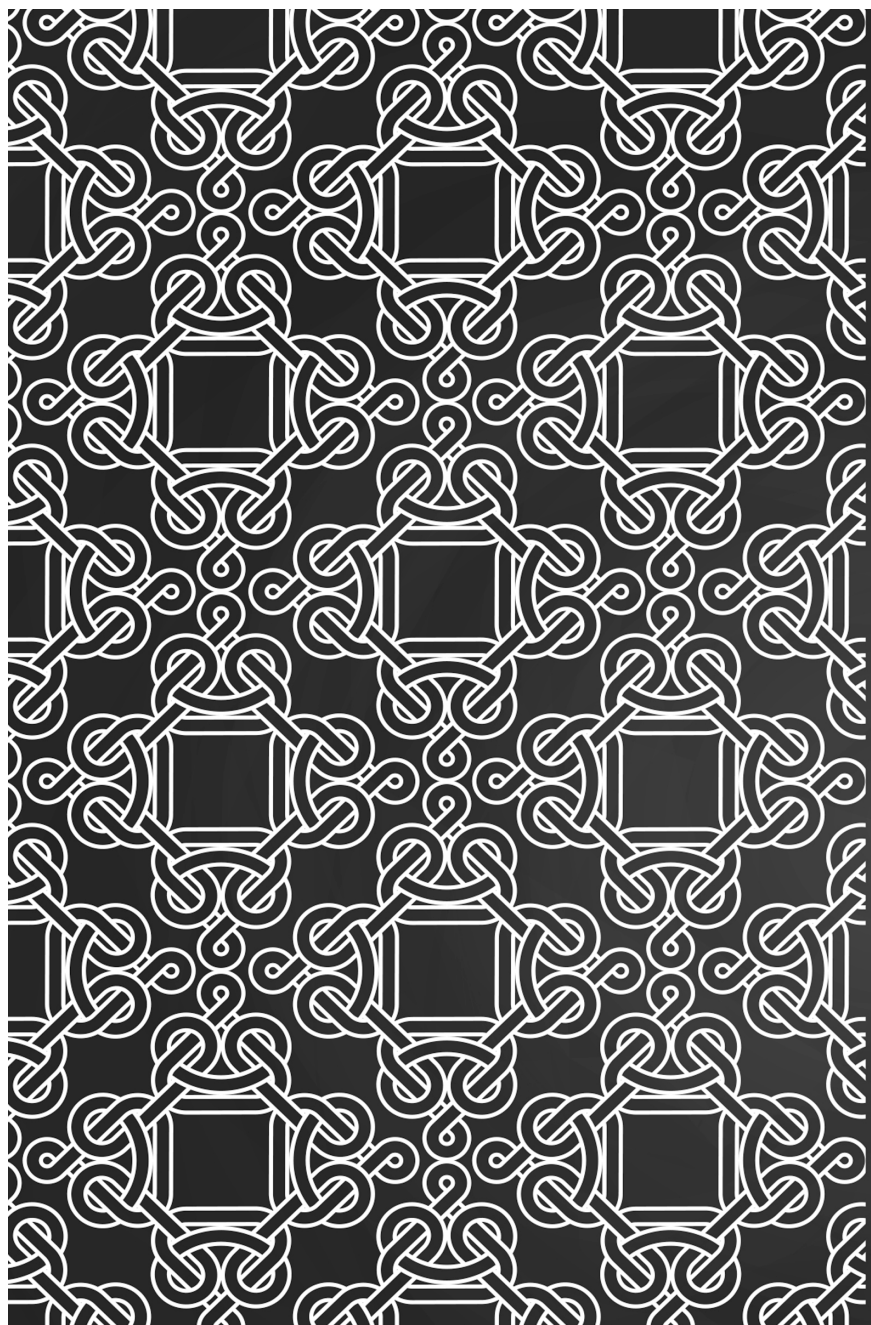


# Kalea Jameson and the Gathering

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Streamrider Chronicles



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Streamrider Chronicles

Kelly Douglas  
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## DEDICATION

To my mom, who always told me to go write her a story. I did it, Mom. And to my sister Karen who manned the fort so I could have some quiet time to write. If you know, you know how much I appreciate this.





*“... as life twists and twirls, and magical thread barrows  
into the blood flows a bitter song of the sparrow.”*

- Masego



# CONTENTS

<a href="#">Chapter 1</a>	1
<a href="#">Chapter 2</a>	11
<a href="#">Chapter 3</a>	23
<a href="#">Chapter 4</a>	27
<a href="#">Chapter 5</a>	29
<a href="#">Chapter 6</a>	35
<a href="#">Chapter 7</a>	39
<a href="#">Chapter 8</a>	55
<a href="#">Chapter 9</a>	61
<a href="#">Chapter 10</a>	71
<a href="#">Chapter 11</a>	77
<a href="#">Chapter 12</a>	85
<a href="#">Chapter 13</a>	95
<a href="#">Chapter 14</a>	103
<a href="#">Chapter 15</a>	109
<a href="#">Chapter 16</a>	115
<a href="#">Chapter 17</a>	131
<a href="#">Chapter 18</a>	141
<a href="#">Chapter 19</a>	149
<a href="#">Chapter 20</a>	161
<a href="#">Chapter 21</a>	173
<a href="#">Chapter 22</a>	181
<a href="#">Chapter 23</a>	189
<a href="#">Chapter 24</a>	203

<a href="#">Chapter 25</a>	211
<a href="#">Chapter 26</a>	223



# CHAPTER 1

A necklace, a book, and the attic



I nstead of answering, I shove the necklace inside the brooch-sized hole in the book. Suddenly, we are soaring into an infinite number of colors. Makai is to my left and Abbie to my right. They look sick. “Ugh, I’m going to hurl,” Makai yells as he tumbles through the air. “What did you do,” he squeaks. Surprised but not taken off guard. Abby makes the best of it. She squeezes her eyes shut, fighting back nausea. Then, she tucks her legs into her body, somersaulting into a graceful swan dive. She’s always been the better swimmer. “Kalea, where are we?” I didn’t answer either of them. Amazingly, I’m enjoying myself this time. I twist my body and barrel roll through the air until I dive into the pool of colors. Waves of peace rush over me. I soak it all in, inhaling the familiar scent until the sound of puking snaps me out of it.

Blinking sleepily, I open my eyes. The tranquility of the moment is ripped to shreds. Makai is sick. Abbie is frantically saying something and shaking me. We are crashing!

“What the heck,” I yell.

We are in an airplane, and it is going down. Gasping for air, I see out the front window that we are in a nosedive! Abbie and I are in the captain's chairs, and there are all sorts of alarms and lights going off. The gauges are all lit up in red. I assume that's not good. Behind us, Makai groans, “do something!” I flip switches and mash down buttons.

“Abbie pull up,” I yell, but she is already doing it. The ground is getting closer. I stop breathing and close my eyes. “This is it,” I mutter, “I brought my friends here to die,” but then, the alarms stop going off. Squinting through one eye, I see that the gages are all in the 'normal range.' “Woo, way to go, Abbie!” Makai cheers. I look out the window and see that we are flying over a big city. Abbie turns to me and grins, “I think I've got the hang of this.”

The door to the plane opens, and a face greets us. “Well, did you enjoy the ride kids,” it asks. The window in front of me has gone black. All the lights on the dash are off. We are no longer moving. Then, the face frowns and looks at Makai, “Hey, only two people are allowed on the ride at a time,” it says crossly, “Ick, what did you do in here? Everyone out.”

While he is staring at the mess at Makai's feet, I pick up the book and tighten my other hand around the necklace hanging from my neck. Everything is there. We file out of the plane and down a flight of metal stairs. We are in a room filled with airplanes and people. There is a line of students waiting to ride and a guy standing at the head of the line in charge of letting them on.

Our face goes to him and announces, “Thirty-minute break

for cleanup. Come back later.” All the kids groan and shoot us hateful looks. He whispers something to the other guy, and he looks up at us accusingly. I turn back and look at the plane. It is only part of a plane, the nose, I think. There is a big sign that reads “Need for Speed. Interactive Flight Simulator.” Makai leans into me and asks, “Where are we?” I shrug.

The face, okay, it's some guy in khakis, and a polo shirt says, “Follow me.” We do. He leads us into a dingy office, and he sits behind a desk. The name badge on his lanyard says that his name is Derek. “Sit down,” he motions to the chairs in front of his desk. The light above us flickers, giving off an eerie glow. “Look, we have strict rules here at the Museum of Science and Industry. There's a reason you puked, kid,” he says, looking directly at Makai.

“Now, I'm going to have to write you up.” He digs around in a desk drawer. He pulls out a packet of pink forms. “This is your first warning.” He picks a pen up from on top of the desk and starts chewing on the lid. “If you pull a stunt like this again, you will be banned from the museum here in Chicago. You don't want that to happen now, do you, kids?” We shake our heads, agreeing that we didn't. His phone goes off. He looks down.

Abbie quickly mouths the word “Chicago” at Makai and me. I shrug. Derek's phone beeps. He flips his phone open and mumbles, “I get crummy service in this building.” He listens to the message. He gasps, “My wife is in labor.” He looks up and gives us a goofy grin. “I'm going to be a dad! I've got to get to the hospital.”

He grabs a leather saddlebag and chaotically throws stuff in it, “Listen, just follow the rules, okay,” He puts the thick strap over his shoulder and hesitates. He reaches down, picks up the pink piece of paper he had written on just moments before, and rips it in two. “Go check out the Navy Pier or something. They have rides there,” he says as he rushes out of the office.

“Well, that was bizarre,” Makai says. In his rush, he leaves us sitting in his office. It is sparsely decorated. There is a stack of papers, paper clips, a name placard, and a picture frame on his beat-up metal desk. And that was it. His name is Derek Sheppard. The lady in the picture looks very familiar, but maybe she just has one of those faces.

“So, what now?” Abbie asks. “I’m pretty sure we are in Chicago,” I respond to her. Then she says, “I used to live here, you know. If that’s where we really are, then we should go to the Navy Pier. It’s tons of fun.” She starts braiding a section of her hair. We sit in momentary shocked silence. Makai is fidgeting with paper clips he took from the desk. They make a soft metallic clink in his hands. “Guys, Chicago? How are we here? I mean, we were just in your attic, Kalea! I think we were sucked into a tornado or something.”

Trying to lighten the mood, I interject, “I don’t think we are in Kansas anymore, Toto.” He rolls his eyes at me and says, “Out of nowhere, we are crashing in an airplane! But wait, not really! Because we are in a flight simulator, and then some grouch decides he’s going to write us up but doesn’t.”

I look to Abbie. She is undoing the braid she just made. Sighing heavily, she stands up and straightens her dress, saying, “This office is so...” But Makai interrupts, “Don’t you two find our situation the least bit odd? Let’s just go home.” Jumping up, I leave the office saying, “Come on guys, we can at least enjoy the museum.” I’m not sure if they will follow me, and more to myself, I say, “Why not, right?” They do.

We pass the humongous book between us, so no one carries it for long periods of time. Makai finally starts enjoying himself. He is a history nerd, after all. He is having so much fun that we nearly leave him in the historical vehicles section, but he chases us down and asks, “Hey, is anyone else hungry?” We are at the front entrance.

“Let's go to the pier,” Abbie says excitedly. I look around for a clock. Noon? It must be dinner time back home. It takes a lot of coaxing to get Makai to leave the building, but he finally agrees. It is a beautiful spring day. Abbie runs down to the street and hails a cab. We catch up with her and pile in. I sit the book down in between us. Abbie already told the driver where we wanted to go, so we sat back and enjoyed the ride. To our right is Lake Michigan. There are all sorts of boats out on the water. To our left is the big city of Chicago. It is beautiful. Abbie chatters the whole way about when she used to live here.

Makai flashes a mischievous smile at Abbie and says, “Abbie Gabby take a breath!” Without missing a beat, she replies, “Don't call me that. Look, there's the building my dad used to work in....” Abbie Gabriella Diaz is her full name. She got stuck with the nickname Abbie Gabby and hates it, but it fits her so well. So, we needle her from time to time. “Abbie Gabby take a breath,” I nudge her. “Ugh, Kalea!” She rolls her eyes. “Look, there.” She points at a shop. “My mom used to shop there. They have the cutest clothes.”

It takes about twenty minutes to get to the Pier. Abbie pays the cabbie. Makai picks up the book and waits for us wide-eyed and mouth agape. “Do you smell that,” he asks, but he doesn't wait for an answer. He is off in a flash. We find him in front of a vendor stuffing his face. There is powdered sugar everywhere. He smiles sheepishly.

With his mouth full, he says, “funnel cake.” Crumbs fall out of his mouth and onto his shirt. Abbie rolls her eyes and strolls over to the lake. She inhales deeply and says, “I forgot how much I like it here. We used to come here when I was little. We would watch the boats and then go to the Children's museum. You guys, it was so cool! We would dig for dinosaur bones and get to climb all over a ship. There was so much to do. Here, it's this way.”



We follow Abbie until she stops dead in her tracks. She freezes like a statue. "What's up," I ask because all the color is draining out of her face. Makai points at a young family and asks, "Abbie, is that your mom?" We stand there as time passes, staring at the scene in front of us. Abbie's five-year-old self and her little brother are eating cheese puffs and talking excitedly about going to the children's museum. Her mom tells them to watch the boats and finish their snack first; then they will go. It's kind of freaky to watch.

Abbie says, "I remember this. My brother is going to throw cheese puffs into the lake. Watch." Her brother fills his chubby toddler hands full of cheese puffs, runs to the fence, and throws them over into the lake. He giggles and runs back to Abbie's mom to show her that they are all gone now. "Mom was not happy. She made us wait even longer to go to the museum. She said that he wasted his food." Abbie gives us a play-by-play of what will happen, and it does just the way she says it will. I shiver.

Makai says, "This is creepy." We are so absorbed in the scene in front of us that we fail to notice the couple watching us. Abbie's family is having a great time eating cheese puffs. Her little brother was such a cutie-pie, but something caught my eye. Glancing in that direction, I see an oddly dressed couple stand up from their benches and start limping toward us. I can't see their faces. They give me the heebie-jeebies. "Let's go," I say. I throw another uneasy glance behind me. "Abbie," I say louder, "Let's go." She is mesmerized by her family and doesn't hear me.

Makai pushes on Abbie's shoulder and says, "We gotta go." Makai and I look into each other's eyes, and at the same time, we decide to take Abbie's hands and pull. We do, and she comes out of her trance. "Hey, whatcha doing?" We don't explain. I think Makai saw it, too. We are being followed. We continue to pull Abbie away. "No, wait! I don't want to go," she cries.

Makai and I don't care. We have got to get away from here. I searched the crowds as we ran, but the couple disappeared, and I couldn't figure out where they went. I look behind me, and they are rushing toward us. They have on ball caps pulled down low over their eyes and scarves wrapped around their necks and faces. Makai is leading, and we go straight into the funhouse maze.

"Did we just sneak in here?" I whisper to Makai. "Just keep walking with this family in front of us," he whispers back. "What are we doing? Let go of my hands." Abbie shoves her now freed hands into her pockets. "We are going to go through the maze," I tell her. "We should lose whoever was following us," Makai says, "I hope." I haven't been paying attention, and I trip on the uneven floor. "Why was this a good idea?" I ask. He shrugs. We follow our "family" into what looks like a green dungeon. There are columns and archways everywhere.

"How do we get out of here?" Abbie asks. "Uhm, I guess just follow our family," I say, but they are gone. I frantically look around. Makai yells, "they're gone, but they were just here!" The lights go out. Then bright flashes of light start popping on and off. "Ugh, the strobes," Abbie says. We start moving towards what might be the exit, although it looks like we are moving in slow motion.

"Give us the gem," something or someone hisses in unison.

The lights continue to strobe. Makai shouts. I hear a thud. "The book," he yells. Someone is touching my neck. The lights flicker on and off. I can't get a good look at who it is. I put my hands over the gem, so they can't get it.

"Get off her," Abbie yells, and I hear the breath being knocked off of somebody. She must have tackled someone. Makai exclaims, "I got it. I found it." I ask, "Where are you guys?" The room is thrust into complete darkness. The lights are off; slowly, a dim green light comes on and then quickly

shuts off. It does this over and over. I finally find Abbie huddled over Makai. "Someone kicked him, but he still has the book," she says.

### *A Year Ago*

The streamers are up, the presents wrapped, and the cake baked, but what should have been a fun day filled with joy has turned into the saddest day of my life. I sat in the living room staring into the kitchen at the "Happy Thirteenth Birthday" sign that mom had hung up for me. I felt so alone, even though there were people everywhere.

I could hear them whispering to each other about how unfortunate it was that today of all days, happened to be my birthday. They meant well. They were all swamped hustling from one room to another, stressing over where to put the newest casserole or where to add another chair in the living room.

I knew that my mom was trying to keep it together, but I could tell that she was not okay. I know that I wasn't. One of mom's cousins sat down next to me and hugged me. I had never been hugged so much in my life and by so many different people. I hugged her back and realized that I was thankful for all the hugs.

Grandpa was so excited about my birthday. He had an extraordinary gift for me. The week leading up to my big day, he hinted at it. "Sweetheart, just wait until your birthday," he would say, his eyes twinkling, "you will be blown away," I told him that I couldn't wait, but the night before my birthday, he suddenly got super sick. Mom and I thought that he was going to pull through. He was a trooper, so I went to bed.

