfast were in near-constant contact, always sharing whispers of their thoughts. Lily had that once. It hurt to see it, so Lily made herself stare as they entered the sitting area and Breakfast held up a glass, already poured for Una. Lily didn't need a razor blade to cut herself.

She caught Juliet watching her watching them, and the sisters shared a sad smile. Neither of them commented. They both knew what the other had given up.

At least I have her, Lily thought to Lillian. She felt her there, distracted, half listening, but not engaged.

Lily's mechanics were impeccably dressed in the tunic-style of clothes that the men wore in Bower City, and although she was no expert of fashion here, even she could tell that the tailoring and the materials were a cut above what she'd seen so far in the city. The shoulders had crisp lines, the trousers were the perfect combination of structured and snug, and their shoes had the buttery look of the best Italian leather.

Tristan grinned at Lily when he saw her. "That took you half of forever," he said, gesturing to her kimono.

She shrugged and tried to move away, but Tristan caught her elbow and made her stay with him.

"It was worth it, though," he whispered. "You look stunning."

He was too close—too close to her, and too close to being who she needed him to be—but not close enough. She couldn't look him in the eye. She looked at his hands instead and noticed that his glass was full, and rightly guessed that he was already on his second drink.

"What is that stuff?" she said, pointing to the crystal tumbler in his hand.

"Whatever it is, it's amazing," Caleb said.

The lights in Lily's willstone twisted as she looked into the amber liquid and the perfect sphere of ice that rolled in it as if oiled.

"May I pour you one?" Toshi asked.

Lily turned to find him rejoining the group with another bottle. He was wearing a midnight-blue tunic that made him look longer and leaner. She looked away. "I don't drink," she said.

"Ever?"

"Once. That was enough."

Toshi didn't press her. "I don't blame you. This stuff will teach you a lesson." He filled a glass for Juliet. "The first time I had it was at a spring solstice party on the other side of town—a good twenty minutes on the trolley. The party was on the top floor of some rich guy's apartment, and he'd had the whole floor carpeted with grass for people to sit on like they're back in nature." He paused to fill Caleb's glass. "I take off my shoes like everyone else to feel the grass between my toes and have a few of these drinks. And then a few more. And then I *think* there were fireworks—either that or somebody hit me." Tristan chuckled despite himself. "About then I realize it's probably time to go, so I stagger out onto the street to wait for a trolley. Couldn't find a trolley if it ran over me. So I walked home." He refilled Una's glass, taking another well-timed pause. "I wake up the next day and my feet are just killing me." His sparkling eyes lifted to meet Lily's. "I'd left my shoes. I was so stinking drunk I hadn't noticed I'd walked halfway across the city barefoot."

Everyone laughed, tipping into a huddle. Everyone except Lily. Toshi didn't ruin his good story by stopping to bask in his own cleverness. Before the laughter had a chance to get stale, he put down the bottle, his demeanor turning crisp.

"Drink up, everyone," he said. "Grace will kill me if I get you there *too* late."

They finished up their drinks and he swept them downstairs,

across the foyer, and through a side door that let out into an atrium. The fountain in the center was large enough to swim in and it was lit so invitingly Lily had an urge to do just that.

The thought of throwing off her clothes and wading into the water pestered her. Lily's lips twitched as she stifled an upwelling of mirth. So many inappropriate impulses were fighting to come out of her. She wanted to tear off her clothes, break every mirror she walked by, and tell everyone in the world to go to hell.

I think I'm going crazy, Lily said, reaching out for Lillian.

You're not, Lillian answered. *That would be easier, though.*

You've felt like this?

Sure. Dozens of times, but most acutely when I took the crown.

What crown?

It would be quicker to show you . . .

. . . Rowan raises the crown over my head, and for the first time I get a good look at it in the mirror. The crown of the Salem Witch is made of burnt iron and diamonds. It's a cruel-looking thing, barbed and jagged, frosted with icy jewels. It's a thing of gothic beauty, born of fire and pressure. Like the Salem Witch herself.

That's me now. I'm the Salem Witch. At thirteen that makes me the youngest in history. As Rowan places it on my head all I can think is *finally*, as if I've waited centuries.

"Proud of yourself?" Rowan teases.

"Let's go," I say, rolling my eyes and trying not to blush.

"Are you sure you don't want those?" Rowan gestures down into the black silk for the rest of the Salem Witch's crown jewels. I balk. I don't even want to look at them.

"I'm not going to the pyre this instant," I say, rubbing my wrists absently. "It's overkill."

Rowan nods and covers them so I don't have to see them. I've heard that the blood of other Salem Witches is scored into the metal,

baked there by such high heat that nothing could ever really scour them clean. I'm not ready for the shackles of my new position. Not yet. Tonight I just want the crown.

We go downstairs and all eyes land on me. Councilmen smear on their smarmiest congratulations. The heads of the other twelve Covens narrow their eyes in dislike while they congratulate me, their smiles wide and frozen.

Laughter froths inside me. I try to stamp it down, but the more solemn I try to behave, the more I find myself fighting the urge to bray like a donkey. I'm a liar. I've somehow convinced this pack of fools that I'm good enough for this, but I know I'm not, and soon they're all going to figure out what a fraud I am.

I want to laugh in everyone's face, I say to Rowan.

Don't, Rowan warns. They already hate you.

If they already hate me, then why bother?

Lillian—

But it's too late. I'm already laughing, laughing, laughing in their stupid faces . . .

Lillian breezed out of Lily's mind again, called away by something urgent. Lily wondered what it was that kept diverting Lillian's attention, but she supposed that being the Salem Witch would keep one busy. Lily had never filled that role personally or experienced much of it through Lillian's or Rowan's memories.

It seemed like every memory of Lillian's had Rowan in it. Lily was beginning to wonder whether there was any part of Lillian's life that didn't include him. At least, any part she cared to remember.

Lily, are you okay? It was Juliet. Lily looked at her and shook her head.

I feel like I'm losing it. What are we doing here, Jules?

Juliet shook her head and shrugged, wearing a helpless grin. As Lily smiled back she realized that she'd called this Juliet Jules—that

was the nickname she had only ever used for her actual sister. She didn't regret it, though, or wish she could take it back. It comforted her too much.

Toshi brought the coven across the atrium and to another wing of Grace's enormous mansion, where the ball was already in progress.

A slim Indian woman in her mid-twenties met them before they could slip in through one of the sets of French doors that opened into the atrium from the ballroom.

"Toshi. Grace is waiting," she said. Her voice was tight and her sharp smile didn't make it up to her eyes. She wore a smoke-colored willstone. It wasn't as dark or as large as Grace's, but it was still impressive. Lily belatedly recognized her as one of the attendants who came with Grace and Toshi to the field of flowers earlier that day.

"We've met, but we haven't been introduced," Lily said, putting herself forward. The woman recoiled slightly, as if Lily were some blundering hick.

"I'm sorry," Toshi apologized, making it seem as if the breach in etiquette was his fault. "Lily Proctor, this is Mala Nehru—Lieutenant Governor of Bower City."

"You look much better," Mala said, her lips smiling but her eyes narrowed.

"Feeling great," Lily said. Her return smile was made through gritted teeth.

"Good. All these people are here to see you, after all. We wouldn't want you to be feeling poorly." Mala stepped uncomfortably close. Lily felt her mechanics stiffen and silently told them to keep back. For a moment she thought Mala was going to try to uncover the other two willstones she'd hidden inside her obi, but instead Mala untied the outer sash and retied it while she spoke. "You knot once, twist—like this—and then tuck the edges."

“Thank you,” Lily said, meeting and holding Mala’s eyes. They were standing close enough to kiss. Lily didn’t back away.

“Anything I can do to help,” Mala answered before turning and leading them into the ballroom.

That was creepy, Breakfast said to the coven in mindspeak. *Do we have to follow her?*

The coven laughed under their breath to relieve some of the tension. Toshi watched their changing demeanor like a kid pressed against a candy shop window.

She’s just trying to throw you off balance, Juliet said to Lily in mind-speak. *It’s such an obvious power play it makes her look weak.*

Juliet had a knowing smirk on her face as her eyes followed Mala into the ballroom. This Juliet, the one who’d been raised alongside Lillian, knew how to navigate a nest of vipers.

Keep telling me things like that, Lily replied, and stepped between the billowing curtains that framed the French doors.

Inside, the chandeliers overhead filled the room with a bubbly golden light, as if the air had been infused with champagne. Gilded walls and sparkling glass doors bounced that light around until it fell in soft focus upon the jewel-like people. The style of dress seemed to favor kimonos, but there were also some saris and a few dresses that appeared to be from the Georgian era in England. Some of the men and women wore war paint, but it was placed to please rather than intimidate. Everyone looked slim, healthy, and relatively young.

Flowers exploded from vases. Flowers were pinned up in ladies’ hair. Flowers decorated the buttonholes of men’s jackets. Flowers adorned every table, and Lily knew that in some of those flowers was a Worker, picking its way through the petals on needle-like toes.

As Lily entered the ballroom, heads turned. Drinks were halted halfway to mouths. Eyes stared, unblinking. Lily resisted the urge to

look at the floor, and instead met some of the stares. No one held her gaze or tried to engage her attention.

If they're all here to meet me, she asked Juliet, why are they avoiding me?

They're here to see you, not meet you.

I feel like an idiot.

Keep your chin up, Juliet encouraged. Lily felt her sister briefly squeeze her hand before letting it go.

Mala melted into the crowd, abandoning Lily without making one introduction. As jostling bodies swallowed Mala's lithe figure, a man's thick shoulders replaced hers. He was making his way toward them, lifting a hand to hail them. He was tall, well over six feet, and he had thinning blond hair and blue eyes that reminded Lily of sky rather than ice. His features were thick, his cheeks were ruddy, and his chin dimpled by a deep cleft. Physically, he looked about thirty, but he might have been nearer to fifty for all the cares he seemed to carry. Around his neck he wore the largest golden willstone Lily had ever seen.

For kitchen magic—simple but tiring stuff to make, like cleansing mists and water purifiers. Useful guy, Lily thought, and wondered whether Lillian was listening. She could feel Lillian in the back of her head, but she wasn't actively engaged. Lily could sense that Lillian was occupied with something that was taking her whole attention again.

"Ah, Toshi," he said, approaching them with a distracted look. He pulled Toshi aside to tell him something in private and then turned his attention to Lily's coven. "So, we're all here, then?" he said, smiling broadly.

He looks like a retired boxer, Breakfast whispered in Lily's mind. His description was so dead-on that Lily had to stifle a snicker.

"Good to see you again," Juliet said, recognizing him as the final member of the trio of attendants that came with Grace to welcome them into the city.

“And you,” he said. “You were all a bit too tired for introductions when we first met. I’m Ivan Volkov. Head Mechanic of Bower City.”