Then, early in the morning, mom came into my room while

I was sleeping and woke me. I heard the fear and sadness in her voice.

“Kalea.”

A knot suddenly twisted itself round and round in the pit of my stomach.

“Grandpa is asking for you.”

I shuffled up to his room. The larger-than-life man who was always filled with joy was lying in bed, struggling to breathe. He looked so frail. I walked towards him. He reached out his hand and touched my face. “It's okay, sweetheart.” He wiped away my tears. I didn't even know that I had been crying.

He said, “I love you, honey.”

He started fussing with his blankets.

I leaned over and hugged him.

“I love you, too.” I asked him, “What are you looking for?”

He smiled weakly and put something into my hands. I could tell that all the effort had worn him out, yet his eyes gleamed.

“Happy birthday, kiddo!”

I looked at the package that he had given me. It was so pretty. It was wrapped in white polka-dotted tangerine paper with a hot pink bow and ribbons. He, or most likely mom, went to the trouble of wrapping it in my favorite colors. I stood there staring at it, listening to grandpa's labored breathing, and I panicked. My throat closed, and I couldn't breathe.

I focused on the beautiful box, trying to hold myself together. I shook my head and thrust the package back at him. “No, grandpa. You should give it to me during my party tomorrow.” Suddenly, mom was beside me. She put a comforting arm around my waist, pulled me close. Gently she whispered, “open it.” I looked up straight into grandpa's eyes. He nodded. So, I did.



## CHAPTER 2

### Working on a homework assignment



*Yesterday after school.*

I walk up the stairs to the attic. Mom told me that everything I needed would be in grandpa's study. I'm deep in thought about the big assignment Mrs. Rosenthal assigned the class. "Okay, listen up, your semester project is to research your family history, write a report, and make an ancestor chart. I think most of you did this way back in sixth grade. So, you've heard of a family tree, right?"

She paused and looked around the room. "Well, that's what an ancestor chart is. You start with you. Write your parents' names above yours like this, see." Mrs. Rosenthal wrote on the chalkboard, "So, I will draw a line up to my parents and then split the line, one line goes to my father and the other to my

mother. Here's where it's different, from sixth grade. Along with your ancestor chart, you will write a three to five-page report on a family member who immigrated here and why."

Everyone groans. She picks up a stack of papers and begins handing them out, "Here is the rubric...." The stair creaks, bringing me back to the present. This should be simple. I just need to get it started.

I love the attic. It's not scary at all. You know, like the ones you read in books or see in the movies. It was converted into Grandpa's study and bedroom a long time ago. He spent so much time up here. Mom left it exactly like he kept it. It's just me and her now. He passed away a little over a year ago from kidney disease. We miss him terribly, but we manage. It's now the guest room.

Mom has a sister, so we aren't totally alone. My Auntie and Uncle like to visit often since we live so close to the beach. I like it when they do because I get to see my cousins, and mom doesn't seem as sad with her sister here. Auntie can always talk her into taking a break. We all go surfing or snorkeling and just hang out at the beach all day. I reach the last stair and walk over to the cozy study nook. I take a deep breath through my nose.

It still smells like grandpa. I walk to the shelf where he kept his LPs. I run my fingers along the cardboard covers making a satisfying clicking sound. I stop at my favorite Ella Fitzgerald album. I take the record out of its sleeve. I put it on the player and dropped the needle. Jazzy music fills the room, and I bob my head to the rhythm.

I turn towards the desk. His sweater hangs over his chair, and like I always do, I put it on, hug myself and close my eyes, remembering his big bear hugs. I reach into the pockets of the cardigan and pull out his pipe. I stick it in between my teeth. I pull out the strange crystal necklace from the other pocket. He

loved this thing, and he gave it to me for my birthday right before he died. I hold it in my hand, letting the chain dangle. I study it like I have a million times before. It is big and beautiful. Technically, it is a brooch, but at some point, someone put it on a chain. There are specks of blue, red, and golden-brown glinting through the clear crystal. It really shows up in the sunlight. So, I walk over to the window. It is mesmerizing.

I hear my name. I look out through the window. At the beach with their surfboards, my two best friends, Makai Gisemba and Abbie Diaz. They are waving and jumping up and down like crazy people. I grin and wave back. I open the window, and I holler out to them. "Guys, not today. I've got way too much homework."

Makai throws his skinny mocha-colored arms in the air letting his tri-color surfboard fall onto the sand. "Kalea Jameson, I will not take no for an answer!" His dark brown eyes are deep and expressive. His smile, which lights up his entire face, reaches his eyes, crinkles them at the edges, and exudes joy and kindness. His black curly hair falls into his eyes. He quickly fixes it with the comb that he always keeps with him. He's wearing his favorite preppy plaid board shorts and thick dark glasses. He will take the glasses off and surf blind. I don't understand why he refuses to get contacts.

I can see Abbie roll her eyes from up here. Her stylized bohemian board is standing in the sand. She gives Makai a playful little shove. "Pick up your board, doofus." She is wearing a raffia straw cowboy hat. Her long thick, caramel blond hair is in a French braid. Over her bikini, she is wearing a t-shirt that reads "keep it rad" with a retro cowboy couple printed on the front. "Text you later, Kalea." She starts toward the ocean.

Makai picks up his board and makes an exaggerated face at Abbie. He smiles at me and takes off. I watch the two of them



until they are out of sight. "Well, I better get started," I say to no one in particular.

I notice that the music has stopped, so I flip the record over to play the B side. I make sure to flip the switch that will automatically lift the arm and repeat playing the record. Then I reach down and grab my backpack. I find all of grandpa's charts without a hitch.

Probably an hour has gone by, but maybe more so I look out the window at the ocean and the angle of the sun. Yep, the sun is starting to set. I'm going to get this finished tonight, woot! Taking a little break, I lean back in my chair and stretch. Whoops, I go too far, and the chair starts tipping. Trying to catch myself, I flail my arms around. Let's just say that it didn't work too well. I smack my hand on the hanging bookshelf with my left arm. "ouch," gritting my teeth; I brace myself for the brunt of it.

The shelf full of books comes tumbling down, and so do I. *Thwunk, thwunk*, bang, each book falls either onto me or the floor beside me, causing many *Oofs* and *ows* to come out of my mouth. I hear mom at the bottom of the stairs. "Is everything O.K. up there, Kalea-Bug?" I groan back to her, "I'm fine. I just knocked some books over."

"O.K., honey. Dinner will be ready in an hour."

"All right, thanks, mom."

As I catch my breath, I survey the damage that I've done. "No wonder that hurt." I picked up a humongous book that had fallen squarely in the middle of my stomach, knocking the breath out of me. It is old. It's oddly beautiful. I heft it up to the desk. It lands with a thud and sends my notebook papers swirling to the ground. I thumb through it. The pages are yellowed and feel like dried coconut. They are insanely brittle. Gingerly, I open it to a page in the middle. Beautiful

handwritten script fills the pages. It is written in cursive, but luckily, I know how to decipher it.

"Hmmm, actually, these are names," I say aloud, "I wonder...." I turn to the last pages of the book, and my theory is correct! My name is the final one scrawled in its pages which makes sense. I am the youngest of my cousins. I was the last born.

I know this handwriting! Grandpa filled in the last few pages. I trace my finger over his elegant penmanship. I remember his beautiful handwriting on the backs of old pictures. He would write names and dates, so no one would forget who was pictured. I smile at the memory of curling up on his lap as he shows me pictures of our family. He would tell the best stories about his Scots Irish kin. Our family was poor when they came over to America. Grandpa's mom and dad only had a few bucks between them, and they had a newborn baby.

Grandpa's favorite story about his parents filled my imagination. I can see the black and white photographs. There's a young family just starting out in a foreign country during the 1930s. One of my favorites is a picture of a young man in a tweed hat and fisherman's sweater standing in front of a factory. I know that it's my great-grandpa and that he is in Boston, but he didn't stay long because he couldn't stand being made fun of for being an Irishman. So, he packed up his family and moved to a farm in Oklahoma. The next photo is of my grandpa with his parents standing in front of an old car.

"We look tired and sad because our luck had run out," he would say, "It was the year of the big Dust Bowl." So, once again, my great-grandpa picked up his family and moved, this time to California. He found work on some farm picking oranges. Grandpa would say, "They called us fruit tramps," as he showed me a picture of his parents with baskets. "We stayed here, though, and made a life for ourselves."

Grandpa grew up in California and joined the Navy. During the war, he met a beautiful Hawaiian lady, my grandma. I call her by the Hawaiian name for grandma, tutu-lady. They married and moved to California. They saved up their money to buy a bungalow by the ocean, and we are still here. Anyway, my mom is Irish, Scottish, Japanese, Hawaiian, and Polynesian. My dad is Irish too, but he's got a bunch of other stuff in him. I'm a Heinz 57, just like my friends. You know I think this report for Mrs. Rosenthal is going to be easy, thanks to grandpa. I study the book's cover.

“Man, this thing is ancient,” I say as I run my hand over the worn leather. My finger catches on something, and a flap opens, revealing a secret compartment. My heart skips a beat. “What belongs in here,” I wonder aloud.

The leather inside is embossed just like the rest of the thick flowery cover. Only inside, instead of flowers, it is something that looks like maybe a bird and a language that I can't read. I play with the flap, opening and closing it. Honestly, as weird as this sounds, I feel like it is pulling at me and begging me to pay attention.

Fascinated, I lean in closer. You know those fun puzzles and optical illusions where if you stare long enough, the circles start dancing around? Well, the flowers on the book start to dance and go in circles. It is as if I am on top of a tornado looking down inside while everything swirls past me. I can't look away from “the maybe a bird” and whatever that language is. “What. In. The. World,” I say aloud.

The letters are shuddering and surrounded by light. They leap out of the book, just missing me as they whiz by. I still have no idea what the words mean. The murky image of the bird flies across the breadth of the cover and then, up towards

me, the top of the tornado leaving a trail of blue, red, and golden-brown glitter.

I suck in air in between my teeth. The compartment's shape. I know it. I force myself to look away. There it is! I pick up the gemstone necklace, but it slips out of my sweaty hands and back onto the table. That's when I realize that I am gasping for air. Jumping quickly up out of my chair, I try to distance myself from the book. "What in the world is my problem," I ask. I'm still wearing grandpa's cardigan, so I hug myself and take a deep breath. I stand up a little taller and walk back to the desk.

I sit with my feet propped up on the desk, careful not to tip over again. I can't look at the book. Honestly, it creeps me out now, but I hold the necklace in my hand. I have it by the chain, swinging it back and forth, watching it sparkle. I want to know what kind of gem this is. I think grandpa told me once, but I just can't remember. So, I reach into my backpack with my other hand and pull out the school-assigned tablet. It has some science apps on it that I think will help me figure it out.

I discover that it's a crystal opal. I am feeling less spooked out by everything now. I always like researching and learning new things, so I think it helps me to calm down. The gem has a name now, too. So, it's less mysterious. This kind of opal is described as having a play of color and fire exiting from the cuts in the gem. Well, that's cool! My chair squeaks as I swing my legs down and scoot my chair forward. I toss the tablet off to the side while pulling the book towards me quickly.

Before I lose my courage, I shove the opal into the secret compartment, and someone hits me in the gut! Breathless, I search the room. My eyes dart back and forth, but no one is there. "Ugh, I'm going to puke," I moan.

Am I falling, too? Suddenly, I am transfixed by the bird at the bottom of the tornado. The letters go flying by, or am I

flying by the letters? I'm so dizzy. I feel the kind of dizzy when I ride in the back of the car and try to read. I always get car sick. I squeeze my eyes shut, "Don't puke. Don't puke." I opened my eyes and saw that I was caught in a whirlpool of beautifully brilliant colors. Wave after wave of intense light is washing over me, and then a blinding riptide pulls me under. Each peaceful wave relaxes me, and I am blissfully floating. I smell baking cookies—the kind my tutu-lady makes at Christmas time.

Suddenly, I am aware of a high-pitched rhythmic pounding in my head. I slowly open my eyes and see an ambulance race by. I am outside, sitting in a patch of grass. The book is in my lap. A gentle breeze blows my dark hair into my eyes. "Where am I?" I shake my head. I'm not in my cozy attic, and the sun is brightly shining straight overhead. The wind is warm, but I shiver. Gulping in the air greedily, I taste the sea. I pull myself up from the ground and turn around.

"The hospital?"

Who knows how long I stand there staring at the towering building? I'm pretty sure that I look like a goof. Here I am, a wide-eyed skinny kid standing in the middle of the hospital's lawn holding a book as big as she is. There is a commotion to the right of me. I turn my head and see a massive red-faced chubby guy running straight for me. He looks old, like thirty-something, and grumpy. Well, I mean, he is yelling something at the top of his lungs. I'm not going to stick around to find out what he wants. I shoved the book under my arm and did my best to impersonate a running-back and head towards the beach.

The book is cumbersome, so I'm glad that I'm running track and playing volleyball this school year. Seriously, the coaches' favorite thing is to make us run laps, "thankfully," I say as I turn to see that the guy is still chasing me. Maybe I'll find Makai and Abbie. They'll know what to do.

“Lass, I just need to talk to you,” the grumpy guy shouts breathlessly as he closes in on me. I'm almost to our favorite surf spot. My arm is burning from holding the heavy book, and my lungs feel like they are on fire, but I push myself anyway. I'm here. It looks weird. Where did all these food trucks come from? I frantically search the surf looking for my friends. “Maybe they are closer to my house,” I say worriedly.

I am standing in the middle of the mobile restaurants with the smell of fried foods wafting through the air. I start searching each picnic table. “No. Nope. No, not them.” Then, I spot Beachy Keen Shaved Ice! “There's a sight for sore eyes,” I sigh. “Kalea, we need to talk. I need to explain what's going on,” Grumpy guy is standing right next to me. Holy cow, how'd he get here so fast! Wait, how does he know my name? I ran away as fast as I could. I'm heading to the best-shaved ice place on the planet. Juan will help me.

My left eye is twitching as he repeats himself. “Look, kid, I have never seen you before in my life.” I glance over my shoulder and see Ol' Grumpy Pants standing there. His cross face is glistening with sweat. He is bent over, holding his side. He looks up at me, and we look straight into each other's eyes, and now I am really spooked. I whip my head back towards the window. “C'mon Juan, my friends and I come here almost every day,” I practically shout at him. He shrugs and shakes his head, “Sorry, kid. Have a small shaved ice on the house. New flavor!” He starts to hand me a brightly colored cone. I slowly back away from the food truck.

Juan doesn't know me. What is happening? I have both hands on either side of my pounding head. “Lass, please, please stop,” Mr. Grumpy begs. I am frozen in place. I finally get a good look at him. He has dark hair and golden hazel eyes, just the same as me. I'm more curious now than frightened, but I can't get my eye to stop twitching. He's still grumpy.

“I had to run two blocks just to get to you, lass! Why did you have to run,” he said with a thick Irish brogue. I say nothing. I don't think he really wants an answer, and I'm having trouble understanding him. He is rambling on about, “A lass wi' naw sense.” Then, I hear someone playing the ukulele and humming. We both hear it at the same time, and Mr. Grumpy says a word that I won't repeat.

The new guy approaches us. He has hair the color of damp sand. His eyes are dull and lifeless. He is tall and lanky. The ukulele looks tiny in his hands. He smiles a big toothy grin, walks right up to Mr. Grumpy, and pats him on the stomach. “You think it's about time to lay off the pies, Amos?” He goes into a fit of giggles. Apparently, new guy thinks he's hilarious. His melodic laughter is contagious, though, and I realize that I am laughing too. Then his laughter stops abruptly.

His drab eyes are on me, “Give me the brooch,” he says in an offhanded way. He grins, but his eyes stay the same. How the heck does he know about my necklace? “You want to give it to good ol' Donavon, don't you,” he asks. I shake my head. Of course, I don't, right? I feel compelled to hand it over, so I start to take it off from around my neck, but Mr. Grumpy moves in front of me.

“No, lass.” I blink.

“What?”

Donovan violently strums the ukulele, “Oh, you want to play, Amos,” he asks. Unexpectedly, he is behind me, whispering in my ear, “Amos is not your friend. You can't trust him.” As quickly as he is behind me, he is off to the side saying that he is my friend, then he scurries to the opposite side, “we will have great fun together, just give me the gem.” Amos, aka. Mr. Grumpy is still shielding me from Donovan, or is that what he's really doing? I mean, he was just chasing and yelling at me like a minute ago, so I sidestep him and watch the other

guy closely. He seems to be circling us, and the more he talks, the more confused I become.

Amos is talking, but everything seems muffled; then I think I hear him say, "He is spinning his web of lies." Finally, he comes into focus. We are practically standing nose to nose. "Use the book, lass." He managed to snap me out of whatever was going on with me. I am standing here with my arm stretched out, the necklace dangling from my fingertips. Stunned at what I am doing, I pull my arm back towards myself. The book is still under my right arm. Gosh, my arm is stiff from carrying it. I force my arm to move and open the flap on the front cover. I think Donovan is coming in close, but Amos is there. I fumble with the necklace, barely shoving it into the compartment, when I see Donovan jump towards me, but Amos tackles him shouts, "Hurry, lass."