Lily’s coven greeted the Head Mechanic. She noticed Ivan marking Caleb’s golden willstone, and the two of them sharing an exchange of understanding. Golden stones weren’t given as much glory as smoke or rose stones, and because of that their bearers tended to be overlooked. Ivan’s position as Head Mechanic was exceptional—something that Lily couldn’t imagine happening back east.

“I’m sure we’ll speak more later,” Ivan said with an apologetic smile. He was a busy man, apparently, and left them, saying, “Ah, Simon,” in the same tone he’d used to greet Toshi.

“That’s Ivan,” Toshi said, smiling after him warmly. They continued on toward the far side of the room.

“You’re fond of him,” Lily remarked.

“He’s my mentor. Not that Ivan picks favorites,” he amended quickly. “That’s why we all respect him so much. He gives each of us an equal chance to advance.”

“He’s from Russia?” Una guessed.

“His family was, like my family was from Japan. But it’s been so long since the Hive has allowed anyone new to immigrate to the city no one here is really *from* anyplace else anymore.” He lifted his eyebrows. “Why do you think we’re throwing you this party?”

“You know, I’m not really sure.” Lily looked up at Toshi, testing him. She spread her hands to indicate the glittering room. “It’s a bit much.”

“Being chosen is a big deal,” he assured her. “It hasn’t happened in almost twenty years. If you’re here, it’s for a reason.”

“So the Hive kidnaps people and flies them to a strange city to fulfill some kind of purpose?” Caleb asked. “What could a bunch of insects want from humans?”

Toshi turned to him, his face taut. “The Hive *selects* people. And all it wants is a well-run society.”

“Oh, great,” Breakfast said wryly. “Because perfect societies never have a downside.”

Toshi laughed, dispelling the tension. “No one ever claimed Bower City was perfect,” he said. “But it is well run.”

They arrived at a large table, where Grace was half listening to Mala say something in her ear. Grace saw Lily arrive and stood before Mala had finished.

“Lily. Thank you for coming,” she said, looking pleased. She was wearing a buckskin suede dress decorated with turquoise beads and an impressive feathered headdress. Tribal paint streaked her face and dotted her shoulders and thick silver bracelets were clipped over her wrists like gauntlets.

Lily didn’t have a response, so she just smiled. Grace invited Lily to sit next to her. Mala was obliged to move down a chair, which she did with pursed lips. Toshi and the rest of Lily’s coven seated themselves around the table. Ivan circled back to place his drink down between Tristan and Caleb before he darted off again. Once everyone had claimed a seat, there was still an extra place setting.

“Did you enjoy your visit to the docks?” Grace asked.

Lily pulled her gaze away from the empty seat. “Some of us more than others,” she replied.

“Oh? Was there a problem?” Grace directed her question at Toshi.

“Just culture shock,” Toshi assured her.

“Yes,” Grace said. “I suppose it would be hard to take in, wouldn’t it?” Caleb made a disgusted sound. “Speak your mind,” Grace urged. “You didn’t like it?”

“Oh, the ships, the trade, that’s all great,” Caleb said, a knife-edge gleam in his eyes. “For *you*.”

“Go on,” Grace said, knowing there was more.

“You’re wearing a sachem’s headdress, but you’ve left your people to die.”

“Bower City is where my people are,” Grace replied gently. Caleb shook his head, rejecting her answer.

“You could send out scouts right now and tell the Outlanders that there are no Woven in the west,” he persisted. “They don’t need your charity if you’re worried about refugees, and they wouldn’t have to come here to the city. They could build one of their own. There’s plenty of room.”

“Okay, say I do send out scouts,” Grace said hypothetically. “For those who manage to get past the Pride and the Pack, what happens to the ones the Hive doesn’t accept?”

“Thousands would die,” Mala answered, on cue.

“Thousands *are* dying,” Caleb shot back.

Mala opened her mouth to say something, but Grace raised a hand to silence her. “Caleb, do you know what the Hive wants? What guides its choices? Or why it kills some and accepts others?” she asked. Grace leaned in, holding his eyes. “What if the Hive decides it’s done accepting people altogether and it kills *everyone* who tries to make the crossing? I’m sure you’ve heard the stories of whole tribes being wiped out.”

Caleb looked away.

“So we can’t tell anyone,” Tristan said. He raised an eyebrow. “And I’m sure if we promise not to say anything, you’ll let us leave and go back home.”

“Go north, go south—there isn’t anything out there, but you’re welcome to look,” Grace said. “I’m afraid the Hive will stop you if you try to go east, though.”

“Why? What do they care which way we go?” Lily asked, her

frustration evident. Again, she found herself encountering a strange “rule” that the Woven followed for no apparent reason. No one hazarded an answer.

“I’m sorry to be the one tell you this, but the Hive won’t let you go east,” Grace said. “You’re welcome to stay here, at least.”

White-gloved porters filled all the water glasses. Lily stared at the one waiting in front of the empty chair, sitting there like an unanswered question.

“What’s the rest of the world like?” Juliet asked, breaking the long silence. “Are there witches and mechanics in other countries?”

“Not like here,” Grace said. “There are people with talent all over the world, but they lack the means to harness it.”

“Harness?” Juliet repeated vaguely, and then understanding dawned on her. “Willstones. You’ve kept the secret.”

“We have,” Grace said.

“In our history books back east it says that before the Woven Outbreak—which threw everything into chaos—the process for growing willstones was the most carefully guarded secret that the covens had,” Juliet said, as if to edify the westerners about eastern ways, but really it was to catch Una, Breakfast, and Lily up on the history of this world before they misspoke. “Even still, growing willstones is the last thing that only the most advanced mechanics learn in their training.”

“We do things differently here,” Ivan said delicately.

“Only the Bower Witch and two mechanics are trusted with the formula at any given time,” Mala continued for him.

“When either the Head Mechanic or his second dies, another is supposed to be chosen immediately so that the formula isn’t lost,” Toshi said, finishing the explanation. He looked at Ivan, and many chapters of their story together passed silently between them.

“So, only three people grow willstones for everyone in Bower City?” Una asked.

“The mechanics handle the growing, and they only do that for people who have *talent*,” Mala corrected. “We don’t give willstones to just anyone, like you do in the east.”

“I’m guessing you also don’t give willstones to people in other countries,” Lily said.

“Not unless they’re selected for immigration and come to live in Bower City,” Grace replied.

“But crucibles and mechanics in other countries can’t get willstones from the east because it’s closed,” Breakfast said, confused.

“Which means Bower City has a monopoly on magic *itself* and all the medicines, products, and power that you can create with it,” Juliet said, leaning back in her chair. She shot Grace one of her disappointed looks that Lily knew too well, pursing her lips and gently shaking her head.

“All over the world,” Tristan muttered, impressed. “They have to come to you. No wonder your docks are so busy.”

Grace tipped her head in assent. She could see that the easterners disapproved. “Greece kept the secret for Greek fire so well the knowledge of its making went extinct with their culture. China managed to keep the secret of making silk from the rest of the world for hundreds of years,” she said unapologetically. “Bower City keeps the secret of willstones.”

“And you’ve profited from it greatly,” Juliet said, her frown deepening.

“Yes. Our city is rich and our people want for nothing,” Grace said. “Tell me, on your trip down to the docks, or earlier when you came through the Forum, did you see any slums? Or people begging on the street?”

“No. Because you don’t have anything like that in Bower City, do you, Grace?” Lily said.

“We don’t,” she replied, smiling. “Isn’t it incredible? We’ve eradicated poverty.”

Caleb made the same disgusted sound he’d made at the beginning of the conversation. “For *you*,” he said again.

Lily thought of all the crucibles and mechanics around the world whose talent had been stunted because the Hive hadn’t selected them for immigration. She remembered her life before she came to this world—the migraines, the fevers, and the seizures that nearly killed her. She pushed her chair back from the table with a scraping sound.

“You know what? I don’t think I’m hungry,” she said.

“I’d really like for you to stay,” Grace said. “There’s someone else about to join us.”

Lily stood, ignoring the shocked faces of her coven and how their eyes kept darting over her shoulder. “Really. I think I’m done here.”

“Lily,” said a voice behind her.

It was a low voice. A voice she hadn’t heard in months, but that she *thought* she heard at the edge of sleep nearly every night. Lily forced herself to turn and face him slowly.

“Rowan.”

Lily didn’t feel the chair under her, but she did feel her spine jolt as she landed on it. Tristan, Caleb, and Una stood up as Lily sank, their shock quickly turning to anger. Silly questions, like “How’d you get here?” were asked, and needless statements like “We left you with Alaric,” were made.

Obviously, the Hive selected him and brought him to Bower City, she said to Lillian. And, He must not have stayed with Alaric. He must have been following us the whole time. For months. He followed us right into Hive territory and the Hive took him like they took us.

Either Caleb or Tristan wanted to hit him. Maybe it was both of them, but Lily couldn't tell because she could feel that both of them also wanted to embrace him as well. Voices were raised. A pinprick of annoyed heat grew into a dime-size dot that throbbed behind her left eye. Tempers flared higher. Soon her entire head was hot and buzzing until she couldn't stand it anymore.

"Enough," Lily said.

She'd barely whispered it, but a ripple of energy had traveled out of her with the single word, like a stone dropped into a pond. Her claimed gripped at their heads as if a piercing noise was deafening them. Every person in the ballroom was buffeted away from Lily, knocked back with the surge. Glass tinkled as it broke.

Dark streaks fell to the ground outside. The frames of the now-shattered glass doors burst open, and Warrior Sisters scudded in on their long ostrich-like legs. Their exo-armor glinted black over their tiger-striped skin, and their whips quivered in their human hands.

Lily's witch wind moaned as it raced to her. Her mechanics drew in a united breath at the precipice of the Gift. She felt Rowan's mind click into place inside hers, diamond bright and strong. Need almost overwhelmed her.

"Lily, don't!" Toshi called out, rushing to her side. A swarm of Workers flew in around their Sisters, blackening the air like a flurry of soot. "They're reacting to your aggression. You have to stop!"

Lily felt her coven pulling at her, all of them ready to receive her power. Out of the corner of her eye, she caught a glimpse of Grace's scowling face and the words "warmonger witch" ran through her head.

She pulled back, releasing her mechanics, and hoped it wasn't too late. She felt a jumble of mindspeak hit her at once as they argued with her.

What are you doing?

We're defenseless . . .

They're going to attack.

We've already lost.

"Just wait," Lily said aloud. The last mindspeech had definitely come from Rowan, and he was right. Her coven was dusted with Workers. Without a pyre she'd never be able to give them enough strength to survive the stings.

Lily felt a Worker crawl across her bare throat. She looked at the nearest Sister, trying to pierce through the rainbow sheen covering her bulbous black eyes, and trained every nerve in her body to fight the urge to slap the Worker away. The Sister flicked her whip and shivered her wings in agitation, but she made no move forward.

"I've stopped," Lily said to her.

The Sister's monstrous head swiveled lightning fast atop her stalk neck, but her tense posture didn't change. Lily had no idea if she understood or not, or even if this particular Sister was their leader. There was no distinction among them that Lily could see. Lily had chosen her simply because she was closest.