Again, I am falling through the tornado. I pass the soaring bird and dive into the beautiful colors. My head is spinning, and I'm feeling nauseated. Then, it all stops. I open my eyes, and I'm back at grandpa's desk with the book opened in front of me to the year I was born. I rub my eyes, and I say aloud, "I must have clonked my head when I toppled over earlier." I hear my mom call out from downstairs.

"Dinner's ready, Kalea."

What a crazy dream! I exhale deeply and stand up. I look down at the mess that I made when I knocked the shelves down. There are piles of books and papers strewn all over. I kick some books aside to create a path, and I notice a thick white envelope in the middle of an opened book. My name is written on it in grandpa's handwriting. I pluck it up and open it immediately.





## CHAPTER 3

So I found a sweet, cryptic letter from Grandpa



The letter is long, and I hear my mom impatiently yell my name again, so I fold it up, put it back inside the envelope, and shove it inside my backpack while racing downstairs for dinner. “What were you doing? I can’t even remember how many times I called you,” mom says matter-of-factly. I smile at her and say, “I’m sorry. I think I fell asleep.” She hands me a plate. “It’s O.K., sweetheart. I can never stay mad at you.” I take the plate. “What’s for dinner? It smells amazing.” I walk over to the stove and see that it’s my favorite. “Tacos! It must be Tuesday!”

Mom and I are sitting at the table recounting our days to each other, “...and then the onion rolls under the car. Can you imagine me on all fours, looking under the car, and fishing for

my onion when judge Rickles walked up?" I bust out laughing so hard that water comes out of my nose, and we both get the giggles. She had a super busy day, and somehow, she can make anything sound like a funny, exciting adventure. I love dinners with mom. She is truly my best friend. My dad went off the deep end when I was a baby, and she had to pull herself up by the bootstraps and provide for both of us. She met dad during one of her college history classes. He was charming and charismatic, and they had a whirlwind romance. They married before they graduated, and then dad got a little wacky and left us.

Of course, grandpa and tutu-lady helped us out, but that doesn't mean mom didn't work hard. She is an ER nurse. She works long hours and comes home exhausted. I don't know how she does it because she isn't cranky when she gets home. I'M A GROUCH when I have a long day at school because of practice and stuff, but mom never is.

"How's your homework coming," she asks.

"I'm just about finished. Grandpa made it easy because he kept such good records."

I don't know why, but I don't tell her about the book, the necklace, or grandpa's letter and keeping it secret makes me feel guilty. I did tell her about leaning back too far in my chair, the mess I made, and my goofball friends at the window. "You should go out with them tomorrow. It'll do you good. I think you've been working too hard, Kalea-bug. You seem a bit stressed," she smiles. She has the best smile. It lights up her whole face and gives her those pretty eye crinkles. She hates them, but I tell her all the time that it makes her look like a happy person.

"Yeah, that's probably a good idea. I am happiest when I'm on my board floating in the sea," I reply, trying hard to stay in the present with mom. The thing is, though, I really want to

talk to my friends, and grandpa's letter is weighing heavily on me. I seriously want to know what he had to say, but instead of running off to my room and reading it, I help mom with the dishes, and then we watch our favorite superhero T.V. shows. As soon as I'm in my room for the night, I grab my backpack and pull out the letter. It's late, and I have school in the morning, but I'm dying to know what grandpa wrote to me. I begin reading.

*My dearest Granddaughter Kalea,*

*I remember the day you were born. I was delighted that we had the same eyes. As you got older, I discovered that you have your grandmother's quick and graceful smile. You are as absolutely beautiful and intelligent as your mother. I held you in my arms the day you were born and told you that you are deeply loved. There is nothing that you can ever do to make me love you more. There is nothing that you can ever do that can make me love you less. I hope that I have shown you that in the short time we had together. There is nothing I wish more than to protect you.*

*So, I must tell you that you have the lines of five. This will seem confusing at first, but you will soon understand.*

- 1. One falls from the heavens in flashes of lightning.*
- 2. Two is esteemed by all under the sun.*
- 3. Three are the tears of joy mixed with rain.*
- 4. Four are splinters of falling stars.*

5. And five is the sun solidified.

The Sun and the Sky mixed in a new world, the  
Dragon and the Unicorn sailed across the sea,  
the Weaver and the Sycamore are near a  
stream, and the Shepard watches over them all.

All my love,

Grandpa

I slowly fold the letter and put it back into the envelope. I sniffle. Gosh, I miss him. I reread it. Then, I scan the second half of it again. It's weird. I don't get it. Maybe he was senile like Auntie and mom insist. I turn the lamp off and roll over onto my side but can't get to sleep. The incident in the attic continues to replay itself over and over: the breath being knocked out of me, falling into intense light, the strange letters and the birdlike thing flying at me, and Donovan and Amos. Surely, I dreamed it, but I hear my grandpa's voice saying, "You have the lines of five." I finally fall into a fitful sleep brimming with superheroes and villains that look an awful lot like me.



# CHAPTER 4

## Ancient Ireland



*1200 A.D. Scotland, about 800 years ago*

“I hate these games,” Branwen says as Amos places a freshly picked flower in her long-braided hair. “I know, but there is nothing we can do. It's tradition. It's the way the clans have always done it.” Amos studies her face. Her dark hair highlights her fair skin. Her intelligent brown eyes search his face. He thinks to himself; she is the most beautiful woman I've ever laid eyes on, and she loves me incredibly. Branwen leans in and kisses him.

“Let's just run away. You have nothing to prove to me, Amos.” He holds her close, knowing that he can never disgrace his clan by running.

He watches from the shadows. Amos should never have fallen in love. How weak of him and to think that I used to marvel at his strength, the young man thinks to himself bitterly. The scene in front of him fades away as he becomes lost in thought. They are at home. The aroma of stew fills the room as their mother fixes dinner. Their father has gone off to battle, and Amos is recounting the story of how he managed to hunt down their dinner. "I was so in awe of him," he mumbles to himself. Then, he remembers when he fell in a craggy and got his leg stuck. Amos was there to save me. He's always been the strong one, but I am the smart one. I can recite the ways of the clans word for word. Our clan traveled to Scotland and back to Ireland. We brought the games back with us. He is startled out of his reverie because Amos walks closer to his hiding spot. He quickly scurries further into the shadows.

Amos stops and turns back to Branwen. Holding out his hand, he said, "Come. It's cooler over here." She walks to him and says, "The games are in just a week, my love. If you insist on competing, you must promise me that you will win." Then, Amos does the unthinkable.

"Marry me, My Love."

The man in the shadows can't believe what he is hearing. It is against the code of honor for chieftain's children to propose marriage. When their sons and daughters come of age, the father's job is to decide whom their children will marry, forging alliances among the clans. The games are only the beginning. Branwen is the prize that all the young clansmen seek. Her father is the leader of all the chieftains. With her comes status, power, and wealth. Amos cannot bypass the games. He will bring shame to our family.



## CHAPTER 5

Showing Abbie and Makai last night's discoveries



**M**y alarm goes off. “Ugh.” I was up half the night mulling over everything that Grandpa said in that letter. I look at my phone. “Shoot.” I slept through my first two alarms. I fall out of bed and throw on my Tardis blue Gallifrey University t-shirt, jean shorts, tube socks, and Chucks. I grab a pop tart from the kitchen counter and sprint to get to the bus. It's about to leave without me! My bag swings back and forth on my back, kind of throwing me off balance. I barely make it in time. The bus driver has to re-open the doors for me. I trip up the stairs getting onto the bus.

“Good morning,” Betty, the bus driver, sings to me. She is always so chipper. I smile back and look for a seat. We don't have assigned seats. I wish we did. I search the faces of my peers and, like always, no one seems very friendly. I find a seat next to the least threatening third grader, and the bus takes off. She stares at my head and points. “My mom would've made me

brush my hair.” I give her a half-smile and let out a Sigh. I dig through my backpack. “Yes!” I find a hair tie and pull my messy hair up into a bun.

At school, I find my friends hanging out at my and Abbie's locker. This is the first year we get to use them. I wasn't sure that I would like them, but it turns out they are great.

“Hey, guys,” I say to Abbie and Makai. Abbie is wearing a sleeveless Navajo print maxi dress with a crocheted cardigan sweater that you can see through. The skirt stops mid-calf, showing off her sun-kissed legs and super cute strappy flat sandals. I squeeze past her, feeling underdressed. I pull out my first-hour book from our locker and try to sneak a whiff of my armpits stealthily. Suddenly, I'm very aware of the shower that I missed this morning and that I grabbed my shirt from the floor.

“I wish you had come with us yesterday,” Makai says. He is wearing pastel orange shorts, a white dressy v-neck t-shirt, and a tan blazer with leather patches on the elbows. He is wearing white sneakers without socks. I think he did something different with his hair, again. “Yeah, it was perfect,” Abbie sighs. I ask, “Uhm, is it picture day?” They both look at me funny. Makai shakes his head. Then he teases Abbie, “Ah, you only say that it was perfect because your crush was there.” We move away from the lockers as other kids try to get to their books.

“Wait, you went surfing with Jordan?” I ask. Abbie's face goes pink, “Makai!” He starts to laugh. She looks at me and says, “The waves were perfect, and I didn't surf with Jordan.” Makai interrupts, “but he was there.” She huffs and turns away from him. Makai says, “Come on, you made a point of telling me that he was many, many times.” Before Abbie loses it, I decide to change the subject, “Hey guys, you have to come to my house after school. I have to show you something.” The bell rings, and we head to class.



After school, Makai, Abbie, and I traipse up the steps to the attic. My mom won't be home for hours. Today is her long shift at work. She said I should go out with my friends today, but I brought them here instead. That should count, right. I fling my backpack to the floor on top of all the books I knocked over last night.

"Whoa, what happened in here," Makai says, looking around incredulously. "Makai, I present to you, our friend, the crazed researcher. It's like a mad scientist, only dorkier," Abbie laughs. "You know, the clumsy eccentric may not be far off. I accidentally knocked the shelf down last night, but that's not what I want to show you," I say as I put on grandpa's cardigan. I pull the necklace out of the pocket, "Here, look at this."

"Oh, that's so pretty," Abbie says and reaches for it. I hand it to her, "I know, right? It's a fire opal. I looked it up last night." She stares intently at the fire opal and runs her thumb over the surrounding gems. After studying it, she hands it to Makai. He walks over to the couch and flops into its cushions, and examines the necklace. "Diamond, jade, turquoise, amber, and opal. It's pretty Kalea." Abbie sits in grandpa's overstuffed chair. I get the book from the desk in the study area.

"Here, this is what I wanted to show you," I say as I sit next to Makai on the couch. His eyes light up, and he quickly places the necklace on the sofa table in front of us and snatches the book from me.

Abbie leans forward and picks up the necklace from the table, "This is so pretty, Kalea," she says. Makai is thumbing through the book. "Wow, this thing is old," he says while pushing his glasses up farther on his nose. He stops on a page towards the end of the book. "These dates! Look here; it's about the time of the Civil War."

Makai is a history buff, by the way. It's one of his favorite

subjects in school. In 6th grade, he did a diorama of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It was amazing. Last year, in seventh grade, he dressed up as the Egyptian King Khufu and talked about his pyramid. So, of course, he is geeking out about the book. He continues to flip through the pages, but I snatch the book from him and put it on the table in front of us. The book is opened to a page with the names of some cousins that I had never met before.

I shut the book and show them the front cover, “Look, guys, this is where it gets interesting. See, it has a hidden compartment that fits the necklace perfectly. I think it's a key or something.” Abbie scoots around and sits on my right-hand side. She hands me the necklace. My friends' arms are around my neck like we are about to take a selfie. We lean in closer and huddle around the book. I feel the pull.

Abbie asks, “do you feel that?”

Makai nods.

“So, if I put the necklace in the compartment, Uhm, it will....”

Makai says, “What? It will do WHAT, Kalea?”

I don't answer Makai. I just shove the gem into the book. Okay, so I'll stop there. I mean, you already know the next part. We are somehow in Chicago, and faceless thugs are beating us up in a funhouse. I still don't understand all of that. I mean, why? And right now, I'm having serious regrets about sharing this incredible new secret with my best friends. The lights flicker and strobe. Makai groans in pain. I'm trying to get my brain to stop panicking and to think. Think. The book!

I remember Amos' words from earlier, “Use the book, lass.” I feel for the necklace. I still have it. The lights are entirely on now and blinding. Whoever is after us is closing in.

I turn to look at them, squinting, but I can't get a clear look. Abbie is looking, too. The lights start going green again. I run to her and Makai. I slide into them on my knees. "Where's the book," I exclaim. My friends and I huddle together, I put the gem inside the book, and we soar home. Back in my attic, we sit in stunned silence.

Finally, Makai speaks, "Whoa, what just happened?" Abbie is in a daze. I try to come up with an answer. I'm not sure what I expected to happen today. O.K., that's not the truth. I expected it not to work. You know, I'd bring my friends up here and tell them a fantastic story. I'd show them the necklace and book. Then, they would say something like, "sounds like one doozy of a dream," which would be the end of it.

Makai would have said, "nice story, Kalea."

Abbie would have said, "You must have really hit your head hard last night," and we would have laughed.

All day today, I reasoned it away. I convinced myself that it really didn't happen. It is too incredible. I never imagined that it would work again and that we would get sucked into a tornado, get absorbed into a multitude of colors, end up somewhere mysterious, and get beat up by some faceless thugs!

But what I said to them was, "Uhm, yeah, I don't know."

Abbie suddenly snaps out of it, "You don't know! You don't know! I just saw myself from when I was a five-year-old kid. Holy cow, Kalea! We traveled back in time. We went...uh, I mean...We jumped back into... oh, gosh, I don't understand. How the heck did we do that?" I don't say anything. I don't know the answer. I'm thinking about my grandpa and this crazy necklace.

I see that Makai is bent over, holding his ribs. He moans, "Somebody seriously kicked me." He lifts his shirt. The skin

above his ribs is turning black and blue. "I'm so sorry. This is my fault. I'll be right back." I jump up and head downstairs, "Let me get you something to put on that."

I go to the kitchen and open the freezer. I can hear them talking. They are right to blame me. I am the one who got them into this whole mess in the first place. I find a bag of frozen peas. "This will work," I say out loud. Then, someone pounds on the door right next to me in the kitchen.



## CHAPTER 6

Dad's back, and he's in one of his moods



I nearly wet myself! Slowly, I close the freezer door. I peer through the curtains on the door and see that it's my dad. He is unshaven and wild-eyed. He has on one of his trademark bowling shirts, torn-up blue jeans, and cowboy boots. He sees me and wiggles his fingers at me. "Great, this day just keeps getting better," I mumbled sarcastically.

My dad left mom and me when I was just a baby. He decided that being a husband and father wasn't what he wanted from life. Anyway, that's the reason we moved in with my grandparents. Dad only comes around when he wants something, usually money. Immediately my stomach starts to hurt. Honestly, I don't want to deal with him today, but he saw me look through the window. So, I let out a heavy sigh and opened the door.

“What's up?” He takes a step forward and snarls, “How about, hi, dad?” Okay, not really but, it sounds like a snarl to me. I suppress an eye roll and try to keep a neutral expression on my face, then I force a smile and say, “Hi, dad.” He grunts, “That's better. Your mother around? I need to ask her something.” He stares at me with his jaw clenched tensely.

I stare back and search for our shared likeness. I guess we have the same nose, maybe. He does have Hollywood good looks. I can see why mom was attracted to him. He clears his throat, leans on the doorjamb, and frowns at me. I guess that I'm taking too long to answer. Crud, he is in one of those looking for a fight moods. I wonder what new money-making scheme he's gotten himself into. I bet he's out of money, again. I don't need the situation to escalate. My friends are waiting for me. So, I fib a little.

“She's upstairs with my friends. Makai wiped out today on a gnarly wave, and she is helping him.” The peas crinkle in my hand as I hold them up, “I need to get these to him. Do you need money or something?” Before he can act offended, I twist around and grab the change jar that we keep on the counter and shove it at him. “Here.” He is taken off guard and stumbles backward just enough for me to shut and lock the door.

“Kalea Siobhan Jameson,” he bellows out my full Hawaiian and Irish name and starts pounding on the door. As I run upstairs, I cringe as I hear my Irish middle name being yelled out for everyone in the neighborhood to hear. It sounds like she-von, but it's spelled way differently. I never thought I'd learn to spell it. The cell phone in my pocket goes off. Once I get to the top of the stairs, I check it.

It's dad. He texted me, “Have your mother call me.” This time I do roll my eyes. I put my phone back in my pocket and went over to Makai. He is sitting in an overstuffed chair.

“Here, this should help.” He takes the frozen peas from me and puts them on his side. I sit down next to Abbie on the couch. Abbie asks, “Who was at the door?” I answer, “Just my dad.” Her eyes widen, and she says, “Ugh, what did he want this time?” Breezily I say, “Oh, you know, the usual.” I don’t feel like talking about him today.

Makai has the book in his free hand. He says, “I think we may have figured something out while you were gone.” I raise an eyebrow, “Really, because that would be awesome!” He shifts uncomfortably. His side must really be hurting. He looks at Abbie and then at me. “Well, not really, but look.” I squint at what he is pointing at. He opens the flap and shows me that strange language embossed on the old leather. “Oh, so you guys know what it means,” I say and sit up excitedly. “That was fast, Makai. Even for you.”

Abbie clears her throat and says, “Well, we didn’t figure it out exactly, but that’s where we should start. Don’t you think? What the does *teaghlaigh de* mean, anyway?” She says that strange word like she has something stuck in her throat. I giggle.

“Whatever. You try to pronounce it. At least it might lead us in the right direction.” I shrug, “Sure, and we could figure out what that bird means, too.” My phone buzzes again. I look at it. Dad again. I check the time and gasp. “How long do you think we were gone,” I ask. “Hours,” Makai answers, “we went through the whole museum and played at that amusement park place.”

I hold up my phone and show them the time. “It’s only been an hour and a half since school let out.” Abbie exclaims, “No way! Your phone must be wrong.” They both take their phones out and check the time.

“It’s like we never left. That means we came back at the

same time we left,” Makai says, “This day just keeps getting weirder.” After a quick google search, we discovered that the words on the book mean “family of” in ancient Gaelic, which makes sense. The whole book is my family tree.

Abbie says gloomily, “I guess I was wrong. That doesn't tell us anything.” I now know what those quaking letters mean. When I put the fire opal into the secret slot, the words *'teaghlaigh de'* start pounding, pull away from the book, and shoot past me. Outloud, I say, “It doesn't seem like nothing to me.” We sit quietly, absorbed in our thoughts. I think about Abbie on the pier watching her younger self. Then, I started thinking about the first time I used the book.

“You know guys; we also know that we went back in time to when Abbie was a little kid. I think that's probably why Juan didn't recognize me when I went by myself. I must have gone back in time, too!” Makai pushes his glasses up and announces, “I agree! See Abbie; it is something. We just have to figure out why and how the two are connected.”

Then he turns towards Abbie, “You're just tired. Don't you have theater practice before school tomorrow?” She looks at him in mock offense, squints her eyes, wrinkles her nose, and promptly sticks her tongue out at him. We decide to call it a night. We all have morning meetings at school. I have track, Abbie has play practice, and Makai has chess club.





## CHAPTER 7

What a really, really long day



The coach is brutal this morning. We have a meet coming up at the end of the week. She makes us work on endurance and speed. We run sprints and flying bears for most of the morning. A flying bear is when we sprint for 100 meters and then jog for fifty and then do it all over again. Practice is just about over, and we are taking a much-needed water break. My relay team and I are talking about track stuff when the hair on the back of my neck and my arms stand straight up out of nowhere. Someone is watching me. It is such an eerie feeling that I back up and look around. Then, I look at my three other teammates standing beside me, but they are all oblivious except for Grace. She seems as creeped out like me. We lock eyes.

“Do you feel that?” she asks.

I motion for her to follow me. "I think someone is watching us," I whisper. My eyes dart from one end of the track to the other, searching for the culprit. Our coach calls for everyone to gather up, so she can give us some last-minute tips before school starts. Our teammates hustle over. As they do, she shouts out, "Remember caffeine and carbonated drinks are off-limits, and if I catch any of you drinking them again, the whole team will be running a 5k or more."

The shot-put team groans loudly. It must have been one of them. They are protesting too much. Grace and I stay where we are, however. I feel compelled to tell her about the book and brooch. For whatever reason, I can't help myself. The story just comes spilling out. I don't stop to take a breath because she's going to think I'm a nut case, I just know it, and if I stop, I might not start again. Then again, I don't think I could stop talking if I wanted to. "...and we must have got back around the same time that we left."

I stand there breathless. Amazingly, though, she's not phased at all. Her eyes are kind and sincere. I clear my throat, "Uhm." I know my story is absurd. It's like I say Santa Claus is real, and she just rolls with it. "Why don't you come over this weekend and see for yourself." She nods quickly. "You know, Kalea. We have this thing in our..." Just then, the coach angrily tweets her whistle, interrupting whatever Grace is going to say.

Coach Carter's face is turning an intense shade of red. My gaze is drawn from the coach to the team because they are hollering at us to hurry up and blaming us for extra laps. "Oh shoot, I guess we should go." We jog off toward the angry mob, but something catches my eye. I slow down and look at the bleachers. I think I see something there. That creepy feeling slithers its way down my spine. I assure myself that it's nothing, but I speed up just in case.

The first half of my day is 'meh.' I don't see Makai or Abbie at all, not even at lunch, because they both have a debate thing in Mr. Ezekiel's classroom. They get a pizza party, and I am stuck here in the lunchroom with a dry peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a bruised banana. I am also all by myself. The makeup queens are at the other end of the table, but I have this side all to myself, so I put my feet up on the chair across from me until the lunch monitor, Mrs. Wen, smacks the back of the chair and glares at me.

I smile sheepishly at her, but inside my head, I roll my eyes. I try to think of a sarcastic reply. I can't think of anything. I take the last bite of my sandwich. I chew and think—still nothing. Oh well, mom says that it's not becoming to be a snot to people, anyway. She's probably right because then I would be just like the makeup queens and their jerky boyfriends. I look over at them. They are the prettiest and most popular kids in school.

Their ringleader glances at me and then, in a stage whisper, says, "OMG! Ew, that girl is looking at us." The whole side of the table takes their cue and starts snickering, and looks over to glower at me. Thankfully, the bell rings, and we are dismissed. I throw away my trash and melt into the crowd of my peers, leaving them and their snide remarks behind.

Last night, I went to bed before mom got home. I know I'll see her tonight at dinner, but I want to talk to her. I should warn her that dad is in one of "those" moods again and tell her about my crummy day. I sneak a text to her while I'm at my locker. Right away, my phone lights up. I quickly glance at it while pretending to look for something in my bag. I don't want to get caught. "Talk later. Love, mom." I drop it further into my backpack and slam my locker shut. I cannot wait to see her—what a crap day. I head to history class. Mrs. Rosenthal meets us at the door. There is a pop quiz.

“Nothing should be on your desks, read the board and follow the instructions.” I get a sheet of paper out and a pencil. Mrs. Rosenthal is stuck on repeat. Her voice fades to the background and is overtaken by the chorus of students rustling papers, slamming pencils on their desks, and *thwunking* their giant planners onto the floor.

The bell rings. Mrs. Rosenthal comes inside the room and starts to say something different, but I think Abbie, Makai, and some other kid, Liam, come rushing in. This causes her to pause. Abbie hands her a note from the debate teacher. I make *googley* eyes at her and Makai as they go to their chairs. Abbie playfully bumps into my shoulder, and Makai shoots me a goofy grin.

The quiz is brutal. I have no idea what these answers could be, and then the school secretary calls my name over the intercom.

“Kalea Jameson, to the office, please.”

I look at my teacher, and she nods. I collected my things and handed her my half-finished quiz. As I'm leaving the room, my brain runs wild, and my palms start sweating. I exit my classroom into a short hallway that leads to the big open hall filled with our lockers. I walk through the usually cramped spaces on autopilot.

I'm lost in thought. I take a right turn. Why'd I get called to the office? I turn left out of the eighth-grade hall. Am I busted for using my phone during school, but how'd they find out? I pass the cafeteria. The sixth graders are now in there eating lunch. I walk past and then turn right. Maybe it's mom. Is she okay? I wipe my palms on my pants and notice that my heart is racing. I stop in front of the office. I swallow hard and walk through the doorway. My dad is there.

“Dad, what?” but he cuts me off.

“Sign out, sweetheart. We need to go.”

I look at the secretary questioningly.

“We cleared it with your mom. Go ahead.”

I sign the clipboard.

“I need to get my stuff out of my locker.”

Dad nods.

In the truck, dad clears his throat and starts to say something but doesn't finish. He takes one hand off the wheel and rubs his face. He still hasn't shaved, so there is more pronounced stubble on his jaw. He is acting weirder than normal. He sighs heavily. His hand moves to his right temple, and his eye twitches. He tries to rub away the tension written on his face. I'm worried. He shifts uneasily in his seat and sighs heavily for the second time.

He slowly brakes at the stoplight, and we sit in awkward silence. The light changes, and the truck begins to move. I look out the window at the passing buildings, one after another zoom past as we speed by. I look at dad, and he is hyper-focused on the road. He is making me uncomfortable and worried. Suddenly, I break the silence by loudly blurting out, “Is mom o.k.? Is she dead?”

Dad jumps. He is on edge. “What? No! Your mother is fine, sweetheart. I'm sorry. Is that what you think? I didn't mean to scare you. I'm trying to think of how to tell you something.” He takes a hand off the wheel and pats my knee. He turns on the blinker and uses both hands to make a left turn. At least he sounds more like himself now.

“Oh, are you going on another treasure hunt?” I am relieved that mom is okay, and dad is just being dad. I look over at him. He is staring at me oddly. “I love you. You know that, right.”

Okay, I take it back. He really is acting strange. I nod at him. We drive in silence. I'm not sure where we are going. Then, he suddenly stops the car. The seatbelt prevents me from slamming my head on the dashboard.

“Ouch, Dad! What the heck?”

His eyes are fixed on something in the distance. Then he slowly turns his head towards me and looks me straight in the eyes. His expression is strained, and his eyes blank.

“I know that you met the weaver.”

I shift in my chair and start fidgeting with my cell phone. I look out my window and back to him. His jaw is locked, and he is talking through his teeth.

“You have it, and he wants it.”

He seems to be struggling with his words. I scoot as far over towards the door as I can muster. He has sweat on his upper lip and brow, and there is a faraway look in his eyes. He leans in my direction and whispers hoarsely.

“He is coming.”

I reach for the door handle, but my sweaty hand slips off the cold metal. The handle didn't budge. It's locked. Frightened, I glance at dad while the truck starts pulling forward. I am reaching for the lock but just like that, his demeanor changes. I'm talking Jekyll and Hyde here!

“Yes, I am going on another treasure hunt.”

He looks around a bit confusedly. He makes a U-turn and drives us to the beach. He chatters on and on about his upcoming trip. We pull up to Beachy Keen Shaved Ice. Dad jumps out of the car. "I want to try the creamy mango this time."

We sit at a picnic table. Dad is eating his snow cone. I haven't touched mine. I can barely focus while he talks about how his old and newest escapades are connected. Moments ago, he was a complete lunatic in the truck, and now he's acting like nothing even happened. It's almost like he can't remember it. I shiver and look at the ocean. I can't shake the feeling that someone is watching us.

I want to walk home, but dad starts acting paranoid as soon as I suggest it, so I let him take me home instead. As we drive, dad talks on and on about his plans. I sort of tune out until he pauses. The silence causes me to look up to see what's the problem. Dad smiles at me imploringly. "I want you to come with me, Kalea."

We pull into my driveway. "Dad and daughter together searching for history's greatest mysteries. How about it, bug?" My mouth drops open. I quickly shut it. He has never asked me to go with him on a treasure hunt before. Dad parks the truck and turns to look at me. I'm intrigued.

I've always thought it would be fun to research the truth, make stunning discoveries, and then verify it by going on a big adventure like those documentaries that I'm addicted to. Oddly enough, I never considered going with him. I realize that I'm just staring at him. "I'll have to think about it."

I hop out of the truck and slam the heavy door shut. When I'm at the house, I turn and wave at him. I dig my key out of my backpack and go through the side kitchen door. We rarely use the front door.

Once inside, I push aside the curtain on the door's window and look out at the driveway. He doesn't drive away. He is tensely looking from side to side like he's expecting someone to jump out of the bushes or something. He takes a deep breath and cranks down the driver's side window. He hangs one arm out of the window and puts his feet up on the passenger's side dashboard. I guess he's staying. I shrug. I fling my backpack onto a kitchen chair and pull my phone out of my pocket.

I have a message from mom that reads, "Heads up! Dad is coming to pick you up from school. See you at dinner." I smile and say out loud, "Thanks, mom." I put the phone on the table and inhaled deeply. What is the deal with dad, anyway? He's acting even stranger than usual. Seriously, that whole act earlier in the truck was spooky. I walk to the door and look again. Yep, he is still camped out there.

I get a hunk of cheese out of the fridge for a snack. I take a bite and open the cupboard and search for something else to eat. I pull out one of those small single-serving bags of chips. Score, Cool Ranch! My favorite. I sit down at the kitchen table and look at the time on my phone. School is finished. I stretch my legs out onto the chair across from me. No worries that a teacher will make me move them. There is a stack of unopened bills and magazines in the middle of the table. I pull one of the catalogs over to me and thumb through it. I finish my cheese, open the bag of chips, and call Abbie.

"Hey Kalea, where did you go today?" She doesn't wait for me to answer her. "Because it was not fair! That quiz was so hard. I got a 60%. Can you believe it? That's just awful." Through a mouthful of chips, I say, "I probably didn't do much better than you did. You know, I didn't actually finish the quiz." I pull out another chip and start munching. "Mrs. Rosenthal will probably let you finish it tomorrow," she says. I fish out another chip, loudly crinkling the bag. "What is that terrible noise?"



I ignore her question. "Yeah, you are probably, right." Abbie forgets about my noisy potato chip bag and says, "Oh, guess who I talked to today?" She pauses for like a second and answers herself. "Jordan! He said that he liked my blouse and then, I...." Interrupting her, I say, "Hey, are you still coming over?"

Her response is to yell, "Stop it!" Then there is complete silence on her end. "Uhm, Abbie?" I pull the phone away from my ear and look at the screen. We are still connected. I put the phone back to my ear. "Hello." The silence is broken by a very loud, "Yes, it is! No, let go. She called me!" Then I hear a muffled, "Hi Kalea. Ouch, you don't have to pinch me!" I laugh. "Tell Makai hello." She answers my question, "Hey, yeah, see you in a few." She hangs up, and I put the phone down on the table.

I dog-ear the pages of the magazine that have my favorite outfits on them and then grab another catalog from the stack. I realize that I'm thirsty, though, so I stand up and get a bottle of juice out of the fridge. Then, curiosity gets the best of me, and I peer out the window. Yep, dad's still there. A few minutes later, there's a knock at the door. It's my friends. I let them in.

"Why's your dad sitting in the driveway?" As he goes straight to the fridge, Makai asks, grabbing a soda for himself and a juice for Abbie. Abbie opens the cupboard and asks, "Don't you have chips?" I shake my head. "Sorry, I ate the last bag." She rummages around and finds an unopened bag of Chex Mix. "Hey, where'd you find that?"

Abbie's eyes light up with incredulity, and she giggles, "I can't believe you still don't know where your mom hides the good stuff!" We head up to the attic with our snacks. Makai flops on the couch. Abbie sits in the big comfy chair. I get grandpa's sweater, all the while giving an account of my afternoon with dad. I put the sweater on and pull the necklace out of the pocket. I walk over to the couch and swat at Makai's

feet. He is taking up the entire sofa. I sit down quickly before he puts them back.

“Your dad did what?” I cover my face with my hands and sigh heavily. “Dad said he knows that I have this.” I quickly grab the brooch necklace thing from my lap and hold it up. “...and he wants it.” I put it on. Makai repeats himself softly, “He did what?” Abby simply says, “But, how?”

I look at the necklace hanging from my neck. It really is beautiful, and without looking up, I say, “and he knows that I met the Weaver, too. Whatever that means.” Abbie gets up and goes to the window that overlooks the driveway. “Your dad is still here.” She turns to me and says, “let me get this straight; your dad knows that you have that,” she points at the necklace, “and he wants it. Is that why he is holding you hostage in your own house?” I shake my head, “No, I don't think that he meant it that way.”

I get up off the couch and look out the window at dad and the neighborhood. I say, “He seems to be watching for someone, not holding me hostage.” I sit down in the chair that Abbie had been sitting in. She is on the couch now, anyway. I watch as she struggles to get the bag of Chex Mix from Makai. He takes another giant handful before reluctantly handing her the bag. She looks into the bag and sighs heavily. I curl my feet under me and snuggle down into the big chair.

“After dad said everything, he was confused and didn't seem to remember even saying it at all.” I ponder what I said for a moment, then let out a growl. “Oh, I don't know, maybe it was an act, and he does want it!” I look back at my friends. “But, seriously, I think he means that the Weaver knows and wants it.” Makai asks, “Who is this Weaver, anyway, some chick who sews or something?” I answer, “No, dad definitely said he. He knows, and he wants it.”

Makai shrugs his shoulders, “Okay, then maybe it's a guy

that sews or knits.” I stand up and begin pacing, “Guys, it must be Amos or Donovan.” I stop at grandpa’s desk. “Oh.” Wide-eyed, Abbie looks at me and then the book. “Remember, you said that when you jumped into the book the first time that the grumpy guy told you that the other guy was spinning a web of lies.”

I nod my head and lean over the book. The closer I get to the book, the more I can feel its pull. I watch the necklace hanging from my neck swing gently back and forth. I visualize Amos and then Donovan. Back and forth. Amos and Donovan. I absent-mindedly thumb through the book. I was rustling the pages. *Ftlbump. Ftlbump.* Back and forth. Amos and Donovan. I open the book and look up.

I whisper, “It’s Donavon.” Makai pulls the book away, breaking the trance. He shuts it with a thud. At first, I think he is angry, and I start to get angry, too. I hear him say, “the first page.” He is opening the front cover. “He’s not here,” Makai continues to flip the pages, searching.