Everyone stay still. Lily—you can't just behave as if you're calm. You have to be calm, Rowan said in mindspeak.

She brushed his presence from her mind, annoyed that he felt like he had the right to advise her. She grudgingly followed his instruction nonetheless because she knew he was right. As Lily relaxed, so did the Hive. The Workers lifted off the coven's skin and the Warrior Sisters moved back, their wings still.

With one more lightning-fast twitch of her head, the closest Warrior Sister leapt into the air. The rest of the Hive followed her, vacating the ballroom as swiftly as they had entered it.

Lily looked around the ballroom. Chairs and tables were knocked

down in a blast pattern that formed a circle around Lily. All the guests were on the floor, too terrified to move or make a sound.

“You’ll have to get ahold of your temper.” Grace’s voice was raspy as it broke the stunned silence. “The Hive won’t allow that a second time.”

Lily found Grace watching her, a mixture of understanding and reproof in her look.

“I didn’t mean to—” Lily stopped and looked around. There was broken glass everywhere, and some people were bleeding from superficial cuts. She felt hot with embarrassment. “I apologize.”

“So do I,” Grace replied thoughtfully. She spread her hands between Rowan and Lily. “I thought that you’d been separated, and that this would be a happy reunion.”

Rowan furrowed his brow at Grace, but he held his tongue. The guests started to rise up off the floor and assess their injuries. Lily and her coven offered their assistance, but Ivan declined.

“It’s fine, really,” he said. “There are a quite a few people here who can heal, and it’d probably be better if you left. Toshi?” Ivan craned his head until he found his student. “Why don’t you take Lily and her coven back to their apartments?”

Toshi nodded and turned to Lily. He gestured with his head at Rowan. “Is he coming with you?”

Lily turned to Caleb. “Is he?” she asked him.

I don’t like it, but right now the more protection you have the better, Caleb answered in mindspeak.

Everyone in this room looks like they want to take a piece out of you, Una said in mindspeak, by way of agreement. Tristan, Breakfast, and Juliet gave their begrudging assent.

“He can come,” she said, avoiding Rowan’s eyes.

As they passed on their way out, Mala hawked Lily’s every step.

. . . and the piece she’d like to take is your head, Una added.

Toshi came alongside Lily while they crossed the courtyard. "I could find another place for him," he said quietly, gesturing to Rowan, who was lagging behind the rest of the coven.

"It's okay," Lily said. "Distance doesn't make a difference." She smiled ruefully. "I put a whole continent between us and that still didn't help."

Toshi frowned. "Is that why you came west? To get away from an ex?"

"Not exclusively." Lily looked up at him. "And how do you know he's my ex?"

"Experience, unfortunately." Toshi looked sheepish. "I've made one or two girls angry enough to throw things at me. Never had a girl try to throw a whole *ballroom* at me before, though."

Lily's shoulders shook with a silent laugh, and Toshi watched her with an indecipherable look. "What?" she asked.

"I like making you laugh," he said, surprised. His face suddenly clouded over. "Grace wasn't kidding about the Hive not allowing another show of aggression from you."

"I know," Lily replied.

"But will you be alright with him?"

"I'll be fine. I can control myself," she said. She hoped. She gave him a weak smile. "I fought the Hive once, and I'm in no hurry to do it again."

Toshi stared at her for a moment. "Incredible. No one fights the Hive," he whispered under his breath, and then left her at the door to the guest suite.

Lily and her coven went straight to the men's sitting room to have it out. She could feel them already arguing in mindspeak, although they hadn't included her yet. The silence was like a scream.

Lily sat, waiting for someone to engage her while she stared at

anything but Rowan. Someone had brought fresh flowers into the rooms while they'd been away.

She reached out to Lillian again, craving some kind of council. *Rowan's back*, she said.

Good. You need him, Lillian finally replied. *Forgive him and count yourself lucky that you have him back.*

I don't have him. He left me, remember?

He'll always be yours—and you his. Stop wasting time. Lily sensed sweeping, jaw-grinding pain before Lillian quickly severed contact.

"Lily!" Tristan said sharply.

"What?" she replied, snapping back to the here and now.

"You've been blocking us all out again," he said, his eyes narrowed.

"Oh." Lily hadn't been aware. That was the second time she'd barricaded them out of her head without realizing it.

"Who were you mindspeaking with?" Rowan asked with narrowed eyes. Lily didn't respond.

"Do you want to chime in here, Lil?" Breakfast asked. "There's a lot going on."

She kept her face neutral, which wasn't hard to do. Now that the excitement had passed she felt exhausted. "There isn't much for me to say, is there? Rowan followed us, probably on Alaric's orders, and he got taken by the Hive just like we did. That's the *why* of him being here settled. Now, as to *what* he intends to do, it doesn't really matter, does it? He's too far to contact Alaric through mindspeak and I have no intention of allowing him close enough to me to be a threat." She stood and smoothed her kimono, not looking at him. "If he tries to get too close, I'll make him suffer. What was that he told me about Scot and Gideon? Claim your enemies. Well, I've already claimed him, and he may have surprised me once, but it won't happen again. So that's settled. Am I missing anything?"

“You don’t want to say anything to him or ask him any questions?” Juliet asked. Her big eyes were round with worry and a whispered name ghosted across her mind. *Like Lillian.*

Lily turned to her. “No. I really don’t. I’m going to bed.”

She felt the pull of him as she walked away—a heavy bending of space around his body that threatened to drag her to him. But every step got easier, and by the time she reached her room she didn’t feel Rowan’s weight at all.

Carrick waited patiently for someone to come to him. He’d been here for a day and a half and so far he’d only met lackeys. Lackeys never knew what to do with him. Whenever Carrick had visited the fancy homes of the powerful people who needed his talents, like Gideon and his father, the lackeys could never figure out if they should treat him as a guest because their masters needed him, or like scum because that’s what their masters thought of him.

The woman who came to get him that morning, Mala, was no different. She wasn’t stupid. She could sense what Carrick was, and she had no idea why her master—an Outlander named Governor Grace Bendingtree—would want to house a killer.

“Big party last night,” Carrick said. “I couldn’t see from my window, but I could hear it. There was a fight. Breaking glass and a witch wind.”

“Yes,” Mala replied. She kept her body angled slightly away from Carrick, like half of her was about to run away. “You’re not one of them, are you?”

“I know who they are. I know the witch, Lily. And she knows me,” he replied.

Mala swallowed, unnerved by the way he said Lily’s name. “Grace said you were following her.”

Carrick stared at Mala. There was something she wanted, but she

was too afraid to ask. He started with the obvious. "You don't seem to like Lily too much."

Mala's mouth trembled with all she wanted to say. "Do *you* like her?"

Carrick shrugged, noncommittal. "The things I do don't leave much room for liking."

"What things? Following people?"

"Sure," he said. If she wanted to pretend that's all he did, he'd let her. She knew better, though. But let her pretend for now.

"She's staying in another wing of this building. Would you follow her for me?"

Carrick tipped his chin at the door. "There are no locks on the doors."

Mala didn't understand. "And?"

Carrick sighed. Maybe she wasn't as smart as he'd thought, and if she wasn't smart, maybe she wasn't all that powerful. He didn't care if she was dumber than a pickax. All he needed from Mala was someone influential enough to make sure he could come and go as he pleased, do as he pleased, and that was it. If she could handle that, then they had a deal.

"No one leaves *me* in a room without a lock on the door, unless they got something better to watch me," he said.

"We don't need locks here," Mala said. "The Hive prevents violence."

Carrick stood. Mala didn't shrink from him. That was a good sign. She had some backbone. "Then if you want me to do what you can't, you're going to have to figure out how to keep the Hive away from me, aren't you?" She nodded slowly, finally understanding him. "Until then, I'll just follow."

CHAPTER

4

DAPPLED LIGHT BRIGHTENED THE OTHER SIDE OF LILY'S eyelids, and for a moment the whole world was warm and rosy red. The swaying of the trolley passed her head back and forth between invisible hands, lifting her up and out of her body. Warmth cooled, and the rosy light darkened to gunmetal gray. An old friend met her in the Mist. Someone sad and lonely. Someone lost.

She was in pain.

Lily saw an army sprawled out before her. She saw banners snapping in the wind and the acrid taste of struck iron made saliva gush under her tongue.

"Lily?" Toshi's voice startled her from her near sleep. "Sorry," he said, grimacing at her stricken expression. "But we have to hop off in another few blocks."

Lily looked around, reorienting herself in the spangled sunshine of Bower City. *Lillian?* She called to her in mindspeak, and got no answer.

"Are you okay?" Toshi asked.

Lily nodded. “Strange dream,” she said, shifting the packages on her lap.

They’d been shopping half the day and stopping at cafés for cool drinks and tapas. Now, nearing the end of the day, Lily found herself alone with Toshi. Una was getting the pedicure she’d been longing for, Juliet a massage, and the guys sat for proper haircuts that were done with scissors instead of belt knives.

Rowan wasn’t with them. He’d said he’d had a witch shower him with gifts before and that it hadn’t ended well. Then he wandered off on his own, leaving the rest of them to take a little less pleasure from the pampering.

Lily looked down at her packages with an odd detachment. After months on the road, saying no to new clothes was not practical. It felt wrong to be out shopping, but if the clothes were a little less fine, or the surroundings a little less opulent, it wouldn’t make the dead come back to life. Lily looked out the window at the sparkling day. It was easy to forget about death here. Bower City didn’t do gloomy or rainy or sad. It didn’t dirty its head with the ashes of mourning. It had one bright cheery note, and everyone was forced to sing it.

Toshi and Lily stepped off the trolley and he led her into a scent bar. Lily figured if she was expected to wear perfume, she might as well pick out something she liked enough to wear every day. An elegant woman, dark skinned and dressed in a sari, stood behind the bar waiting to be of assistance but too refined to inject herself into their browsing.

“Do you have those a lot?” Toshi asked as he slid a glass rod out of a crystal bottle filled with a honey-colored liquid.

“A lot of what?” Lily asked.

“Strange dreams.” He dabbed one drop of the liquid onto a strip of paper, let it dry, and waved it under Lily’s nose. She breathed in bergamot and blood orange.

"All the time." She shook her head at the scent. "Too sweet." Toshi moved down the bar and lifted a glass rod from another jar.

"After what you've been through—" He broke off. "I can't imagine it. To go out among the Woven, into the unknown. No map. No idea of what's out there—mountains, deserts, uncrossable rivers." He waved the strip under Lily's nose. Lemon and verbena quickened her thoughts.

Ah, actually, we sort of knew how to get to California. I'm not exactly Sacajawea, she thought, suppressing a grin. But there was no one to tell that joke to. Tristan would have gotten it.

"You're sad again," Toshi noticed.

Lily didn't reply and moved down the row. She lifted the next rod for herself. It was a powdery grandma smell. She dropped it immediately and decided to follow Toshi's cues instead.