I watch him. A slow rage inches its way through me. Things go out of focus. I feel the pull of the book. The necklace is swinging from my neck. I reach up and hold it. Everything goes bright white. I’m no longer in the room. “Hey,” Abbie is shaking me, Kalea, “hey. Earth to Kalea! Sit down, now, before you pass out or do something stupid.”

Things come into sharp focus. I feel like someone woke me during REM. “Ugh.” I sit down and frown at Abbie. “I wasn’t going to do anything.” But Makai vehemently disagrees, “You were acting funny and mumbling. Sit on your hands.” I try to get up. “No.” Abbie holds me down, “do it, please. Just until you feel better.”

I start to protest, but I finally look up and lock eyes with Abbie and then Makai. They look terrified, which totally freaks me out, so I quickly stick my hands under my behind and sit

really still. "One second, you were fine, and then you go all zombie-like on us," Makai says. "Do you know a foreign language? You were saying something over and over."

I shudder. I feel icky and want to go to sleep. I shake my head. "No, just what we learned the other day." I sit there for a second, then reach for my necklace. Abbie's eyes go wide, and she shakes her head. "Don't worry." I take it off. "Will you do me a favor?"

Makai is already back to searching through the book for Donavon. I put the necklace in Abbie's hand. "Take this necklace and keep it safe." She wraps a hand around it and holds it in the air. She stares at it intently. "But it was your grandpa's. It's a family heirloom. Kalea, I don't know? Do you really think it's what made you do all that a minute ago?" As she speaks, she waves her hands over me in circles. She brings the necklace closer to her face and examines it turning it round and round. She takes a deep breath and finally puts it on.

I stand up and hug her. "Thank you. I think that will help me." She smiles a 'you're welcome' back at me. Makai slaps his hand down on the desk, startling us both. "I found him!" "Look!" We rush to look over Makai's shoulder. "Donovan and Amos are brothers. They were born in Ireland during the 12th century." I leaned in closer and read that they were born in the 1100s. "They were born in the middle ages? How? I met them at the beach. I'm pretty sure medieval armored shave ice trucks didn't exist!"

My friends groan at me in unison. "Hey, knights have to get hot under all that chain mail! Where do they go after a long night of sword fighting?" They shrug at me. "To an all knight shaved ice truck!" I barely get to the punch line without laughing. "Get it?... Huh, huh?" I look from one to the other. They both roll their eyes at me. "Oh, come on, you guys! Can you two think of a better one?" Makai clears his throat. "Okay, I got it. No, wait, that won't work." Give me a second. Abbie

giggles, "Knights and armored ice cream trucks are a funny image." We both giggle. "Ah, got it!" Makai cracks his knuckles and says, "Where do knights go to learn how to make shaved ice?" He pauses for effect. "Knight school!" Abbie lets out a snort and laughs. I look at her. "It wasn't that funny." Makai shouts in mock offense, "Hey!"

Abbie shakes her head and holds up her hand but keeps laughing. She takes a deep breath and holds it. She lets it out by making a rude noise with her lips and chortles. She tries it again. She takes another deep breath and says, "What's a knight's favorite fish? A swordfish!" I barely understand her because she is giggling so hard.

Makai says, "Really? That wasn't any better than my joke." Her laughter is giving me the giggles. I'm now laughing so hard that tears are streaming down my face. We settled down a bit. Then I say, "We are so bad at telling jokes!" This makes us start laughing again.

Finally, Makai says, "Not to put a damper on our moment here, but I think we should go to the library." This isn't a bad idea. I nod in agreement. Makai grabs the book and shoves it in his duffle bag. Abbie picks up her backpack and touches her neckline to confirm that she still has the necklace under her shirt. I get a notebook and some pencils, shove them in my bag, and then head out the door. I take the time to tell my dad, who is still parked in my driveway, that we are going to the library.

He looks at me warily, but says "Okay, do you want a ride?" Smiling, I say, "I have my friends. We'll be fine." We walk to the library. Makai glances behind him. I look, too. Dad is slowly following behind us in his beat-up old truck. Abbie says, "We should have just taken him up on the ride."

I glance at him again. "Dad, really?" He wiggles his fingers at me in a cutesy little wave. Our little parade makes it to the

library. Dad parks the truck in the lot. I guess he will do the same thing here that he was doing back at the house.

My friends and I walked inside the building and set up camp at one of the back-study tables. I pull my notebook out of my bag, and grandpa's letter falls out. With all the other stuff going on in my life, I had forgotten about it. I pull it out of the envelope and start reading. The part of the letter where grandpa wrote, "You are a child of both the Weaver and the Sycamore," jumps out at me.

I gently nudge Makai in the ribs, "look at this," I point at the words, and his gaze follows. Abbie stands up and leans over the table to see. I turn the letter her way so that she can see it better. She gasps and whispers, "You're his kid!" Makai takes the letter out of my hand and says, "I think it means that she descends from those two brothers." I let that soak in. "I'm going to find some books on the history of Ireland and see if they have a Gaelic language book."

They nod at me. Makai says, "I'll go with you until we get to the public computers. I'm going to do a quick search online of the sycamore and weaver." I find my books and go back to the table with Abbie. After a while, Makai returns from the computers. He has a notebook full of notes. "I need to get some cash out of my backpack. I printed some fascinating articles." He pushes his glasses up. He digs around in his bag and then stops. "Do you feel like you are being watched?"

Abbie nods and looks around. I point at my dad in a chair near the front of the building. "Yes, I feel it too, but it could just be that my dad is watching us." Makai shakes his head. "No, it's different. It's a creepy feeling. The hair on my arms keeps standing on end, but it's not cold in here or anything."

I look around, then peer through the stacks of books, and I see it again. It's a shadowy figure like the one I saw this

morning under the bleachers. I turn to my friends to get their attention, but nobody is there when we all turn to look. Abbie says, "This is icky. I am so creeped out. I'm going home, right now." She hastily collects her things.

I start to pack up, too. "I'm with you Abbie," I remember that it's about time for mom to be home, and I really want to talk to her. Makai runs off to print his materials. "Wait for me. I'll be right back." He takes forever. Abbie is getting antsy. I see the shadow lights again but don't say anything to Abbie. She is already a nervous wreck. She looks at me. "You are freaking me out. I can feel the tenseness radiating from you."

I search for my dad. He's moved from his camp at the entrance. Makai hustles up to us with a massive stack of papers. He stuffs them in his bag. Abbie jumps up from her chair. "Let's go." My dad appears out of nowhere and follows us out. Abbie and Makai walk home, and I let dad drive me home.



# CHAPTER 8

I love dinners with Mom



It's so good to talk to mom. There is just something about being with her that makes me feel like everything will be all right. I tell her all about dad and how strange he is being, which leads me to ask her, "What is his deal anyway? Like, I know he always thinks that he is about to make the next big discovery and all. I mean, that's why he left us when I was a baby. He loved his treasure hunting more than us, but what is he after?"

Mom takes another bite of her chicken stir fry and slowly chews. So, I keep going, "He picked me up early from school today just to say that he knows that I have grandpa's necklace." She picks up her glass from the table and slowly takes a drink. Seriously, what is the deal with my parents, "Mom!" She just sits there like I haven't even been talking. I stare at her and wait for a minute. I make a goofy face at her. Still no response.



“Ugh,” I exhale and jab at my food, quickly shoving it in my face. Then she gently places her glass back on the table. She finally says, “Honey, don't scarf your food. It'll give you a stomach ache.”

I am staring at my plate, but when she says that, I whip my head up to look at her, my cheeks puffy with stir fry. She bursts out laughing, and I join in. She makes the same goofy face back at me that I would have sworn that she didn't see before and says, “You know he and grandpa were both obsessed with that thing.”

I shrug and swallow another mouthful of food. I nearly choke on it. She raises an eyebrow at me as if to say, told you so. I put my fork down, making an effort to slow down. “It's not surprising that your father wants to talk about it. That's when he went off the deep end, you know.” I respond by hiccuping. I did know. I had heard this story before. Side note, I should not have scarfed my food. She says, “He just became so hyper-focused on researching that necklace. He took trips all over the globe searching for something. He never told me what it was that he is looking for.”

I reach for my glass while hiccuping and take a big gulp of water. Mom continues, “He would only say that it is so spectacular it will change our lives forever. So, to answer your question, I have no idea what he is after.” I know where the story is going, so I say through my hiccups, “Then, one day he just stopped coming home. you got an email from him that said he was in Korea hunting, but it was nearly eight years before he showed up again. Grandpa met him at the front door and told him to leave. I remember hiding behind him when he answered the door.”

Mom smiles at me and says, “and by then, you were no longer a baby, and your father was a different man.” She looks so sad now. I know it was a tough time, and I say, “Thank goodness for grandpa and tutu-lady.”

She nods and keeps talking about the necklace, "It's an old family heirloom that was passed down through the generations, and your grandpa would swear that it is a magical talisman. He would drive your tutu-lady, Aunt Lydia, and me nuts about it. Tutu-lady was sure that he had lost his ever-loving mind. Well, Kalea-Bug, you know how eccentric grandpa was." She smiles, obviously thinking about some silly thing that he used to do.

I defend him, "He was cool!"

Her smile grows wider. "You always were the apple of his eye, honey." Then she sighs heavily, stands up, and starts collecting her dishes, "I am worn out. It was so crazy at the hospital today!"

I help her with the dishes and listen to her talk about her day. She hands me a plate to dry that I take in my towel-wrapped hands. I kind of smear the water around on the wet plate because the towel is damp now. I drop the towel on the counter and consider getting a fresh one, but I don't. I put the half-dried dish inside the cupboard. I hear the slurp of the dishwater being drained out of the sink.

"Well, that does it. Time to relax."

Before I turn around, mom snaps my behind with the wet towel. It makes a loud crack. "Yow! Mom." She laughs at me. "That hurt," I say as I rub the sore spot. She shrugs. "You'll be O.K." She throws me a dry towel. "Here. Dry that plate again." I do, and as I turn to put it back, I feel a cold breeze. Ack! I quickly turn back around and try to get my towel in a tight roll. It doesn't really work.

Mom pops me again and giggles. "Hey, my towel is dry! No fair." I swung mine at her, but it was a dud. "Ugh." I run behind the table.

Mom eyes me. Her towel is wound. She is gingerly making

her way towards me. I duck under the table and run to the sink. I turn on the faucet wetting my towel. Crack! I jump. "That's three. I win," Mom cheers.

I whip around and get one good one in. Snap. "Hey, the game's over, Missy!" Now it is my turn to laugh. We go into the living room and watch our evening shows on t.v. "I love you, mom." She wraps me in a hug. "I love you too, Bug." I fall asleep on the couch.

My arm is numb and tingling from sleeping on it funny. I sit up. Mom has covered me up with my favorite blanket. I search for my phone. It is the wee hours of the morning. I pull the couch cushions off. I stop and turn around and look at the living room windows. There it is again, that creepy feeling that I am being watched.

Through the sheer curtains, I see that shadowy figure. I shiver and rush to my bedroom. I quickly close the door. I don't need my phone that badly. I jump into bed and stay still, barely breathing. I lay there listening to nothing but hearing everything. I wish grandpa hadn't given me that stupid necklace. I must have finally fallen asleep. The next thing I hear is, "Hey, you're late!"

Mom pulls the covers off of me, "The alarm on your phone has been going off for about a half-hour. I finally found it. It was shoved in the cushions of the chair." I roll over to a seated position and yawn. Mom has already left the room. My phone is on my bedside table. I pick it up and look at the time. Oh my word, I am so going to have to run extra laps!

I throw on some clothes, yoga pants, a school t-shirt, and my running shoes. I shove clean socks and underwear and an outfit into my backpack. I'm going to wear jeans, a t-shirt, and my chucks at school today. The shirt I chose is a sporty black t-shirt with white stripes on the arms. Printed on the front is a retro lady hugging a giant slice of pizza. Under the image,

there is a pink banner that says true love. I rush out of the room and find mom in the kitchen.

I grab a Pop-tart out of the cupboard. Mom is sitting at the table drinking her morning coffee. I lean over the chair and hug her. In return, she hugs her coffee mug, but she does sit it down, yawn at me, and then smiles. I open my eyes wide and give her my best puppy dog face. "Please." She sighs and stands up.

I hoist my bag onto my shoulder. She snatches the keys off of the counter, and we rush out of the house. She speeds all the way there. I eat my breakfast in the car. She pulls up to the track. I jump out. "Thank you," I holler at her while sprinting to the track. I make it in time, after all. I speed walk up to the goalposts and stand next to Grace. That guy from my history class is with her. That's why he looks familiar. I ask, "Are you ready for tomorrow?"

Grace answers me with her own question, "You know Liam, right?" I nod and smile in Liam's direction. The coach is talking about our meet tomorrow morning. Oh, that's right! We have that tomorrow. Well, I knew we did, but it just wasn't connecting in my brain that tomorrow is Saturday. I turn to Grace, "Are you still coming over to my house after the meet?"

She nods and says, "I wanna bring Liam, too." Huh? Uhm, why did she tell Liam? I get ready to answer her, but the coach has gotten quiet. I flash into the present and realize that she is staring at us. "You three. Laps. Go!" Groaning, I take off. I want to go back to bed.



## CHAPTER 9

Weirdo, weirdo, weirdo



Slowing my pace, hoping Grace would catch up with me. Liam zooms pass. Grace is now matching me step for step. “I hope you're not upset. He felt it, too,” she says. It takes a minute for this to sink in. She explains, “That shadowy creepy feeling that someone is watching.” This causes me to think about last night when I woke up in the living room. I shiver and say, “He's welcome to come over.” Grace starts saying something about her family but stops kind of awkwardly and says, “How'd you do on that history quiz?”

Liam laps us, then falls into step beside Grace. We run like this until Coach Carter tells us to stop. Before we part ways to work on drills, I say to Liam, “Grace says you would like to come over on Saturday.” He nods. “Yeah, if that's okay with you.” I nod. “Yeah, it's fine.”

His face lights up, and then he frowns. “Grace says that we are going to talk about that murky shadow that was under the bleachers yesterday. Whatever it was made, the hair on my arms stands straight up. My buddies thought I was joking. They didn't see a thing. They thought I was nuts and teased me the rest of the day.”

Coach Carter has the team do some light jogging and stretches, and that was it for practice, but before we get to leave, she gives us the schedule of tomorrow's events and makes a huge deal about us being prompt for the bus in the morning.

“We will leave without you, and you will miss the meet. Be responsible. Take care of the little things, and the big things will take care of themselves.” She looks at her watch, “I'll make this short. I want you to take a second and think about what this means.” She pauses and paces back and forth, looking at us. Searching our faces, “What are the little things?” We are all suddenly very interested in the grass at our feet. No one wants her to call on them. “What are the big things?”

She is standing in front of me now and stares at me for an uncomfortable amount of time, and then says, “And, how do the big things take care of themselves?” She stops talking and walks over to the football goal post. She leans against it and says, “Focus on the little things. You are responsible for you, and you control how you react in any given situation. As an athlete, you have control over your hustle, speed, drive, and effort. That's it. See you in the morning!” We walk to the locker rooms to get ready for the first hour.

In the eighth-grade hall, my locker is decorated with black, silver, and royal blue ribbons. There is a hot pink paper sneaker taped to the middle of the door. My last name Jameson is written out on it in bubble letters. I open my locker and see that the pep coach put notes inside our lockers again. This one has three Starburst candies taped in a row above a big *kapow*

thought bubble, and it says, "For a burst of Energy at the Pep Assembly." I turn it over and see that the boys and girls track teams will be dismissed at the end of the first hour to go to the gym for the pep rally.

As I'm digging for my first-hour math book, I hear, "Hey, chica!" Before I can turn around, Abbie is tackling me into a great big bear hug. "So, Makai said that I was a grouch last night. I don't think I was, but just in case, I wanted to apologize for being grumpy." I laugh. "You were so not a grouch." She throws her arms in the air, "That's what I said!"

She is wearing ripped-up straight-legged jeans. She rolled up the legs of the pants to show off her cute light brown ankle boots. She is wearing a white v-neck t-shirt. Printed on the front is a southwestern Thunderbird. The bird is made of colorful blocks like paint chip samples. She is wearing a stylish camel-colored leather jacket over the t-shirt that matches her boots. I pull my book out from the bottom of the pile and step aside so that Abbie can get her stuff out of our locker.

"We've just had a weird couple of days." She slams the locker door shut and says, "You're telling me!" The first bell rings. "Oh, gotta get to the choir! Remember, Jordan is in my first hour." Of course, I know that. She won't let me forget it. Chuckling at her, I shake my head, and I turn to leave; but I hear Makai. "Kalea, wait up!"

Everyone is milling around in the hall, either chatting with their friends or trying to get to class, so he has to bob and weave his way over to me. His dark green leather oxfords sidestep one way and then the other. I reached into my pocket for my phone out of habit, but the rules are that you must leave them in your locker during school hours. I sigh and look up at the digital clock on the wall. We still have a few minutes.

I look back to Makai. He is getting closer. His dark blue jeans and a light blue denim dress shirt are coming into better

focus. His sleeves are rolled up to his elbows, and his jeans are rolled up to his ankles. His loosely tied preppy navy and green plaid tie are swinging back and forth as he comes to a screeching halt in front of me.

He jumps right in, "After I walked Abbie home last night, I heard something." I squint at him, not fully understanding what he's talking about. "It's hard to explain. I mean, I heard this...." He cuts himself off and chuckles nervously. "I'm not crazy." I smile at him and joke, "Well, there is a fine line between crazy and genius." I noticed that we were the only ones left in the hall. "Makai, we got to go." He nods, and we start walking. He says again, "I'm not crazy." I shrug at him and raise an eyebrow. He shakes his head and says, "We'll talk later."

We part ways, and both rush off to class. I make it in time. The teacher begins talking, but I'm lost in thought. Why is Makai so weirded out about hearing something? What is that creepy shadowy weirdness? What's the deal with my weirdo dad? Can that necklace and book get any weirder? The kid sitting next to me leans over into my face, and I jump. He whispers, "Why do you keep saying weird over and over?" I shrug and sink into my seat.

Ten minutes before the first hour is over, the track team is dismissed to go to the gym. Coach Carter and the assistant coach meet us and tell us where to sit. Grace and the rest of my relay team sit next to me. Liam comes in and finds Grace. He squeezes in beside her.

The pep rally is going to be fun. Abbie is part of the pep club, and Makai plays the trumpet in the pep band. I make sure to find them both in the crowd and wave at them. Our school mascot, Bruce the falcon, dances around in the middle of the gym while the pep club cheers and the band plays a catchy tune. Students file excitedly into the gym.



The mic squeals, and then everyone collectively gasps, and somehow, we get even louder than we just were. It's pretty chaotic, and I am enjoying myself. I'm not in class, and it's taking my mind off of everything else. The principal settles us down and gives a speech that I'm sure no one is listening to. Then our coach steps up to the mic and says, *"Let's GOOOooo, Falcons!"* This is our cue. The track team jumps up, cheering and generally making a bunch of noise. We run down the bleacher stairs and line up beside her. Everyone goes wild!

Once we are lined up, she raises her hand, and the crowd gets quiet. She begins reading names from the roster. My name is called, and the student body claps once, just like we were taught. I step out of the line and wave. I hear my friends cheer, and Makai blasts a note on his horn. I watch as the band director marches up the bleachers to him. Whoops, busted. The pep club makes the track team play silly games, boys vs. girls, and the girls beat the boys. Woot! After that, they lead everyone in a cheer. Then it's over, and the principal dismisses us by grade level.

As I walk to my third-hour class, that girl from the lunch table bumps into my arm really hard. She sneers at me, "Watch where you're going." She and her gaggle of friends pass by me in fits of giggles. Liam and Grace are with me. Liam says, "Ugh, the make-up queens think they own the place."

We watch as she does this to other students. Ugh, only two more hours until lunch. "Don't pay any attention to them. They're jerks," Grace says quickly before heading to her locker. "Thanks, guys." We part ways, and I walk away to my locker to get the next hour's book. I slam my locker shut. My friends and I need to hit the surf after school. I need a break from the crazy, but the crazy follows me for the rest of the day.

During lunch, that chick just doesn't stop. She shoots dirty looks over our way as soon as she enters the room. We try to ignore her. Makai puts his hands up to his temples and moans.

"I have a terrible headache, and the nurse refuses to give me any aspirins."

As he says this, the whole group from the other side of the table turn all at once and say to me, "weirdo, weirdo, weirdo." Oh great, that kid from first hour ratted me out. I give them a half-smile and nod in their direction. "Funny," I say to them. I look back at my friends. Makai hardly notices anything happening, but Abbie is scowling. Her fists are balled up, and she is tense. I say to her, "Look, it's because I was mumbling weirdo in first hour. It's no big deal."

The other side of the table is still howling in laughter. I sigh and watch Abbie. Her neck and face are starting to flush. Oh, great, she is ticked. I try to calm her down. "No, really, I was overthinking about how things have gotten so strange lately. I just couldn't stop thinking about it. I guess I was lost in thought, and I was mumbling weirdo over and over."

But Abbie isn't listening to me. Instead, she is getting worked up. Her eyes are cold and hard. Her lips are pursed, and her jaw is locked. She jumps up and stomps over to the ring leader. She shouts, "Leave us alone!" Then she punches her in the nose. The make-up queen screams, but the sound of it gets lost in the dismissal bell. Abbie turns and high-tails it out of the room. This is so out of character for her. I'm stunned.

"What the heck, Abbie?" Makai and I scramble to follow her. Grace and Liam appear beside us in the crowded hallway. Liam says, "Did she just do what I think she did?" Suddenly we stop dead in our tracks. The loudest roar you've ever heard comes from behind us. Several pairs of shoes quickly smacking the ground come towards us. We turn around.

"How dare you!" the make-up queen shouts. She wipes blood from her nose with her sleeve. Abbie steps away from us and gets in the middle of the make-up queens. "Stop it! Just

stop it. Nobody likes a bully, Olivia.”

Olivia, aka. 'The make-up queens' ring leader starts to say, “You little...” but Mrs. Wen and Mrs. Rosenthal push their way through the crowd of students and jump in front of her before she can retaliate. Olivia makes a massive scene with a full-out ugly cry and blames us for starting it. She is making up all sorts of crap. Seriously? I am about to protest and explain my innocence but, one of the make-up groupies, McKenna, is by my side. I step away from her, but she is right by my side again.

I ask, “What exactly do you think you're doing?” Makai and Abbie are in earshot. She makes sure of this by making eye contact with them and wrapping her arms around us like we are all BFFs. She whispers, “Donavon is coming.” She giggles and walks off and melting into the crowd of gawkers. A cold shiver runs down my spine.

Mr. Ezekiel and Coach Carter come over and begin shooing away all the onlookers, including Grace and Liam. Grace must have overheard because as the teachers are shooing her down the hall, she says, “Who is Donavon, Kalea?” I look over at Abbie instead. All the color has drained from her face. I glance at Makai. He is hunched over, mumbling and holding his head. Mrs. Rosenthal is taking Olivia to the school nurse. I watch as she pats her on the back. I imagine she's saying something like, “There, there, those horrible little toads will get what's coming to them.” I don't get a chance to answer Grace because Mrs. Wen is jabbing her finger in our direction and motions for us to follow.

Abbie says, “My hand hurts.” I look at it. It's starting to bruise. I have never been inside the principal's office. Never. The three of us are sitting outside his door, waiting to go in. Mrs. Wen is in there with him now. The school nurse brings Olivia in, and they walk right past us and go straight inside. Olivia turns to shut the door, and since no adult can see her face, she smirks at us.

Makai moans and says, "My head hurts." Then we sit in silence. Only a few minutes go by, but it feels like hours when Olivia finally comes out. She glares at Abbie but says nothing. Mrs. Wen calls my name. "I'm next," I ask, pointing at my chest.

Mrs. Wen gives me an exasperated look and nods. The school nurse comes out of the office. She motions for Olivia to sit in my freshly vacated seat next to Makai. I square my shoulders and go through to the office. The principal is seated behind an enormous mahogany desk. There are stacks and stacks of papers in front of him and on the floor. Behind him, lining the wall and partially blocking the window, are black filing cabinets. Painted above the window is a falcon, and written in silver and blue, it says, "Home of the Falcons." Motivational posters are hanging on the cream-painted cinder block walls.

Mrs. Wen is standing in the back corner with her arms crossed. Principal Garcia nods at her, and from behind me, she says, "Kalea, what happened?" My mouth is dry, and my voice cracks as I tell them my side of the story.

Principal Garcia says, "I'm going to notify your mother. She needs to know about your shenanigans, however. Your story checks out with what Mrs. Wen and Mrs. Rosenthal have said, so I'm going to let you off with just a warning this time. But remember that I am watching you. You're a good kid, Kalea. Don't screw it up. Go back to class." I thank him and quickly get out of there.

In Mrs. Rosenthal's Pre-AP history class, I embarrassedly slink down in my chair. She glances at me and gives me one of those grown-up disapproving looks.

She continues, "That finishes up the Viking invasions during the low Middle ages. Now let's move on to the High

Middle Ages and the Norman invasions. So, who were these Normans?" She pauses for a moment. "Let's talk about the British Isles, William the Conqueror, and the battle of Hastings."

Makai comes into the room and takes his seat. He quickly pulls out his notebook and takes notes from the smartboard. Mrs. Rosenthal gives us our homework assignment. "Read the next two chapters in your book and answer these two questions in an essay format. Did the Vikings and the Normans invade England for the same reasons? Why do these invasions matter today? Also, reminder," she walks to the section of the whiteboard not covered by the smartboard and points. "Your ancestor charts are due soon."

My brain is swimming with all the new information. I missed some of the notes from the beginning of the hour, so I asked the girl next to me, Ella-Cait if I could borrow her notes. She smiles sweetly. "Of course, Kalea. Here you go." She starts reading in her textbook as I frantically copy her notes. Abbie comes into class, and then the bell rings.



## CHAPTER 10

O.k., It was just a mini freak out at school



She is in a hurry. I give Ella-Cait her notes back. “Thanks.” I quickly gather all my stuff up in a great big messy heap. I rush up to the classroom door.

“Hey, wait, Abbie, are you okay?”

She quickly spins around, stopping me suddenly—the other kids filing out of the classroom ram into my back. I drop my pencil, but I just leave it on the floor. Everyone behind me is piling up. “Sorry,” I announce. They push by and mumble things about me being a klutz and stuff.

I'm focused on Abbie, though. She looks sick and angry. “I got an in-school suspension because of you,” her finger is wagging around in my face. “I'm sorry, but I didn't make you punch her in the nose.” After I say this, I realize it's the wrong thing to say because she turned a deeper shade of red.

“You know that Olivia isn't getting punished! She is the one who is a bully. I can feel her gloating over me.” A couple of kids are watching us, so I move away from them and say, “Olivia is a jerk. You know that.” Abbie lets out a huge sigh and just walks off at a quicker pace than me. I chase her to our locker, but she won't talk to me. She slams the door shut and hurries away without a word.

I switch out my books and think about Abbie. She has the necklace now. I hope she doesn't do anything rash with it just because she's annoyed with me. I swallow my panic and think about grandpa. He was one of my favorite people and best friends, but I really wish he hadn't given me that stupid thing. Apparently, he was obsessed with it, but I mean, it's just a necklace, right? If Mrs. Rosenthal hadn't assigned us that dumb ancestor chart, then I would have never put the book and the necklace together.

I replay that night in my head. Mom told me everything that I needed would be in grandpa's study. Mom. She acts like grandpa was a complete nut case. But the thing is, I don't think she really feels that way. Something's off, but what? She is always upfront with me. What's different now? Gosh, the letter. Who hid it in the first place? Well, it doesn't matter now because I found it. I think mom doesn't want me to become like her dad or, even worse, like my weirdo dad. I decide that I am definitely not telling her about Donavon and Amos and the magical necklace and book. She'll think I'm crazy, too.

I'm about to walk into class when Grace and Liam accost me in the hallway. “We saw it again! Abbie was with us, too,” says Liam. Grace adds, “It didn't move this time. It's like it was staring right through me.” She shivers, “Liam got all brave and walked up to it.”

“What! Did you approach that thing? Are you nuts?” Liam says, “No, it was different this time. Somehow, I knew it was okay. Even Abbie felt like it was all right. I guess I'd say it was

friendly.” Grace interjects, “We were in the science lab.”

Liam looks at Grace, “Uh, yeah, we were in the science lab, and I felt it again. I nudged Grace in the ribs and told her to look over in the corner of the room. Abbie was already standing there. I got up and went over to her. The closer I got to it, I could see that it was about as tall as me, but bigger around. It was just some random dim flashing lights. It wasn't the same as yesterday. I mean, it might have been, but Abbie agrees that it didn't put off a strange vibe.” Grace's eyes are wide, and she is nodding vigorously in agreement.

They rush back to class, and I go into mine, but I freak out about everything as I sit through class. I can't help but stew over Abbie. She is my best friend. We have never stayed angry at one another for longer than like ten minutes. When class is over, she sends Makai to deliver a message. It's stupid, too. He stands there awkwardly.

“Uhm, Abbie says everything is your fault because you were eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich at lunch, and she hates the two of those together, and it was grossing her out, so she snapped.”

Makai stands there for a second and then leaves. They do this for the rest of the day. I want to tell him about the shadow lights, but he doesn't stay long enough. He delivers his messages and then runs off. He seems upset with me for some reason, too. Well, I'm sure he already knows all about it, anyway. Now I start to worry about Makai. He is so fidgety and can't wait to get away from me every time we meet, and he is grouchy, too.

“Ugh, this day is the worst,” I say aloud, just as that kid from the first hour walks by. He says, “weirdo, weirdo, weirdo.” I storm off to my next class. Maybe I am a weirdo, seriously. I'm sitting in my chair, waiting for class to start. I believe that I can jump into ancient books and swim in rainbows. Gasping, I



say, "Oh my word." I realized that I spoke out loud and looked around me and quickly added, "I forgot to do my homework."

Have I been on drugs or magic mushrooms or something? I am totally absorbed in my thoughts, and my mind is racing. It must be grandpa's necklace. It's some kind of psychedelic drug thingy. That would explain my paranoia. Abbie and Makai used the necklace, and we think we ended up in Chicago. It's a drug! That must be why Abbie is so emotional. We are on a slippery slope. We're all druggies. We even got in trouble today! I break into a cold sweat. My thoughts are running wild. I take a deep breath and force myself to pause. I had not listened to a word the teacher said.

I look up at the board and copy down our homework assignment. I notice that I am sweating profusely and that Mr. Pellegrini is standing next to me. He kneels to my level. He seems very concerned. "Are you feeling okay? I think you should go to the nurse. You have gone pale, and you are shaking." I nod and obediently head to the nurse's office.

On the way there, I come to my senses. I think the cooler air in the hallway has helped. How did all three of us have the same hallucination at the same time? Grace and Liam haven't even seen the necklace, and they have the same shadowy creepy feelings. Geez, control yourself. Coach's words fill my head, "You are responsible for you, and you control how you react in any given situation." Well, I just totally overreacted. This necklace, I've got to figure it out, and it is definitely not hallucinogenic. I shuffle inside the nurse's office.

"Kalea Jameson, what are you doing here?" The school nurse is looking at me warily. "My teacher said I should come." She shakes her head. I'm not sure she believes me. "Mr. Pellegrini said that I didn't look so good."

By the end of the day, I had given up on my friends ever forgiving me. Honestly, I am much better after my mini freak

out. Coach is right; I am responsible for how I deal with situations, and I have been letting whatever comes my way lead me. Nope, not anymore. I made up my mind. I'm giving myself this little pep talk while waiting in line to get on the bus. I feel someone tap me on the shoulder. I turn to see Abbie. I step out of line. "Meet me at Juan's in about an hour."

I should be gracious and nice. Don't let your situations control you, but instead, I let my anger get the best of me. "Seriously, you have ignored me all day!" I turn to get back in line. "Look, I'm sorry I lost my temper. I was a stupid jerk, okay. Couldn't you tell that I wanted to talk to you? I had Makai explain to you about your icky sandwich. I thought you'd understand. I hate when we can't talk, and I need to talk to you." She draws out the word need.

I want to point out that she was why we didn't talk all day, but I don't. See, I can change. Because I don't say anything as she whines, "Kalea." I cross my arms. "Okay, I know you are still miffed with me about overreacting earlier. Just promise to meet me." My demeanor must have changed because before I could even get the word out that I would meet her, she smiled really big. "Great, see you there!" I climb into the school bus, and Chipper Betty says, "Hiya kiddo!"



## CHAPTER 11

Oh joy, another pirate story from dad, and a  
violent storm



I'm the first one here. Figures, so I walk down to my favorite thinking spot. Wave after wave thundered across the stones. I stop and listen. The roar is deafening. I look out into the expanse of the ocean and realize that the groundswells are pretty harsh. There is a storm off in the distance—no need to put myself in danger, so I head back to Beachy Keen. Grace is sitting at one of the picnic tables. “Hey,” I say.

She puts down her coffee-flavored shaved ice and says “hey” back to me and grins. Makai is just getting to the table. He sits down next to Grace. I sit, too. “Abbie will be here in a minute,” he announces and then says, “The pounding in my head is gone.” I exclaim, “That’s good news!” He nods and tucks into his French fries.

I remind myself to ask him about the thing he heard last night. I don't want to ask him now since he acted so bizarre about it earlier today. Grace is staring at something, so I follow her gaze. Liam is biking here. He peddles up to us through the sand and jumps off his bike. "What'd I miss," he smiles widely. He has a nice smile, I muse, and then I promptly blush. Makai is looking across the table at me oddly. I avoid eye contact. Grace says, "Nothing, we just got here."

He takes off his helmet and says, "Cool, I'm gonna get something to eat," and he walks away. Makai is boring holes into me. Thankfully, Abbie arrives. "Hey, guys! She chirps. Good news. My parents totally understand, and they aren't even that mad!" She makes a 'squee' noise and throws her hands in the air. I jump up and hug her. "That's great! How did you manage that?"

She answers, "I just explained what a bully Olivia has been to us recently. I mean, really, she's just been totally awful. My dad will call and talk to the principal, but he says that I'll probably have to do the suspension. Mom says it will be a good time to get caught up on all my homework projects." Liam says, sitting down at the table with his hands full of food, "I wish my parents were like that."