"Have you always been adventurous?" he asked, dabbing another strip of paper with scent.

"Not at all! In fact most of my life I couldn't go anywhere. The most exciting thing that happened to me was a trip to the hospital." Lily breathed in Christmas. Gingersnap and snow. "I like this one," she said about the scent, "but it's not for me."

"What's for you?" he said musingly. "You're a woman who goes from happy to sad in a second. A woman who claims to be unadventurous, who's just had the adventure of a lifetime. You're a powerful woman who I could toss into the air with one hand." He shifted closer, his face dipping toward hers. "What's for you?"

Lily looked down and shook her head. "I'm not who you think I am, Toshi."

"No one's who we think they are," he said, waving a dismissive hand in the air.

He drew a rod out of a tiny glass jar that had only a few drops of

a dark and unctuous liquor. The sales woman stiffened, about to say something, but Toshi smiled and nodded at her.

He didn't waste any of the precious liquid on a strip of paper, but waved the rod under Lily's nose. Smoke and spice. Bruised-to-sweetness sap bled from a young tree. Salt. And something underneath it all—something animal and almost revolting that she couldn't place and couldn't stop smelling. She inhaled it over and over, unable to pull herself away.

"Now tell me why you're sad."

Lily opened her eyes and saw Toshi watching her with concern. She swallowed. "I lost someone." The grief and guilt trembled right behind the words, which she spoke as plainly as possible to keep herself from bursting into tears. "He died to protect me."

"Did you love him?" Toshi whispered.

"Of course."

"Then lucky him." He tore his gaze away from Lily and looked up at the saleswoman. "We'll take a twenty-fourth of this," he said crisply.

Lily cocked her head at him. "You do that a lot," she remarked.

"Do what?"

"End the moment before it gets old. Or out of your control."

Toshi nodded pensively. "I've learned not to wait for applause. For anything."

"You've got a story," Lily said, half smiling.

"Some other time," he replied, his expression darkening.

"Oh, great. You're soulful." Lily said, rolling her eyes.

He looked hurt. "You don't give anyone a break, do you?"

Lily made an effort to soften her tone. "No, I don't," she admitted. "But I actually like soulful. It was a compliment."

He dropped his eyes so Lily couldn't read him. The saleswoman

came to his rescue, returning with a tiny vial that she placed carefully inside a tissue-paper-lined bag. She looked anxious.

"It's okay," Toshi reassured her again as he took the bag. "Thank you."

Lily waited until they were outside to speak. "I'm guessing I picked the scent that costs a fortune?"

"Yes, but money's not the issue," Toshi said. "Only one other person in the entire city wears that scent."

A chuff of a laugh escaped Lily. She knew who it had to be. "Grace."

"Yup."

"Interesting," Lily said. "I know why I like it," she added, thinking of the smoke, the tree sap, and the salty animal smell of her own sweat sizzling in the pyre—thinking of the power and the rush of pouring herself into another person. "But why would *she* if she doesn't have mechanics?" Lily stopped and turned deliberately to Toshi. "Are you her claimed?"

"No," Toshi said, genuinely shocked.

"Look, I'm not the smartest person in the world, but I know one thing." She jabbed a finger at the little bag in his hand. "*That* scent is something a witch only becomes acquainted with by firewalking, and it's a scent she learns to crave only by giving the Gift. You know, there's been a lot of talk about how claiming is slavery, but I don't buy it." She smirked at him. "Don't tell me the people of Bower City are so pure that they're not tempted to claim."

"They're more than tempted," Toshi said hotly. "It happens—of course it happens. And when it does, it's a huge scandal and there's always a public trial. It's very, very messy. Claiming is the only crime that gets committed here, and it's punishable by banishment."

Lily stuck out a hand to stop him. "Wait, did you just say that it's the only crime in Bower City?"

“Yes.”

She looked at him, perplexed. “But you have laws against murder and rape and all that stuff?”

“Of course. But those things don’t happen here.”

Lily started laughing. Toshi didn’t join her. Her laugh died. “You’re serious?”

“Lily, listen very carefully. There’s no crime in Bower City. No murder, no rape, no arson, no theft, no domestic abuse, no kidnapping, no assault, no *crime*. Except claiming.”

“That’s impossible,” she said.

Toshi reached out and led a Worker from the sleeve of Lily’s kimono onto his thumbnail. She sucked in a surprised breath. She hadn’t even realized it was there.

“Who knows how much the Workers understand of what we say?” he said pensively. “The Warrior Sisters can understand some, but from what Grace has said, they understand differently. Whatever that means. What we do know is that the Hive senses what we can’t. They recognize hostility, fear, and aggression of every stripe. Last night, you saw for yourself how quick they are to intervene. They don’t let violent crimes happen. For nonviolent crimes, like theft—well, the Hive is everywhere. They see it happen even if they don’t know what it is. You only have to report something stolen for it to be found and the perpetrators brought to justice. There is no ‘getting away with it’ in Bower City. But claiming is the only crime the Hive can’t understand because it’s not like the others.”

“It’s consensual,” Lily said, finally believing.

“Even pleasurable, I hear,” Toshi said softly. “We’re all tempted to do it. But since it’s the one and only committable crime in Bower City, there’s nothing else for us humans to put our energy into ferreting out. That’s why I can say with some certainty that Grace doesn’t have any claimed. Least of all me.”

There was regret in his voice. Lily understood why the people here stared at her and her coven, and why they kept their distance with such dislike, even distaste. What would she feel if she had been tempted with something her whole life and denied it, only to see a group of people flaunting the freedom she wished she had? A freedom that they *should* have. Her brow furrowed.

“Why is it illegal?” she asked.

“Huh?” Toshi said, distracted. He was looking up the street for a trolley.

“Claiming is consensual,” she said, thinking aloud. “A witch can’t force herself on another. The willstone would shatter if she tried to break the will of the bearer. So why is it illegal?”

“There are other forms of coercion,” Toshi reminded her. “Ways to make people give their consent.”

“Then *that* should be illegal—coerced claiming—but not claiming itself,” Lily argued. “What do the lawmakers care if people choose to give themselves to each other? It’s none of their business, really.” He didn’t reply. “What about becoming stone kin?” she persisted. “There can’t be any objection to that.”

“Illegal,” Toshi said curtly.

“Why?” Lily exclaimed.

“It fosters secrecy and obsession, and it’s another form of intimacy that can be coerced. All individual mindspace should be autonomous, and that autonomy is protected by the city,” Toshi repeated, as if by rote.

“That’s utterly ridiculous,” Lily retorted. “You can’t tell people they’re autonomous, and in the same breath deny them the right to choose.”

The trolley pulled near at that moment, and he urged her onto it. Lily wondered whether he’d heard her, but decided not to press him. If he did hear her, he obviously didn’t want to talk about it.

They met the rest of her coven back at the guest suite and spent a few minutes showing one another what they'd purchased. Rowan slipped in a few minutes after Lily and Toshi arrived. He'd been gone longer than any of them, but he was carrying no packages. He didn't greet anyone. He sat apart from the rest while Una, Juliet, and Tristan looked through every bag to see what the coven had acquired.

"How long were you on the trail?" Toshi asked, picking up a garment that had slid to the floor and folding it.

"Was it three months or four?" Tristan asked, casting his eyes back to Caleb.

"Nearly four," Caleb answered.

Toshi was impressed. "Did your tribe migrate a lot?" he asked Caleb.

"Some," Caleb answered. "But I'd never been out in the wild for that long before."

"Are things getting bad back east? Is that why you risked the trip?" Toshi asked.

"Define bad," Tristan said, still digging through tunics.

"I don't know. I have no idea what it's like to live in the wild," Toshi admitted. "But I'd imagine something huge must have happened to make you all risk going west. Did you think there might be something out here, or did you just go blindly?"

"You're very curious," Rowan said. His tone was not approving.

"Who wouldn't be?" Toshi said, shrugging. "It's got to be one hell of a story. Did you think there was a settlement or some kind of fort that you were heading for?"

"No one back east has any idea that there's anything out here—and certainly not a city," Tristan said.

He's pumping us for information. Don't say another word, Rowan said to all of them in mind speak.

He's just curious, Breakfast countered. *It's totally natural.*

He's a spy, Rowan insisted.

Takes one to know one, I guess, Caleb said. Lily felt how Caleb's words stung Rowan.

"Are we going to see Grace today?" Lily asked, changing both the spoken and non-spoken conversations.

"Dinner. Tonight," Toshi said cheerfully. "She's sorry she can't spend more time with you."

"We're sure she's a busy woman," Juliet said.

"Is she going to explain what she really wants from Lily yet, or is this dinner still part of her charm offensive?" Rowan drawled.

Toshi froze for a moment before recovering. "I'm sure Grace and Lily will have a lot to talk about. But about what, I couldn't guess."

"Thank you, Toshi," Lily said. "If you see Grace, tell her I'm looking forward to speaking with her, too."

Lily waited for Toshi to leave before turning to Rowan. "Not very friendly," she said.

"Oh, so you're looking at me again?" he replied. "Nice to know Toshi's dimples haven't completely blinded you."

"He doesn't have—" Lily started to argue and stopped. She turned away.

"No, you started this. Now finish it," Rowan said, standing and crossing to Lily.

"That's close enough," she said, halting his stride for him. Rowan came up short like he'd run into a brick wall, one foot still raised.

Possessing him was a mistake—Lily knew it as soon as she did it. Not just because it was wrong, but because of what it did to her.

She saw the edge of his skin before she dove into it. The perfect, golden-smooth dewiness of it over stripped sinew and muscle—the sun-soaked softness over strength that was Rowan. She'd forgotten how strong he was. How perfectly his body responded to her desires and carried them out for her. Every dream of grace in motion she'd

ever had he could give her. If she wanted to jump off a cliff into wild waves, or run up thin air to the very stars, his body was the vessel for that dream.

And if his body was her wonderland, his bright mind surpassed it. Only Rowan could corral her harrowed thoughts. Only he had a many-roomed mansion of ideas for her to barrel through, manic and crazed, to pick over feverishly as was her fashion, and pull snapshot memories from the walls. Only Rowan could let her run free inside him with no need to worry if she'd do damage.

He let her take all of him because he was the only one strong enough to survive her rough use.

Only Rowan. And he knew it. He knew how desperately she needed a place to put her frantic, frenetic energy, and he knew he was the only one who could survive her. He welcomed it.

Their eyes met, and Rowan won. She wanted him more. More than anything or anyone. All it took was a moment inside of him to make her feel like she'd be lost in his labyrinth forever.

She released him, letting go like she'd grasped the biting edge of a hot knife, and he put his foot down hard. He was panting from shock. He didn't think she'd actually possess him, and from the stunned looks on the rest of her coven's faces, Lily could see that none of them thought she would do it either.

Stupid, she thought. Maybe Lillian heard her.

"You made your point, Lily," he said in a raspy voice. "Don't worry. I won't come near you again."

The finality of it stung enough to bring her back to herself. There was no apology in her when she addressed them all in mindspeak.

Call Toshi a spy if you want, but the truth is, we're the strangers. We're the threat. Grace wants to know more about us, and she's using Toshi to get that information for her. I would do the same. I haven't told him anything, and neither should you, but I have learned a lot from him.

Lily replayed the memory of her conversation with Toshi in the scent bar so they could all see for themselves how he reacted to her questions about the law against claiming.

Now, can we all move past the idea that I'm naive enough to spill my guts to a pretty boy and start dealing with the fact that we're in a city that's being controlled by the Woven?

You think he's scared to talk about it because of the Hive, Tristan said in mindspeak.

She looked at him and smiled. Now that he knew she wasn't smitten with Toshi he was on her side again. *What other reason can there be? They're everywhere and they're always listening,* she replied.

But can they understand us? Caleb was looking at the floor, thinking deeply, as he asked this question. *At the ball, the Warrior Sisters didn't stand down until they sensed that Lily was calm. Saying it wasn't enough.*

The Sisters didn't look like they understood anything Lily was saying, Una added, agreeing with Caleb.

We don't know what they understand. We need more information, Juliet said. *Toshi could have a dozen reasons for not wanting to talk about the laws here. We're just assuming that it's because of the Hive.*

What do we do, then? Try to strike up a conversation with one of the Workers? Breakfast smirked as he asked this in mindspeak. The thought was ridiculous enough to get a smile out of all of them—except Rowan.

What I want to know is where they come from, he said. Everyone looked at Rowan. *They're called the Hive, but has anyone seen an actual beehive anywhere?*

No one had.

I looked all over today for some place big enough for a large number of Warrior Sisters to congregate, but apart from those lookout towers, there isn't any. The towers only fit a dozen or so Sisters at a time, Rowan continued. *So, where's their hive?*

Out in the fields? Tristan guessed.

Rowan shrugged. Lily could sense that the rest of her coven felt a bit embarrassed, especially Caleb. While they were getting their hair done, Rowan had been trying to gather information about their Woven hosts. Lily looked at Rowan.

What do you suggest we do?

She didn't like asking Rowan for direction. She liked it less that for the first time she had to really look at him. He was thinner. His skin was sallow, his eyes more sunken, and his hair was long enough to brush his shoulders. He looked haunted and hungry. Like looking across a burning desert, Lily could only suffer the glaring beauty of him in small bursts. She looked away.

Keep Toshi busy tomorrow. I'll look around some more and try to see which way they come and go, he answered.

I'll go with you, Caleb offered.

Rowan shook his head.

We'll both go, Tristan said.

No. Stay close to our witch, Rowan said. His hot, dark eyes came up to meet Lily's cold, light ones. *She's in more danger around Toshi than she thinks. She has no idea how far an orphaned mechanic would go for her.*

Lily wore her new scent to dinner that night. She realized when she put it on that one of the compounds in it was designed to soak into the skin, pleasantly altering the wearer's mood. She could see it tracing around her veins, lighting her up inside. She wondered whether this agent—whatever it was—occurred naturally in the scent components, or if it had been added for her benefit. She liked it. Maybe too much. When she stepped out of her bath and joined everyone else in the ladies sitting room, she felt a bit reckless.

Lily crossed to a pitcher of chilled water that was resting on a silver tray by the open balcony doors. The night jasmine on the

veranda had bloomed and several Workers were combing through the velvety petals. She took a drink, feeling the coolness of the water wash down her throat while she watched the Workers shiver through the flowers, seemingly oblivious to anything but the task of gathering nectar.

When she turned, everyone was staring at her. Her gaze sought out Rowan and stuck there. *He was meant to wear black*, she thought to Lillian, and wondered whether, in some part of the back of her busy mind, her other self was listening. *He's like a dark flame burning out a slender slice of nothing between all the others.*

Rowan's eyes narrowed at Lily as she stared, a bemused smile threatening to break through his glower. The smoke willstone at his throat swirled with shadow and light and for a moment Lily couldn't imagine why they were fighting.

Then she remembered the cage. *He would have let me die*, she said to Lillian, although she could tell that Lillian was deeply occupied with something else. Another thought occurred to Lily, one that bit deep. *Does he still want me dead?*

"Lily," Rowan said, his forehead pinched with confusion. "Who are you mindspeaking with?"

Lily looked away. *Why does he always know what I'm up to?* she complained to Lillian. "Are we waiting on anyone?" she asked aloud, ignoring Rowan's question.

"Just you," Toshi answered. He paused to sniff the air. "You're wearing it."

They shared conspirers' grins. "I wonder if Grace will notice."

"Oh, she'll notice," he replied, stepping forward to take Lily's arm. "Even if she doesn't say anything."

"Did you tell her I got it?"

Toshi gave her an offended look. "I don't tell Grace *everything*."

Lily curled her hand over his bicep as she studied him, wondering whether that was true.

He led them downstairs and into yet another wing of Grace's impressive residence. Lily wondered if the Governor's Villa was like the White House, with a new tenant every four or eight years.

"How often do you have elections here?" Lily asked Toshi.

"Five years for parliamentary positions, ten years for service positions," Toshi answered.

Lily nodded at that. "What about the governor's position, or Ivan's place as head mechanic?"

"Head mechanic is different," Toshi said. "It's based on talent, and Ivan is the most talented mechanic in the city."

Lily eyes shot down to Toshi's deep rose stone and wondered whether he was being loyal to his mentor, or whether he truly believed Ivan was the best.

"What about Grace?" Breakfast asked. "Does the governor need to be a witch for some reason?"

"Grace was chosen by the Hive to mediate between them and the humans long ago. She's the only one they'll communicate with," Toshi said, turning his head to include the rest of the coven in the conversation. "She brings proposed laws to the Hive, and then comes back to Parliament with what they will and will not accept."

Lily could feel Caleb bristle. *Asking the Woven what they'd accept . . .*, he fumed in mindspeak.

"The job is for life then?" Lily guessed. "The governor's position?"

"Yes," Toshi answered. "So is head mechanic."

"Cushy," Breakfast said, just loud enough to hear.

Lily chuckled to herself and began to take in her surroundings. The Governor's Villa sprawled out much farther than its street profile would suggest. Lily found herself counting hallways and trying

to peek down stairwells as Toshi led them through the maze. They changed levels without taking stairs enough times to make Lily suspect that the villa had more floors than it seemed when looking at the edifice, but before Lily could ask, they arrived at the formal dining room that was already alive with guests. Mala greeted them outside the large double doors with a tight smile that wanted to grow up to be a snarl.

"Lily," she said through bared teeth. "Fashionably late again, I see."

"Is that a problem?" Lily asked, but Mala had already whirled around and left. Lily turned to Toshi. "Is there any particular reason she hates me, or is she like this with everyone?"

"She's threatened by you," he answered. "She's poised to take over someday, but all of a sudden, Grace seems very interested in you."

Lily thought about it and shrugged. There was a time in her life when petty jealousy and competition from other women had dominated her life.

Being madly in love with Tristan didn't help, she thought to Lillian. Every other girl was a threat to me because he seemed determined to sleep with every other girl in the world but me. It's so strange how far away that all seems now.

"I said—Mala isn't a joke."

Lily looked up at Toshi and realized that he was considering her strangely. He'd had to repeat himself.

"I know," Lily said quickly. She could feel Rowan watching her carefully and she wondered how long she'd absented herself from the conversation. "But I'm not a threat, and I'm sure she'll realize that soon."

Toshi narrowed his eyes at her. "How old do you think I am?" he asked.

"Ah—" Lily fumbled. "Nineteen? Twenty?"

"I'm sixty-four years old."

"Shut up," Una said, the words flying out of her.

"How old do you think Grace is?" he continued without missing a beat.

Lily stared at him, gobsmacked. He wasn't kidding. "I don't know," she said, not willing to guess.

"Neither do I. Grace has been governor of Bower City since before it *was* Bower City, back when this place was just a few tepees and a campfire. I don't even know what year that was because there are few records of the early days, and Grace doesn't talk about it," Toshi said. He leaned close to Lily. "Mala has already been waiting a *long* time. Be careful around her."

Toshi crossed the last few steps into the dining room and joined the dinner party. Lily put out a hand and stopped her coven from following so they could calm down and regroup.

"This place just got a whole lot more interesting," Tristan said. "I wonder how long Grace has been in power."

"Long enough for all of us to be scared of her," Juliet said. "Power does funny things to a person's head and the longer you have it, the more twisted you get. What I want to know is what she wants from Lily."

Lily felt a protective surge of emotion from her sister and smiled at her, but Juliet was too worried to be mollified. A fretful frown stamped a crease between her big brown eyes and it would not go away.

It's okay, Juliet. I'm not afraid of Grace.

You should be, Juliet replied in mindpeak. She sighed and rolled her eyes. *But I know you won't be. So I'll just have to be afraid for you.*

On that note they entered the dining room to find a small group of people waiting for Lily's coven to join them.

"Lily," Grace said, her ageless face spreading into a wide smile.

“Come and meet the minister of trade. I’ve just been telling him how you’ve been to the docks already.”

Waiters circled with brightly colored drinks in strangely shaped glasses. Appetizers whisked by. Grace introduced Lily to several people with the title minister or chief or head in rapid succession. They all studied her like the newest wondrous beast in a menagerie. They gawked at her enormous willstone and tiptoed around the sticky subject of her claimed without ever really confronting the subject head on, or completely letting it drop, either. The women were less tactful about Lily’s coven than the men. They made not-so-veiled comments about how many strapping young mechanics Lily had acquired.

“But you can’t tell me that witches back east don’t tend to lean toward claiming attractive mechanics for themselves when they can,” said the minister of architecture. “Look at this little coven, for example.”

“I’m not *for* Lily. I like men,” Caleb replied bluntly.

“And I’m with her,” Breakfast added, pointing at Una. “The scary one.”

Lily nodded. “It’s true. She is scary.”

“You’re a little too wholesome for me,” Breakfast said to Lily. “No offense.”

“None taken.”

“And you’re a little too female for me,” Caleb said, grinning.

“It’s a fact. I am female,” Lily said with an apologetic shrug. She turned to the minister. “So, no. Witches don’t pick hot mechanics to surround themselves with potential partners. We pick them based on trust.” Her eyes found Rowan, who was speaking to someone on the other side of the room. “Or lack of it.”

The prurient curiosity didn’t end after they’d been seated. Then, it was Mala’s turn to try to make them all feel uncomfortable.

“So, Una,” said Mala, already two drinks in, “what’s it like being a female mechanic?”

“It works just fine for me,” Una replied.

“But didn’t you ever want to be a witch so you could have a herd of adoring men to call your own, like Lily?” Mala persisted.

“No,” Una replied. “Tell me, do witches here firewalk?”

“There’s no reason for witches to do that in Bower City,” Grace interjected sternly. “Firewalking is for battle.”