"Oh, Mmm," Abbie says and snatches a fried jalapeño. Grace takes the opportunity to steal one, too. So, I joined in the fun and pillaged his plate. He playfully bats at my hand.

"Whoa, leave some for me!"

I shoved the jalapeño in my mouth and looked across the table at Makai. He has that odd look on his face again and makes googly eyes at me. I make a face back at him and quickly turn away, looking out at the ocean. He asks, "We are going to meet at your house tomorrow when you guys get back from the meet, right?" I turn back to him and answer, "That's the plan, Stan." He rolls his eyes.

I laugh and then ask him, "Oh, did you hear about the shadow lights in the science lab? I heard that they weren't creepy like the other times." Abbie excitedly says, "I told him all about it. I was there, too."

She must have forgotten that she purposely didn't talk to me for most of the day because her face suddenly fell, and she said, "I'm sorry, Kalea. I know that I hurt your feelings."

I shake my head, "Hey, we're good." I don't think she believes me. What's her deal? I'm fine. The boys are throwing the rest of Makai's fries at each other, so Grace, Abbie, and I leave the table and go for a stroll. We walk along the water avoiding the waves. "You kids go home," a voice demands. I ignore it even though I recognize it. "Hey," it said again, "Kalea, I am talking to you." I sigh. Well, now I have to answer.

"Dad, I am allowed to go to the beach."

He gets in front of us and blocks our way. "There's a storm coming." He follows us. We stroll in silence while my dad tags along. Finally, he says, "Today's the day!" Here we go. He is going to talk about his big treasure hunt. I say, "Girls, this way." I turn back to the picnic tables. This will take a while. Dad is trailing behind us, "Kalea, I am your father. Show me some respect."

I turn to face him, "Let's go sit down, please." I motion towards the picnic table. I notice that the boys are now playing catch with a football instead of fries. Dad says, "I want to talk to you. Not your friends." He looks around the beach and mumbles something about the weather again. He stares intently at me. "I want to talk to you, not them."

I am fed up with all this bluster, "Dad, you can either talk to me with my friends or not at all." I charge up the hill kicking sand for emphasis as I go. Dad speeds up and asks, "What have you kids been up to?" He glances suspiciously in my direction.

I answer for myself, "School stuff. Homework. Track practice. Hanging out. Nothing really." Well, I definitely wasn't going to tell him about the other. Grace looks uncomfortable with the turn of events. Abbie isn't fazed. This isn't her first rodeo.

"I have theater practice, pep club, and choir. You should come to our school play, Mr. Jameson. You would love it! Kalea and Makai work behind the scenes on set design and lights. You could see their handy work." He is so not going to do that, and she knows it. She grins from ear to ear, flips her dark blond locks, and bats her long lashes at him. "And I'm one of the stars, of course." Now my dad looks uncomfortable. He clears his throat and gruffly says, "Thanks for the invitation, kid, but I'll be out of town."

We all gather at our picnic table. Dad searches my face. He glances around the beach again. I look, too. Who or what is he looking for? He turns back to my group of friends and me and starts telling a story. "You guys familiar with the Spanish galleons? The ships that sailed down the coast of California."

He waves his arms toward the ocean. "There was uncertainty around every corner, for they would go on annual voyages and sometimes never return." He says that last part very quietly, like we are little kids sitting at a campfire listening to ghost stories. "This very thing happened! In the year 1600, the galleon Capitana disappeared without a trace!" He says this with gusto and a bit like a pirate. Imagine that he put a flashlight in front of his face and started laughing maniacally.

I roll my eyes and realize that Liam doesn't know who this guy is, so I jump in before dad can continue, "Uhm, this is my dad, everyone. Dad, this is everyone." Liam asks him, "You're going diving then?" But Dad is caught up in what he wants to say and completely ignores the question. He says instead, "Here's where it gets interesting!" I let out an embarrassed

sigh. In his normal voice, he says, "A ship sank. No big deal. Happens all the time, right?" We all sort of shrug noncommittally.

That's all the encouragement he needs, and he plods on, "The Spanish Armada, 1588, have you learned about that in school, kiddos?" He looks around the table, "No. okay, The Spanish didn't like the English, and the feelings were mutual. It was a Catholic vs. Protestant thing. Anyway, this huge Spanish naval fleet was defeated off the coast of Ireland. Some of these men survived and made it to shore only to be robbed by the Irish. They had strict orders to kill any man who washed ashore. The crown would kill them if they didn't, but some clan Chieftains disobeyed orders and helped the Spanish. Now, here's where both things are connected."

"What do you mean?" Makai interrupts. I blink, astonished. He is interested in dad's treasure story. Abbie says, "Yeah, how are they connected?" I notice then that all my friends are staring intently at my dad. He makes eye contact with Makai. He sits there staring at him for an uncomfortable second.

Finally, he says, "Bartolomé del Castillo." Makai shifted restlessly and glanced at me, breaking eye contact. I give him what I hope is my most apologizing face. Why does my dad have to be such a weirdo?

Dad then looks at Abbie and says, "Castillo is one of the Spanish sailors who washed ashore. He was only a few years older than you kids." Abbie nodded emphatically.

"He joined the navy with grand plans of having his own ship one day. Lucky for him, he was found by a chieftain from one of the most ancient and powerful clans, the O'Heanain. Seamus O'Heanain took him to the family castle, where he was nursed back to health by the family physician. Seamus' sister Aileen fancied Castillo. They would take long walks around the grounds learning from one another. Soon Aileen could speak

Spanish like a Spaniard, and Castillo had learned English. The two were inseparable.” Abbie interjects, “Oh, how romantic!”

Dad frowns at her and says, “As soon as he gained his strength, he and Aileen ran away together. What's odd is that he had the O'Heanain family blessing to marry, but instead, they disappeared in the middle of the night.” Liam says, “Okay, but how does this have anything to do with your missing Spanish galleon? I hope that you are going diving for it. I went with dad once when we were in Australia visiting cousins. It was the coolest thing that I've ever done.”

Makai says, “Sweet! Did you dive at the Great Reef and look at all the coral?” Liam's face lights up, and he nods. Quickly Grace says, “A couple of years ago...this has nothing to do with diving, but it's something awesome that I've done...we went to visit my grandparents back in South Korea, and we got to see the Seoul Lantern Festival. There are life-sized paper lanterns lined up along a stream. They are lit up, and you hear traditional music and drumming performances as you walk around looking at them. I even got to watch the dancers. It's so magical!”

All at once, we talk about the cool things we have done and how awesome it is that Liam went diving with his dad in Australia. Dad lost us. We were not paying the slightest bit of attention to him anymore. This upsets him more than it should. He is rubbing the perpetual stubble on his jaw. Suddenly, he smacks the table.

“I wasn't finished.”

We all stopped chatting and gave him our attention. Wow, how rude! I want to get up and walk away, but I stay. The wind picks up and blows my hair into my eyes. I angrily wipe it away. Dad starts talking again.

“Listen to me. Bartolomé del Castillo turns up again twelve



years later. He is the captain of the galleon Capitana, and it vanishes. Legend has it that when he and Aileen absconded into the night all those years earlier, they stole something of great importance from the clan O'Heanain and I'm going to find it." Dad stands up and walks away from the table. Seriously, rude much? "Uhm, sorry, guys." I take off after him despite my better judgment. "You should say goodbye before you storm off, you know," I say to dad. He grunts in my general direction. I grab his sleeve at the elbow, "What is your problem?"

It's starting to rain. Great. I let go of his sleeve and ram my finger in his chest, "You showed up yesterday acting weird. Weird even for you! And now you were just downright rude to my friends and me. Look, I'm used to it, but you could...you know...at least act like you are a human being sometimes." I am so angry, and I wish I would shut up, but instead, I throw my arms in the air and say, "You going for father of the year or something?"

It's pouring down rain now. Everyone is rushing to get to shelter. I have water dripping in my eyes, and I reach up to wipe it away and realize that I'm crying. Dad looks a bit stunned. He backs away, blinks.

"I'm protecting you." He backs away a little more. I think he is going to say something else, but he doesn't. He turns and walks away. He leaves me standing in the rain.



## CHAPTER 12

What are these creepy shadow lights



I stand there. Dad is gone. So are my friends. They probably think that I am with him. The wind is picking up, and the rain is coming down in horizontal sheets. I hug myself and start walking to nowhere in particular. The waves are searching for anything to bash themselves against. I'm the only one left at the beach.

Most people have good sense and stay inside. I keep walking. I find myself heading away from the ocean, away from the storm. A low rumble begins. It escalates quickly. I put my hands over my ears to muffle the sound. My thoughts are louder. "I'm protecting you!" Dad's words rattle around for a moment and then ricochet off my skull, mixing in with the hissing wind. It sounds an awful lot like, "Use the brooch, lass!"

The air is filled with electricity, and the hair on my arms is

standing straight up. A dangerous bolt of lightning nearly blinds me. I'm plunged into darkness. "Give me the brooch! You want to give it to good ol' Donavon." Frightened, I gasp. "He's here!" Then, I see Dad's face, but with a hiss and a flash, it's now Donavon's. No. He isn't real. He was alive hundreds of years ago. Donavon cannot be here, now. "You're not real," I whisper.

The sky lets loose a low rumble. There it is again. I turn quickly towards the hiss, and another bolt of lightning blinds me, and I see Amos?

No, wait, "Dad?"

The wind hisses, "You can't trust him."

I'm frozen in place. I repeatedly say, "This isn't happening. This isn't happening." In front of me, I see...wait, a shadow-light? I back away and stumble. I slip on a stupid rock. Falling forward, I crash into gravel and sand. I skin my knees and hands. I scream in frustration, but the wind knocks the air out of me. Kneeling there, I sob. I let the rain pelt me and roll down my face. I try to catch my breath. It's calmer now. It's just raining. I slowly stand and make my way to the road. As I leave, I can't help but think that I am just like my dad—great, crackpot runs in the family. The wind is pushing me to go quicker.

I find myself at the hospital. I want my mom. The receptionist knows me and lets me back into the ER. I think she is worried, judging by the look on her face. The double doors click open, and I hear my mom.

"Kalea, what in the world? You are sopping wet! Oh, look at your knees! Did you walk here in that storm? You've been crying. Are you okay? Oh Bug, you are making puddles on the linoleum!"

I shiver and hug myself. She wraps her arms around me and walks me back to an open room. The nurse behind the desk smiles sweetly at me and hands mom a warm blanket. Mom wraps me in it as we head to the room. Another nurse wheels in a blood pressure monitor. She pulls the curtain as she leaves. Mom is putting the blood pressure cuff around my right arm.

Really, “Mom, what are you doing?” She looks at my hand and gasps. She pulls open a drawer and gets tweezers and disinfectant out. I groan, “Ow,” she is digging at my hand. I see what she's doing and that I have a piece of glass sticking out of it. I shouldn't have looked. Now, it hurts, and I'm queasy.

She plucks the glass out and applies pressure to my hand. She is gentle but firm. It needs stitches. We don't talk. She just fixes me up. I am happy to be with her. I feel like everything is going to be okay by just being with her. She reaches up and puts both of her hands on my head and pulls me close as she leans in; she puts her head on mine, “I love you, Kalea-Bug.” I feel like I'm a little five-year-old again. “I love you, too,” I say, “Remember when I fell off my bike by the garage?” She smiles, “I had to stitch you up, then too.” She pats my knee where she had performed mini surgery on me when I was little. “Now, tell me what is going on.”

I told her all about dad and his treasure story and how he was a big jerk to my friends and me. “He says it's because he's protecting me, and he just walked away, and by then, all my friends had left, and the storm came really quickly, and I fell over some rocks.”

I feel guilty because I don't tell her about the other stuff. I told myself that she would be worried that I was going crazy anyway. Mom pulls her cell phone out of her shirt pocket. She is in scrubs. These are my favorite. They have kitty cat emoji faces all over them. I know she is calling dad. He doesn't pick up. Probably wise on his part. Mom is furious. After giving him a piece of her mind on the voice mail, she hangs up. She pulls

up the Uber app and requests a ride. She puts her phone away.

“Bug, I don’t get off for at least another six hours. You need to go home, take a warm shower, and get some rest. Oh, and remember to put a plastic grocery bag around your hand before you shower. The Uber will be here in five minutes.”

As I’m leaving, there is a loud clap of thunder. I see that the rain is pelting an ambulance that is pulling up under the awning. The windshield wipers are failing at keeping the window clean. They are making a loud *screech-fwap* sound that can be heard above the howling sirens. It stops in front of the door. The emergency personnel is hurrying to get out of the vehicle and to the injured people in the back. I overhear them. There has been a horrible wreck.

Another ambulance pulls up. There is a lot of commotion, and a few of the ER staff come rushing out of the building with equipment. Mom is among them. She is going to have a long night. She usually does when the weather is bad. I make eye contact with her, and she nods at me, but just as quickly as she appears, she is gone again. She reappears, pushing a bed into the building giving out orders. At that moment, I realize how proud I am of her. I’m feeling better, too. Mom always knows how to make things better. The Uber pulls up. He leans down and looks out the window at me, and honks the horn. Really? I take my time walking over to the car and glide into the back seat.

It feels so good to be home and in my pajamas. I’ve only been home for about an hour. I stuck my head in the fridge. I reach in and pick up the pickles. I struggle to open the jar, but I toss the lid on the counter beside me when it finally budes. With the open jar held between my side and my bad arm, I crunch down on a pickle and search for something better to eat. I lean farther into the fridge. Pickle juice from the jar sloshes out onto my shirt. “Well, stink,” I say as I put the jar on the counter next to the lid.

This is my second time around looking for dinner, and no new food magically appeared. Sighing, I pull open the freezer door, and I take out two frozen burritos. I drop them on a plate and shove them in the microwave. While they cook, I dance and slide around on the hardwood floors singing 80s rock ballads at the top of my lungs. My phone buzzes. It is sitting on the counter behind me. It's plugged into an outlet on the wall. I look at it and see that it's Abbie. "I forgot to tell you that Jordon talked to me during the first hour. He thinks that I should get the lead solo part!"

I put the phone down because my burritos are done. I pour half a bottle of salsa over them. I snag my phone as I walk-dance my way to the living room. Getting a warm shower and being in my fluffiest P.J.s really pepped me up. I sink into my favorite spot on the couch and text Abbie back. My plate is searing a hole into my legs. I grab the pillow next to me and put it on my lap. Then I put the plate on top of the pillow. I say, "Mmm, that's better." Where the pillow used to be on the couch, there is a piece of scrap paper. I pick it up after taking a bite of burrito.

It must be something mom tore up earlier. I turn it over. There's a message written on it, but it's ripped down the middle, so it's only the first half. "We need to...It has begun....meet me in th...."

Strange. What is this? My mind jumps to the worst scenarios that it can think of. Gah, why did mom tear it up? It's because she didn't want me to see it. No. No, it's most likely nothing. Don't be so paranoid. Come on, Kalea, it could mean anything like uhm, "We need to empty the garbage. It has begun to stink. Meet me in the kitchen." Yeah, probably not. I flip it over. No clues there. I poke around on the couch to see if the missing piece is there. Nothing. I look closer at the note. It's Aunt Lydia's handwriting which isn't odd. She is old-fashioned and loves sending greeting cards and notes through

snail mail. "Hmm."

I start flapping the paper on the side of my plate while I try to figure out what message she may have scrawled out. My food smells good. I take another bite of my burrito and chew, mulling it over.

I say out loud, "We need to...we need to...." I jab my fork in the air and say, "see each other more." That's what Auntie Lydia would say. Okay, the other part says, "It has begun...." It has begun, what? Begun to rain! "No, why would she say that." I shake my head. That's dumb. "Ah-ha!" I do the fork thing again, "to feel like forever."

Stringing the puzzle together, I say, "We need to see each other more. It has begun to feel like forever." I'm inspired, adding, "Why don't you meet me in the city?" Yes, that's it, then they would meet up at their favorite coffee house and talk for hours. See, nothing. I eat the rest of my dinner and text with Abbie. On a whim, I send a hello message to Auntie.

I take my dirty dishes to the kitchen and put them in the dishwasher. The trash bin catches my attention. Feeling sheepish, I saunter over to it and take off the lid. Seeing nothing but trash, I put the lid right back in place. I dance away towards the counter. I unplug my charger from the wall, wad it up, and put it in my pocket. I stand there staring at the trash can, and my curiosity gets the best of me.

I race over and toss the lid on the floor. Rummaging deeper through the garbage, I say, "Ah-ha, score!" I pick it up with my thumb and forefinger. "Ew," eggshells and coffee grounds are clinging to it. I shake it off and drop it on the counter. I pull the other half out of my pocket and match them up. It reads, "We need to talk about the gem. It has begun in Kalea. Meet me in the city, our place, noon." My phone buzzes, and I jump. It's Auntie Lydia returning my message.

I swallow hard. I see the first part flash across the screen. She is just saying that it's good to hear from me and stuff. I didn't open it to read the rest. I ignore it. I guess I was sort of on the right track; they did meet at the coffee/tea shop in the city. I suddenly remember that I have a track meet in the morning. Maybe I should skip it. I don't feel very well. No, I would disappoint my relay teammates. I can't do that, so I clean up my mess, wash my good hand, and head to bed.