“Well, I’ve heard Lily shrieking on the pyre,” Una said, pinning Mala with a look. “And I’ll take being in the battle over being on the pyre any day of the week. Herd or no herd.”

Get me out of here, Lily said in mindspeak to Juliet.

Stay calm, she replied, resettling her napkin in her lap primly. *They’re just testing you to see if you fly off the handle again.*

Lily could sense Rowan brushing up against her mind, asking for entry. In a moment of weakness she almost let him, but thought better of it at the last moment. She didn’t want his support. When the food arrived, she felt Toshi nudge her elbow with his. When she looked over at him, he gave her an encouraging smile.

“I’m sure Lily didn’t claim her mechanics for ego-serving reasons,” Grace said, taking Lily’s side. “In the east, a witch needs mechanics or she’s not safe. But claiming is unnecessary here. The Hive protects all citizens equally.” Grace put down her chopsticks. “So, Lily, have you made up your mind yet?”

“My mind?” Lily asked.

“As to whether or not you’d like to stay in Bower City.”

“Actually, I haven’t,” Lily replied honestly. She looked down the table at her coven. “*We* haven’t,” she amended.

“That’s a shame. This city has a lot to offer someone with your skill. More than you had back east, although I’m sure you were very important,” Grace said.

“Not exactly,” Lily said, frowning.

“Oh?” Grace said. She cocked her head to the side.

“It’s complicated.”

“Lily Proctor.” Grace leaned back, thumbing through her memory.

“There was a John Proctor of the Salem Bay Colony in Massachusetts. He was the first mechanic and his wife, Elizabeth, was the first firewalker. Their descendants have been the on-again, off-again Salem Witches ever since. Aren’t you from Salem?”

Lily saw the conversation narrow, leaving her on a tightrope.

“There are a lot of people with the last name Proctor.”

Grace’s smile was detached from her eyes. Thoughts moved behind them like pieces on a chessboard. Silence rolled up the long table and landed in a taut bundle in front of Lily.

“No, there aren’t,” Grace said in a soft voice. “You are Lillian Proctor of Salem. You are the Salem Witch, and Rowan Fall is your head mechanic.”

Lily felt Rowan shoving urgently at her mind. She ignored him. She could handle this on her own.

“I never said my full name was Lillian,” Lily said, keeping her voice as soft and assured as Grace’s. “If the Hive won’t allow anyone to go east, how could you possibly know that?”

Grace didn’t answer. “The thing I want to know, and that Toshi couldn’t seem to find out for me, is why? Why did you leave Salem?”

Lily decided that if Grace didn’t feel the need to answer her questions, there was no need for her to answer Grace’s. As the tense moment grew more uncomfortable, Grace seemed to relax, even enjoy it, until finally she was laughing.

“I like you, Lily Proctor. You remind me of me.” Grace tipped her head to the side, considering this. “That *might* be a good thing.” She stood and Mala scrambled to stand alongside her. “As I said, the Hive has made it clear that they want you, so you and your coven are

welcome here. But there's one thing. If you chose to stay in Bower City, you'll have to give up your claimed. That's the law here. They'll have to smash their willstones and start anew. Understood?" Lily nodded once. "I'll give you a few days to think it over." Grace softened, her smile a surprisingly sad one. "They'll only hurt you, anyway. One by one, no matter how well you think you know your coven, they'll all turn on you eventually." Her gaze strayed pointedly to Rowan before she left the dinner party with Mala trailing behind.

Lily could feel the weight of everyone's stares. She turned back to her plate. "Ivan? Would you pass the salt, please?" she asked with forced civility.

Lily didn't hear a word that was said for the rest of dinner, but running and hiding in her room wasn't an option. Toshi kept trying to explain himself, but Lily brushed him off. Mindspeak among her coven kept her distracted while she chewed and swallowed and thought.

Does she really think we'd all just smash our willstones? Tristan asked.

I think it's either that or try to make it alone in the wilderness. The Hive won't let us go back, Caleb replied.

So Grace says, Breakfast said. *But she could be lying.*

How did she know Lily's name? Una asked.

And how does she know who the current Salem Witch is if it's been decades since the Hive brought anyone new? Rowan added.

Toshi must have been lying about that, Breakfast said. *They're all lying.*

I don't think so, Rowan said. *I think there's something else going on that we're not getting.*

When dessert was finally over, Lily stood and thanked Ivan. Her coven rose with her and they left the dining room without a sound. As soon as they went through the doors, Lily could hear the rest of the dinner guests burst into shocked whispers.

"Worst party ever," Breakfast said, breaking the tension.

“Remember when I had the seizure at Scot’s?” Lily reminded him.

“Oh yeah,” Breakfast said, grinning. “Okay, second worst for you.”

“Lily, wait,” Toshi said, rushing to catch up with them. He took her elbow, and her coven fanned out around her defensively. Toshi wisely removed his hand. “I wanted to say that I’m sorry.”

“For what?” Lily asked.

“Ah—fishing for information and being disingenuous about my reasons?” he hazarded. He made a face. “Actually, right now I’m not sure why I’m apologizing because you don’t look angry.”

“I’m not. You were only doing what you had to,” she said. “Come back to our room with us. I want to talk with you.”

They settled into the men’s sitting room and shut the doors behind them. Lily turned to Toshi.

“Grace says that the Hive won’t let us go east, but what if my coven and I decided to immigrate to Japan or Russia or China? Would Grace allow it?” she asked.

“It’s not Grace.” Toshi looked around the room and sighed heavily. “How many of you know how to make willstones?”

“We can’t answer that,” Rowan said. He looked at Lily. “Don’t answer him,” he pleaded. Lily nodded and looked down.

“I’m sorry, Toshi,” she said. “I wish I could trust you, I really do.”

“No, I don’t blame you,” he replied sadly. “Look if there are any among you who don’t know how to make willstones, and you could prove it to Parliament, they’d have no legal reason to keep you. But you understand what’s at stake here, right?”

“We do,” Juliet said.

“Do you?” Toshi asked, frowning. “Coming from the east, can you really have any idea the influence Bower City has over the rest of the world?” He genuinely didn’t know the answer to that question.

Lily looked at Toshi. *He's sixty-four*, she said to Lillian. *He looks barely out of his teens. I wonder if they've cured cancer here yet. He could help you. Maybe save you . . . I bet he's an even stronger healer than Rowan, and with Toshi you wouldn't have to worry. The secret of River Fall will stay hidden from Rowan.*

"Lily?" Rowan said, startling her. Her thoughts had wandered off again. She really needed to get ahold of that.

"We understand," she said, answering Toshi's question. He didn't look satisfied with Lily's answer.

"There's more to it than just the issue of making willstones. *They want you.*" Toshi let the words hang there while Lily watched a Worker crawl over his shoulder.

Now we know what the walls around the city are for, Juliet said to the coven in mindspeak. *To keep the people in.*

"We understand," Lily said.

"I should go," Toshi said. "I've already been here too long."

He took his leave, mouthing the words *be careful* to all of them before he shut the door behind him.

Lily opened up her mind to her coven. *Thoughts? Comments?*

I don't trust him, Rowan said.

I don't trust you. That hasn't stopped me from working with you, Lily replied. Fresh hurt chased across his face and she looked away rather than feel the hurt with him. *I don't think we have that many more days to decide. Do we stay or try to go?* Her coven didn't have an answer for her, but Tristan did have another question.

Is Bower City so bad? Everyone shot him a look. *I'm not saying it's ideal, but what place is?*

It's run by the Woven, Caleb said, disgusted.

And it looks to me like it's run pretty well, actually, Tristan argued.

Except for the tiny fact that the people seem to be incarcerated, Juliet said.

Think of Salem. Think of those walls. Were we any less incarcerated there by the Woven?

Seems like you've already made up your mind, Rowan said. But you don't know what it's like to smash your willstone.

You survived it. I'm not as weak as you think I am, Ro.

I've never thought you were physically weak, Tristan. But you're choosing this gilded cage the Hive has created for the humans over hardship and freedom. Try and tell me that's strength.

They could all feel how deeply Rowan's words hurt Tristan. As if against her will, Lily recalled what Grace had just said over dinner about her covenant eventually breaking her heart.

We don't all have to stay, Tristan said sullenly.

You want to split up, Una said, surprised.

A long pause followed. "I think we should all decide on our own," Lily said. She looked at Rowan. "Some of us might have personal reasons for wanting to leave the covenant."

Lily left them to discuss her without interfering. She was desperate to get out her kimono and wash the makeup off her face, and desperate for silence, both around her and inside her own head.

The thought of losing this Tristan to Bower City had hurt less than it should. She was almost relieved to not have to see him, to not be constantly reminded that he wasn't her Tristan, and he never could be. As she realized that, guilt folded over guilt until it was piled high on top of her head. She was at her door when she heard Rowan's voice behind her.

"Lily." He stopped several paces from her and kept his hands at his sides where she could see them. He didn't even try to initiate mindspeak. "Are you thinking of staying?"

"I'm not thinking anything yet," she replied. "What about you?" Lily hated that his answer meant so much to her.

"I'll stay if you stay, and I'll go if you go."

“Why?” Lily sighed and shook her head. “There’s nothing for you here. Not with me.”

“I can live on nothing,” he said, and for the first time since he’d returned, Lily saw him smile.

Carrick finished his glass of wine and went back to work on the steak. They’d tried to give him some kind of raw fish and seaweed for lunch, and he hadn’t touched it. He was sure in a classy place like this they had fresh fish, but even still. Didn’t they know they could get worms that way? Carrick always cooked his fish through and through, even if he’d just caught it himself.

“Hungry?” Grace Bendingtree asked.

Carrick shrugged. “I’ve been hungrier,” he answered. The tilt of his lips let her know how big of an understatement that was. He’d been literally starving to death more than once in his life, but as he considered it, maybe this Governor Bendingtree had no idea what hunger was. It was difficult to tell. She lived high now, but she seemed broken in to him. Her features were worn smooth and her eyes were placid from years of weathering strife. Then again, she looked young, too. Carrick couldn’t quite place it, but he’d bet she had some years on her.

“Would you care for some more wine?” she asked.

“Later,” Carrick said. He sat back in his chair. The cushions were plump. Carrick disliked padding on his furniture. “Why don’t you just go ahead and ask me what you came here to ask me?”

Bendingtree smiled at him, slow and knowing. She wasn’t in any rush, but she still wanted something from him. Sure, he was her prisoner, and although this palace with its servants and fancy food and the tub so big he could swim in it didn’t look like any of the dungeons Carrick had been in before, he knew what was going on here. Some captors torture their prisoners, and some pamper them. Carrick knew so much about this dynamic that he saw to the truth of

it. If he wasn't dead, she needed something from him. Strangely, that gave him all the power. He'd respect her more if she tortured him a little.

"You're an interesting man, Carrick. Do you have a last name?" Bendingtree asked as she poured him an unasked-for glass of wine.

"Bait men have no family names to give their children. They are what they do. Every Outlander knows that." He wanted it clear that even though she wore beads and feathers, Carrick knew she wasn't like him.

"So you are Carrick Son of Anoki and nothing else?"

Carrick narrowed his eyes. Not that many people knew who his father was. Had to be an Outlander who told her, but if any Outlander knew about this western city, they all would. Things like this place couldn't be kept secret no matter how much you paid someone.

"How do you keep them from talking about this place?" he asked.

She smiled a pretty smile that Carrick didn't particularly care for. "Why would you think I have spies?" she asked merrily.

"Don't be coy. It doesn't suit you."

"I have eyes on the situation in the east." She weighed her words before disclosing her hand. "Enough to know that there are two Lillian Proctors."

Carrick waited for her to talk some more. People loved to talk, especially when they were proving how smart and powerful they were. A big ego can make even the cleverest person careless, and Carrick had found that silence worked better than a beating with people who thought they were important. All except for Lillian. She never gave anything away unintended. Never talked about herself. Never bragged. Probably because she wasn't proud of what she did.

"I had hoped to get more information from the Lillian here, but

she has proved to be exceptionally tight-lipped.” Grace reconsidered. “Or maybe Toshi isn’t as irresistible as I’d once thought.”

Hearing that made Carrick smile. “Don’t count on a pretty face charming that one into letting her guard down,” he said. Rowan may have distracted Lily for a time, but she wasn’t the type to get her head turned anymore. She came out of the oubliette changed. She liked suffering now; Carrick knew it. That’s why she was perfect for him.

“So which one do you belong to?” she asked. “The sickly Lillian in Salem, or the healthy one? I’m guessing the sick one is your witch, and that the healthy one has no idea you’re here.”

Carrick couldn’t figure out how she could possibly know about the two Lillians. She would have to have someone confirming Lillian’s presence in Salem after Lily was found at Bower City’s gates. Nobody could get from one end of the continent to the other that fast, and no one could mindspeak that far—not even Lillian. Carrick could sense that Bendingtree was powerful, but she was no Lillian. How was she getting her information? He started listing all the spies he could think of in his head, and stopped. She’d *corrected* him when he said “spies.”

“Eyes, not spies,” he muttered. He looked up at her. “What eyes?”

Grace sighed, disappointed. She was finally realizing that she wasn’t going to get anything out of him, and maybe that she had given more than she’d gotten. She was experienced enough to see that, at least.

“I really don’t see why you won’t cooperate, Carrick, Son of Anoki. Your witch isn’t going to last much longer.”

“So sure the sick one’s mine, are you?”

“The healthy one isn’t desperate enough to claim the likes of you. I’d torture you for more information, but I have the disturbing

feeling you'd like that." She stood, but paused at the door before leaving. "Please. Do enjoy the wine."

Lily flipped her pillow over to the cool side, only to find that it was still warm from when she had flipped it five minutes ago.

She rolled over in bed, an arm crooked over her eyes. The window was open and a salty breeze stirred the curtains, but the night was still too mild for her. Her overheated brain kept slinking back to Rowan like a kicked dog. Sleep wasn't going to happen anytime soon. On top of that, she kept thinking she heard steps above her, and she wondered how many floors this villa had. She had thought she was on the top floor.

You're thinking too loud, Juliet said in mind speak.

Come keep me company, Lily replied, more excited than she should be that her sister had heard her. A minute later Juliet trudged in, sporting a red crease down her left cheek. "You've got pillow face," Lily told her.

"You've got pillow hair," Juliet said back.

Lily pushed a hand into the mad tangle on top of her head. "It matches what's going on under it, I guess."

"Man trouble?" Juliet flopped into bed, sprawling out wide so Lily had to move over.

"Am I being too hard on him?" Lily asked, knowing that Juliet would understand she was talking about Rowan.

"Yes and no." Juliet tipped her head from side to side, like her head was a scale for her thoughts. "No, if you consider what he put you through, and, yes, if you consider what he's been through since. We had each other on the trail. Rowan was alone."

"He shared his memories?"

"Some. Caleb and Tristan insisted." Juliet pulled a goose feather out of Lily's duvet. "He didn't sleep much. Couldn't. There was no

one else to watch for Woven or help fight them off.” She rolled the feather between her fingers. “He went through hell.”

“Damn it.” Lily let out a gusty sigh. “Did he show you why he left the tribe and followed us?”

He got into a huge fight with Alaric over the bombs. There’s still two Carrick didn’t get around to dismantling. Juliet looked down at the feather. Alaric’s name was stuck on a loop inside her head.

“That must have been hard for you to watch. Just seeing Alaric, I mean.”

“I’ve been thinking. I never should have run away from him,” Juliet whispered. “I should have fought him harder.”

“You left for me. And his choices aren’t your fault.”

Juliet looked up. Her big brown eyes were burning. *I know that staying here on the other side of the continent looks a lot more attractive when you think about the bombs, but we can’t. We have to go back and stop him.*

Images of the Thirteen Cities flashed through Juliet’s mind. Cities that Lily had never seen. Wondrous places—some built on pontoons floating over water. One was built up among the trees, like an enchanted elfin city. Juliet imagined the trees burning. People screaming. She clutched at Lily’s hand, unable to bear her own thoughts.

Lillian’s cinder world swam to the front of Lily’s mind, and she had to switch out of mindspeak to shield her sister from seeing it. There was no point in hiding what she was about to say from the Hive anyway.

“I know. I don’t know how to stop him from here—but I know.” Lily breathed a bitter laugh. “I dragged you all across the country because I had some crazy idea that the solution to the Woven was out west, like *west* was some miraculous place. I thought I’d find a way for people and Woven to live together so the Outlanders wouldn’t be trapped and there wouldn’t have to be a war.” Lily wanted to kick

herself. “Well, people and Woven can live together. This wasn’t what I had in mind, though.”

“It’s not really living together. It’s more like living *under*,” Juliet said, shuddering. “And I don’t care if they’re listening.”

Lily shrugged. “We’re already their prisoners.” *For now*, she added in mindspeak. Lily almost didn’t ask it, but she couldn’t stop herself. “Nothing in Rowan’s memories about me?”

“He did it to save you,” Juliet said.

“Juliet,” Lily said disbelievingly. “He took my willstones and put me in a cage.”

“Alaric believed you had sided with Lillian. He was going to slit your throat where you stood. Rowan did the only thing he could do to keep you alive without having to slaughter his sachem and his whole tribe to protect you from them.”

Lily looked away. She thought of Rowan’s expression when he’d taken her willstones. There was no anger. No resentment. He didn’t take her willstones because he was bitter or hateful. It was a calculated action performed without passion, like he was making a choice that had more to do with other people than with himself. If there was any feeling in him that she could detect, it was regret. What he’d done, he’d done for her, and even then he knew that the cost of saving her life would be her love.

Was she that unforgiving?

“I didn’t really cry that much after it happened. I was too confused to cry because I knew Rowan would never betray me. Despite what it looked like, I knew there had to be more to it,” Lily admitted.

“I can replay his memory for you. He showed us. Do you want to see it?” Juliet asked.

Lily shook her head. “Don’t need to. Don’t want to.” She knew Juliet was telling the truth and that Rowan had probably saved hundreds of lives, including hers, but she still felt the grating edge of

resentment inside her. Resentment and something else full of yearning that she could quite place yet. “The cage isn’t the problem between us anymore.”

“What is?” Juliet prodded gently.

“What’s your father like? The James of this world,” Lily asked in response. “What is he like?”

Juliet smirked. “I barely know him. He wasn’t really interested in us as children, and then Lillian sent him away when he became too interested in what she was doing as an adult. You know, once she was the Salem Witch.”

“My father was never there,” Lily whispered. Her whole chest felt sore. Juliet waited for Lily to continue, but Lily stayed silent.

“Are you ever going to forgive Rowan?” Juliet asked.

“I’m not good at forgiveness.” Lily thought about how she’d refused to forgive Scot. She never really got around to forgiving her father for abandoning her or Tristan for cheating on her, either. And now they were all dead. “I never give anyone a break,” she whispered, repeating Toshi’s words.

“Is that the person you want to be?” Juliet asked gently.

“No. But I haven’t figured out how to be anyone else yet.” Lily shook herself. “Enough of this. Are you up? Like *up up*?” she asked. Juliet nodded. *I feel like snooping around*, Lily said, switching back to mindspeak. *Want to come?*

Juliet grinned. Lily took that as a yes, and the sisters slid out of the room, quiet as moonlight.

They followed their path from earlier in the evening and found their way back to one of the places where Lily had noticed that they were on a gentle gradient that rose to change levels without stairs. Lily and Juliet didn’t dare allow their magelight to get too bright as they ascended a flight of dark steps.

Juliet asked in mindspeak—*Did you hear it, too?*

Footsteps above? Yes. From the veranda it doesn't look like there's another floor above us, but there must be, right?

I thought the same thing, Juliet replied. *Go this way,* she said when they reached the top of the stairs. *Our rooms will be below.*

They went down a long, narrow corridor with no windows. It was stuffy and baked dry from the daytime heat. The walls seemed to stare at them. The corridor ended at a door with a conventional lock.

There was no ward set to the door—just a simple lock. Lily shrugged at Juliet and easily knocked the tumblers into place with a nudge from one of her willstones. The door clicked open, and Lily peeked her head inside. She let her magelight glow a touch brighter and saw hulking shapes throughout the room. As her eyes adjusted, she could discern dusty crates and furniture covered with sheets.

Dead end, Lily said in mindspeak.

Not necessarily, Juliet replied. *Let's go to the back. I think I can see another door.*

They wended their way through the attic, passing crates, coat racks, broken armoires, shoe racks, a telescope, and even an old globe. Lily stopped at the globe and moved the sheet covering it. She noticed that there was no Canada or Mexico—just one big continent with the Thirteen Cities on one side and Bower City on the other. She had no idea how old the globe was, or how long Bower City had existed, but the globe looked like an antique—a hundred years or more.

They reached the door at the back of the attic and tested it. It was unlocked. Lily pushed the door open and found a room with nothing in it but a stairway set in the middle that led into the ceiling, and another door on the opposite side of the room.

This room isn't dusty, Lily noticed.

It gets used, Juliet replied. She started heading straight to the stairway.

Wait, Juliet. I want to check the other door first. Lily could feel the pull of magic around it, and as she got closer she realized that it was set with a powerful ward. She stopped, not daring to go any closer to it. This room was hidden on one side by a room full of forgotten objects, and protected on the other by powerful wards. Whatever the stairs led to must be important to merit so much protection.

Juliet asked—*Why set such a strong ward on this door but leave the door we came through unlocked?*

Maybe there was a ward set to it a long time ago, but it dissipated. The way we came looks like it's been forgotten, Lily replied. *Do you want to go up?* She could feel Juliet hesitating.

Lily, I have no magic and I'm Lillian's claimed, not yours, Juliet said.

It was strange to think it after everything they'd been through together, but this Juliet wasn't her actual sister—she was another version of her. No matter how much Lily loved her, this Juliet, and her willstone, belonged to Lillian.

If something were to go wrong, Juliet continued, *I couldn't be your vessel. Maybe we should go back and wake Rowan.*

His name had just popped into Juliet's head. She hadn't intended to name Rowan out of all of Lily's mechanics, she was just naturally gravitating to the one who could defend them the best. His name shot through Lily like a bolt, like it always did when she wasn't expecting it.

Sorry, Juliet said, grimacing.

It's okay. And I don't want to go back, Lily said, her pride making her stubborn. She pushed the trapdoor open and climbed up onto the roof of the villa.

Lily could see the whole city and beyond. The Governor's Villa was set on the highest point and they stood at the very top of it. The bright moon allowed Lily to see all the way to the ocean on one side, and over the wall and across the vast field of flowers beyond to a dark smudge on the other horizon.

Lily. Come and look at this, Juliet said.

Juliet was standing beside a large, softly glowing structure that dominated the center of the roof. As Lily approached she realized that it was a giant crystal, supported at the bottom by metal struts. The crystal was at least fifteen feet tall and five or six feet wide.

“What is it?” Lily asked aloud.

“It’s a speaking stone,” said a low voice behind her. Lily turned and saw Rowan ascending the stairs behind her.

“How did you—”

“Know you left?” Rowan finished for her. “I set a ward on our rooms.”

“How’d you know where I went?”

“I can always find you,” Rowan answered with a shrug. “Haven’t you figured that out yet?”

Lily shut her mouth with a snap. He’d found her in the oubliette. He’d found her after the City Guard had raided the subway tunnels. He’d even managed to track her across the continent. Rowan *had* always found her. She’d think of him, and there he’d be. Lily considered that maybe he could always find her because some part of her was always calling to him.

“You shouldn’t have come up here without a mechanic. No offense, Juliet, but you can’t defend her.” He was just about to get angry with Lily when he remembered that he didn’t have that right anymore. She noticed that he stopped several feet away from her and didn’t try to initiate mindspeak. This was their new normal. Something in her contracted to know that. She turned back to the speaking stone.

“What does it do?” she asked.

“It allows a witch to reach the minds of her claimed over long distances,” he replied. “They’re set up spaced apart every few hundred

miles or so, and they work like a relay system. Years ago, the Salem Witch used to embed one of her claimed in the ruling Coven of each of the other Thirteen Cities to keep watch over them, and she'd stay in touch with her claimed through the speaking stones. That way, the Witch could maintain control from Exeter to Savannah without ever having to leave the safety of Salem."

"They haven't been used in years," Juliet said. "I didn't even know what they looked like."

"There's still one in Salem," Rowan said. "On top of the Citadel, over Lillian's rooms."

"Did Lillian ever use it?" Lily asked.

"I don't think so," he replied. "What's the point? She didn't have any claimed in the other Covens, where the other speaking stones were set up, and it only works between a witch and her claimed." He narrowed his eyes. "But why don't you ask her? You two talk all the time, don't you?"

"How did you know—" she began, and hastily cut off. Lily looked down at her hands. "Yes."

Something like a smile softened the corners of his mouth. Lily felt her cheeks heating up.

"Who would she contact?" Juliet asked, still staring at the speaking stone.

Lily had lost the thread of the conversation. "Who would who contact?"

"Bower City doesn't allow witches to claim," Juliet said, frowning. "I'm assuming this is Grace's. If she doesn't have any claimed, how could she use this?"

Rowan walked around it and ran his finger across the surface. "Someone's been using it. See the lights inside?"

Lily looked more closely at its center and saw the roiling play of

light and dark that almost looked alive. “Is this a willstone?” Lily asked, incredulous.

“Same family, different capabilities. Speaking stones are far too large for one mind to bond with, so they can’t be used for all the different kinds of things a willstone can, but what they lack in nuance they make up for in raw power,” Rowan answered.

Lily stared up at the giant crystal. “Can anyone use it, or does it attune itself to one witch?” she asked aloud.

“Anyone can use it. But you can only reach *your* claimed, and another witch could only reach *her* claimed. It’s not like your telephones, where anyone can call and anyone can answer.”

“Ah,” Lily said. She was reminded of teaching Rowan how use a telephone back in her world. He’d loved them, like he’d loved computers and most everything else that had to do with science and technology. He’d loved them because anyone could access them, not just witches and mechanics.

My world really is magical in its own way, she said to Lillian. Look how large the speaking stone has to be, and still its range is only a few hundred miles. I wonder how many of them are set up and which direction they go? North—south? Or is there a line of them reaching all the way back east?

“You’re talking to her right now, aren’t you?” Rowan asked. His brow furrowed.

“She’s not really listening. She’s busy,” Lily replied.

“Then why are you reaching out to her?”

“Because I *want* to,” Lily snapped. She turned to the speaking stone. “Is there any way to find out who is using this and who’s listening?”

Rowan still looked troubled. “No,” he answered distractedly, and then went back to what was really on his mind. “Lily. Have you told her about this place?”

"Of course I have," she said, throwing her hands up.

"Lily!" Juliet said, shocked.

"What?" Lily replied, starting to feel sheepish under Juliet's disapproval. "She's not against us. Not about this."

"Has Lillian told you what she's going to do about it?" Rowan asked.

"Not exactly." Lily looked down at her feet. "She's been busy, like I said."

"Doing what?" Rowan asked, crossing his arms over his chest.

Lily shrugged, feeling stupid. She'd been sharing so much with Lillian but she hadn't bothered to ask what Lillian had been up to in return. Lillian had seemed so busy, and there were times when Lily could feel that she was in pain.

"Why would you do that? Why would you tell her?" Rowan looked concerned, rather than upset.

"Because no one else gets it," Lily said, looking away. "No one else knows what it feels like."

"What *what* feels like?" he persisted.

A lump formed in her throat, and for the life of her she couldn't say the words aloud. An image of Tristan running across the burning plain to face the Hive welled up and set her eyes stinging before she could stuff it back down.

"I can't," she said in a strangled voice.

The numbness she had been forcing on herself evaporated, and anger surged through her. She was angry with herself, and Rowan. She met his eyes and he felt her wave of rage hit him, real and palpable as it had been in the ballroom. He took a stumbling step back as if she'd physically pushed him.

"We should get back inside," Juliet said urgently. She was looking at the sky.

Lily tilted her head and saw dark shapes starting to circle above.

Even from a distance, she could feel the air shivering with the hum of their wings. The Hive was coming in response to Lily's anger.

Rowan took a protective step toward her and pulled up short, remembering he wasn't to touch her. "Go," he said, motioning to the trapdoor. "And try to calm yourself."

Lily scrambled down it after Juliet, and rushed across the empty room. She felt Rowan only a few steps behind her as she threaded her way back through the dusty attic and down the stuffy corridor.

They made it back to their rooms without anyone in the villa spotting them. Lily wondered whether it mattered that the Hive had seen them on the roof or not. Was getting angry on a rooftop in the middle of the night enough to get them detained somehow? Lily couldn't imagine that was true. The Hive would constantly be over-eating to normal things like toddler tantrums if that were the case.

Who decided what was normal around here?

Back in their rooms, Rowan and Juliet showed the rest of the coven what they had seen, but no one had any new thoughts on the speaking stones.

We'll see what we can learn tomorrow when we go looking around, Caleb said. *Lily, can you ask Toshi if he knows anything about them?*

I can try, she replied. *But he may not be able to tell me the truth. Toshi is as trapped here as we are.*

As everyone is in Bower City, Rowan added. *Do you think Toshi would let you claim him?*

They were shocked by Rowan's question, Lily most of all. *It's illegal here,* she said needlessly.

Rowan huffed with impatience. *Toshi wants to be a part of this coven, and he's powerful. If something goes wrong and they don't let us leave, we're going to need a lot more mechanics than just the six of us to have any chance of fighting our way out of here.*

Caleb and Una agreed with him.

I didn't think you'd want me to claim him, Lily said.

Why? My first responsibility is to protect you. That's all I've ever tried to do.

Lily didn't have a response. A part of her wanted him to be jealous.

There wasn't much of the night left, but the coven decided to go back to bed for the rest of it. As Lily approached her door she heard Rowan behind her. Again, he stopped a few paces away from her, and now that they were alone, only addressed her aloud.

"Have you asked her what she's going to do?" Rowan didn't have to say Lillian's name. Lily knew whom he meant.

"She's blocking me right now," Lily replied quietly. "But I will. It was stupid of me to not ask before."

"How often do you mindspeak with her?" he asked gently.

"I don't know," Lily replied. She sighed, suddenly feeling bone tired. "I don't notice I'm doing it most of the time. I just start talking."

That seemed to bother Rowan even more. He opened his mouth to say something and then shut it again.

"What do you talk about with her that you can't with your coven?" he asked. "And I don't mean me. I mean Juliet. Una. Tristan."

Lily shook her head. He didn't understand. "It's not what I tell her, it's what she already knows. What she and I share."

"Like what?"

"What it feels like to be the one who decides which of the people you love dies."

Rowan stared at her for a long time. "This is about your Tristan. That's why you're so angry with me. It's not about the cage anymore, is it?"

"I made Tristan my head mechanic when the Hive came for us. He wasn't ready," she said, her eyes dry and staring. "He wasn't you."

"I should have been there," Rowan whispered.

"Yes," Lily said, the anger returning swiftly and filling her to the brim. "You should have." Lily forced herself back to being numb so the Hive wouldn't be alerted. "Why didn't you just come with us?"

Rowan's lips pressed together. He either couldn't, or wouldn't, answer her. Her heart sinking, Lily went into her room and shut the door in Rowan's face, both of them finally realizing what it was that Lily couldn't forgive. His absence.

Carrick stood on the roof of the Governor's Villa in front of the towering crystal his half brother had called a speaking stone. Warrior Sisters landed on the roof around him, cocking their bulbous heads. Carrick paid them no mind. Act calm, and they were calm. But that was the problem with insect Woven like them. No matter how many times people had heard to stay still and not swat at them, most couldn't seem to help themselves when they heard the sound of those wings and saw the yellow and black of their bodies. Carrick wasn't like most people, though.

The Sisters kept their distance and watched him while he looked at the speaking stone. He put a hand out and touched its surface. It felt warm.

Lillian, he called in mindspeak.

Carrick, she answered. He could feel her confusion. It had been many weeks since they had been able to reach each other in mindspeak. *Where are you?*

It's been a long journey. So tiring, he said leadingly. *Can you use the speaking stone to fuel me so I may give you a full report?*

I've never heard of that being done before. I thought the speaking stones were just used for mindspeak.

Seems like an awful waste. Try it, he urged. Carrick thought that in some ways it was good that he hadn't been trained at the Citadel. He didn't know what was impossible. He smiled as he felt her feeding his willstone with strength and started his story with his abduction by the Hive.