I can't sleep. I kick the blankets off. I'm lying on my back, staring at the glow-in-the-dark stars on my ceiling. They start blurring into the darkness. I can't help shake the feeling that it must be real. All that has been happening to me; must be because even mom and Auntie Lydia are talking about the necklace. But it's a family heirloom and all, so maybe she thinks that it should have gone to her and her kids. Yeah, that's probably it, right, but what's the deal with dad? I close my eyes, and I'm back to earlier at the beach. Cold chills run down my spine. I reach for my blankets, quickly cover up, and lay very still, listening to myself breathe. Mom acts like the necklace was nothing and that grandpa was a silly old man. "It has begun in Kalea."

What does that mean? Did I soar into a book, splash into a pool of colors, and end up in another place? Why else would mom and Auntie be secretly meeting about me? I lean upon my elbow, punch my pillow, and flop over to my other side. No, I'm losing my mind. That's it! Mom thinks that I'm like dad. Ugh, what is happening to me?

I say to myself, "I'm turning into dad." This causes me to struggle for air. I say, "Leave it alone. I don't want to think about it anymore." I curl up into fetal position hugging my pillow. I don't know how long I laid there like that, staring into the darkness before I fell asleep.

"I love you, Bug."

I open my eyes, and mom is sitting on the edge of my bed,



looking at me. She is still in her cat face scrubs from earlier. I squint up at her.

“What time is it?”

“Super late, or early if you prefer. It's nearly four in the morning. I wanted to check on you. You were pretty gnarly this evening.”

“Yeah, well, dad's a jerk.”

She leans up and turns the lamp on. Then she picks up my right hand and examines the stitches. “Did you and Auntie have a nice talk?” She looks confused and cocks her head sideways at me. I lie, “She texted me today.” I tell myself, well, it is kind of true.

She smiles, but it's not a genuine smile. It's strained. It never reaches her eyes. She must not believe me. She says, “It was good to see Lydia. We always have so much fun together, and I got to have my favorite coffee!” She squeezes my hand and looks a little closer at the stitches, “Your hand looks great!”

“Thank you for fixing me up.”

“Sheesh, boy, we got busy as soon as you left the hospital.”

I nod sleepily. “There were so many accidents last night.” She looks away and says, “Hey, listen, sorry for waking you up. You have a meet in a couple of hours.” She looks back at me and ruffles my hair, “I just wanted to check on you, Bug, and let you know that I won't be there in the morning. I'm rooting for though” Then, she turns the lamp off. “Goodnight, Bug.”



## CHAPTER 13

Mom takes Dad's side



“Both the boys' and girls' teams did pretty good at the meet.” I take a bite from my turkey sandwich and say, “My relay team came in first.” Breadcrumbs fly out of my mouth. “Oh whoops,” with my good hand, I brushed off the bits of sandwich from my shirt. Mom ignores how gross it is. “That's wonderful news. I knew you could do it!” She tears a paper towel from the roll, “Here.”

Okay, she did notice, “Thank you,” I say, wiping off my mouth. I smile at her, “You should have seen how fast Grace was. My hand-off was flawless, and....” “Thanks to your wonderful mother who knows how to sew a person's hand back to new!” She laughs. “Uhm, yeah,” I smile, “it was all you, and Grace was able to catch up to the other girl and outrun her. Both are pretty awesome!” She gets up and throws her wrapper away in the trash can. “Lydia called today” She turns around and looks at me.

I shrug and try not to let my face betray my worry, remembering that I never actually checked her text. I pick up my phone from the table.

"Thought you'd want to know tha..." Mom's phone rings. She looks at it and mumbles something. "Hmm, it's work." Before leaving the room, she hurriedly says, "Lydia's coming over with the kids this evening." As she goes through to the other room, she answers her phone.

I check my text from Auntie Lydia, and it is just a 'hi, good to hear from my favorite niece' message. She didn't mention that she had seen mom yesterday. Crap. I walk through the living room, heading to my room. Mom is sitting in her chair. She is still on the phone. I pretend to be interested in tutu's old potted plants near the window just to hear her side of the conversation, but it's totally boring.

As I'm leaving, mom rolls her eyes and points at the phone. She makes the universal blah, blah, blah sign with her free hand. I chuckle and go to my room. I backward dive onto my bed and lay there for a second. I feel sick. Guilt. That's why I feel gross. I should tell her the truth. Well, at least about the torn-up note that I found. I don't make it a practice to tell half-truths, and now they seem to be regularly rolling off my tongue. That's it. I'll tell her when she gets off the phone. I peer into the living room. She's still on the phone.

I've got a while before my friends come over. I want to look at the book. It's on my desk. Abbie has the necklace, so it should be safe to look at. After thumbing through it, I close it and play with the secret compartment, examining it. You can really tell that it was made for the brooch, but I already know that. I rub my fingers over the embossed words inside, and they start to shiver. I swear that bird turned its head and looked at me! I throw the closest thing to me over it and roll away just as my mom opens the door.

“Bug, can I ask you a question?”

My role chair bumps into the bed. I fly backward. I let out a startled cry, “Ack.” She looks at me with a 'that's my goofy kid' look on her face and then sits on my bed.

“When are your friends coming over again?” I thought for sure she was going to ask how I knew about her and Lydia. This is my chance.

“In a few minutes. Mom, last night....”

She gets up, interrupting my confession. “I know it was a rough night for you. Remember that I bought a cake from the bakery, too. Feel free to offer some to your friends, okay?” I nod. “Okay.” Mom is on her way out but stops in the doorway.

“Oh yeah, what are you working on again?”

“School stuff.” She gives me a look, “School stuff. What school stuff?” I roll my eyes at her. I probably shouldn't have done that.

“Kalea,” she says questioningly.

“What?” I ask defensively.

She just stands there, all bent out of shape, for some reason staring into my eyes. I look away. She finally says, “Do we need to have a talk?” I shake my head nervously. “No, why would we?” I study the knobs on my desk. Then I look back at her. “Uhm, what?” I swallow hard. She knows everything. Mom walks over to my desk and sits on it. She's going to take the book away, and now I'll never know what's going on! I wheel my chair closer and lean across the covered book and give her my most innocent look.

She says, “I talked to your father. He says that you kids were

acting funny yesterday.” She motions like she is smoking something. “Now, I usually take what he says with a grain of salt, but I’ve noticed that you have been a little off lately. So, I’m just going to ask it.” She takes a deep breath and blurts out, “Are you and your friends doing drugs?”

“What? No. I would never do that. It kills brain cells and makes you do stupid stuff. Honestly, dad was a flake yesterday and a total jerk. I can’t believe that you believe him. You’re taking his side!” She stops me, “Look, I always believe you. You’ve never given me a reason not to, and I’m not taking sides here, all right? I just want to make sure you are okay.” My thoughts were running wild. Seriously? Dad said that, and mom believed him! He’s the one acting strange. I am angry.

I blurt out, “Auntie didn’t text me about meeting you for coffee. I found her note.”

“What?” She stands up from the desk. Then, she walks to the window and stares outside.

There I did it. Now she knows.

Ignoring my big revelation, I say, “Mom, I’m fine. This semester is rough, you know. There is a ton of homework, and the coach is working us hard. And Abbie is driving me nuts about some boy that she likes and....”

Mom walks over and sits down on my bed. She rubs my back. “I love you, Bug. I just worry about you, okay? We all do. Dad and Auntie, too. That’s why we met for coffee. It wasn’t a big deal, honey.”

There is a noise from outside my room. We lookup. There it is again. Mom quickly walks towards the door, but before she gets there, Abbie bursts in.

“Some boy!”

She pushes past mom.

“Some, boy! Kalea, you know full well that his name is Jordan and that he is...”

Mom speaks over her, “I’ll just leave you girls to talk things over,” and she winks at me.

I get an earful from my best friend until the others start to show up. Makai let himself into the house through the kitchen door. He has a bag of potato chips that he snagged on his way to my room. Just as he sits down on the edge of my bed, the doorbell rings.

Abbie jumps up.

“It must be the other two. I’ll get it.”

Makai nods. “I bet they are at the front door.”

Abbie huffs at him.

He shrugs.

I silently wondered what that was about. “Come on. Let’s go to the living room.” Abbie is shutting the front door as we enter the living room.

Makai says to Abbie, “Told you.”

I placed the book on the coffee table. Everyone sits down. Abbie takes the necklace off, lays it next to the book, and shoots a dirty look at Makai. I take a deep breath. What is wrong with those two. Where do I begin? How do I show this to Grace and Liam? They are all staring at me. I try to explain, but I do a terrible job of it. I look to Abbie and then to Makai for help. They are too busy ignoring one another to chime in.

Things go from bad to worse.

Liam is doubtful, "I don't think it works." Grace chimes in with a question, "Are you making this up?"

Suddenly, Makai blurts out, "Guys, it's not safe."

Abbie seems distressed, "Oh come on, Makai! I'm the one who saw my younger self and freaked out, and I want to go back."

Makai replies, "Yeah, but you weren't the one who was kicked in the ribs, were you, Abbie!"

Abbie stomps over to Makai and leans into his face, "It's just because of what you think you heard when you walked me home." She used air quotes when she said, "think."

I've had enough, "Abbie, you believed me when I told you about the book. Why won't you believe Makai when he said he heard something? It's not because it's strange. I mean, we all have seen the shadow lights, and that's strange." I look at Liam and Grace, "It is real. I promise you. I don't know if we should use it again. My life just keeps getting wackier and wackier!" I told them about the creepy happenings at the beach, and that dad said he was trying to protect me.

Grace is pacing. She says, "I think I believe you guys. Makai may not be telling us what he heard, but I'm sure it's for a good reason." She starts running in place. I wonder how much coffee she's had. She adds, "I don't think we should go." Makai is on the couch. He is staring intently into his empty potato chip bag. Crumpling it into a tiny ball, he quietly says, "I want to go back."

Abbie exclaims, "Ah-ha, see, I knew it!" She jumps up from the chair and says, now, I'm going to be honest with you guys. I do not want to go!" Everyone gapes at her.

Makai stands up and takes a big step towards her. “What is with you? You are on my last nerve! You were lying the whole time,” he says accusingly.” “Exactly,” she says, flipping her hair and walking away from Makai.

I ask, “Uhm, why?” I look from Makai then to her. “Oh, never mind. All in favor of using the necklace raise your hand.” It is a tie—boys against girls. My vote breaks the tie.





## CHAPTER 14

Crushing on Liam and Auntie Lydia visits



“So, it's safe to use, then?” Grace asks. I shrug, “I'm not sure.” Liam says to Grace, “Aren't you the least bit curious to find out what it does? Or if they are making it up?” He gestures at us. She answers, “Of course I am.” I say, “Let's go up to grandpa's study.”

We get settled upstairs, and Abbie and Makai are both silent. What is their deal? Offhandedly, I say, “So who wants to go for a swim?”

Liam looks at me and says, “Er, what?”

He is handsome, not perhaps traditionally beautiful, but he has that way about him that causes him to stand out in the

crowd. He is standing near the window. His mysterious, glacial blue eyes are shimmering in the sunlight. They complement his thick windswept beach blonde hair. His eyes are deep and expressive, and I am caught up. They are like a gentle sea on a calm day. Beautiful and intense. Somebody clears their throat. I realize that I'm gazing adoringly at Liam. I wipe my hands on my pant legs and twirl my hair nervously. I look to my two best friends for help. Apparently, they still aren't talking.

I say, "uh, when you are pulled into the book, you first dive into a rainbow of swirly colors, and then you end up somewhere else."

Grace looks concerned, "Where exactly?"

Makai finally decides to talk. Well, it's about time. He says, "We haven't figured that out yet. I think it may be like a different time or something. Abbie was a little kid when we went. We're not sure about Kalea. She went by herself. There wasn't any real way to tell." I'm doing my best not to look at Liam now. I walk over to the opposite window by grandpa's desk, leaving my friends to talk it over. I look out at the people playing in the ocean. The waves gently crest and break, caressing the shoreline. It's a complete change from yesterday evening. It's chilly. I reach for grandpa's cardigan and think of glaciers and blue eyes. Abbie saunters up and hip checks me.

"Whatcha thinkin' about, girlie?"

"Nothing."

She playfully hits my shoulder and says, "Mmm, that smile isn't nothing." I feel myself blush, and she saunters off again like a cat bored with its prey. I go to the other window and look outside. My auntie is pulling into the driveway.

"Oh guys, I forgot that my Auntie Lydia is coming this evening, and uh, well, she's here. so..." Grace is picking up

her things. "Okay, let's talk again tomorrow, okay?"

We all agree to meet and since I have the winning vote, use the necklace and the book. As everyone leaves, I notice that Makai and Abbie are still not talking. First, it was me and now Makai. That girl is so fickle. I hide the book and necklace before going downstairs. Just to be on the safe side. It's good to see my cousins.

It's too late to go surfing. So, we sit around playing games on our phones. My aunt comes into the living room and plops down next to me. "I haven't seen you all night. Are you trying to avoid me?" She wraps me in a great big bear hug.

"When did you get into town?"

"Yesterday. I heard that you tore it up on the track today! Way to go!"

"Thanks."

My oldest cousin Chloe pulls a couple of board games out of the hall closet. She walks to the coffee table and kneels. "Let's play board games for the rest of the evening!" And, we do. One of the twins, Dylan, slams his game piece on the board.

He shouts, "Sorry!"

I jump.

My nerves are shot. So, I pretty much acted guilty the whole evening. Nothing happens, either. My auntie doesn't jump up and say, "Ah-ha! I know you are using the necklace!" And mom doesn't say, "I love you bug, but you are bat-crap crazy like your father and grandpa."

On the whole, it is pretty anticlimactic. Other than waiting for the other shoe to drop, we have a pleasant evening. Mom is

shoveling food into a plastic container. She hands it to Auntie, who says, "Are you sure you don't want any of this?" She tries to give some of the lasagna back to mom.

"No, it'll just go to waste. Really, take some home for Tom and the boys." I'm standing in the doorway to the kitchen. Auntie says, "Well, I guess that just about does it. What a lovely evening. We've got to do this more often!" Chloe walks in, hugs me, and says, "Gosh, I still can't believe how old you are! What happened to my baby cousin? You're no longer a chubby little kid."

I protest, "Hey, I wasn't chubby!"

Mom bursts out laughing. "Bug, you were a little chunk. Such chubby, chubby cheeks."

Just to make things more embarrassing, Auntie walks over to me and pinches my cheeks, and in baby talk says, "And just so cute, too!"

Chloe says, "She still is a cutie. You're a knock-out, Kalea!"

Chloe is a senior this year and plans on going to Stanford. I bet she will, too. She's smart. Really smart. Auntie leans into the living room from where we're standing.

"Dylan! Tyler! Time to go."

They are playing on their phones. "Yep, be there in a second, mom," they say in unison. They are only a couple of years older than me.

I smile at Chloe, "Thanks! I'll never be as pretty as you, though." She disagrees, "Nah! So, have you found yourself a hottie yet?" There is clatter. Mom must have dropped something. "She better not! She's only fourteen." I smile sheepishly as they laugh. The boys come into the kitchen, and

Auntie Lydia gives them instructions, “grab that container of food. And here. You, you carry this.” Dylan says, “I'm driving!” He grabs the keys from the counter and sprints out the door.

Tyler chases him out the door, “No way, it's my turn.”

Auntie lets out an exasperated sigh, kisses mom on the cheek, and rushes out after her offspring. Chloe says bye to us as she shuts the door. We hear a loud *thwunk* and “ow, Dylan” and a bunch of muffled grunts! Mom peers out the door.

“I am so happy that I didn't have boys.”



## CHAPTER 15

Oh my, is that a castle



We both crumpled into the couch simultaneously and put our feet on the coffee table. I click on the T.V. I flip through the guide, searching for a show to watch. Mom's cell rings. It's on the couch between us. I see that it's her work again. She sighs and answers it. I can tell by listening to her side of the conversation that she is needed asap at the hospital. She hangs up and groans as she stands up.

I say, "They need you at work."

She nods, "I've got to go," She looks around. "Uhm, I have an extra set of scrubs in my locker."

She gives me some instructions and then leaves through the kitchen. I watch her go, and then my attention is drawn to the T.V. I flip through the channels.

“Nothing is on.” Okay, then old, cheesy horror flicks it is. I turn on Radar Men from the Moon. It's a serial show from the '50s about some guy with a sonic rocket pack. He flies to the moon, hoping to defeat the evil moon men. I go to my room, put on my PJs, and then come back and curl up on the couch. I watch show after show until I fall asleep.

The shows mix with my dreams, creating some campy stuff like Abbie and Makai hiding from Krog, the moon man. Abbie's on a swing that spans the crescent cheese-moon. She is giddily swinging over the moon. Her mood changes when she looks down and sees Makai sitting atop the cheese-moon gnawing his way through. He's a little mouse with giant ears. He hears something and scurries away as Krog comes into view. I wake up to the sun bearing down on me through the window. Ugh, I roll over and cover up my head. I lay there for a minute, too late. I have to use the bathroom.

After taking care of business, I wander into the kitchen to pour myself a bowl of Count Chocula. Someone knocks on the door. Hmm, I look at the clock on the wall. It's nearly ten! That's when everyone is coming over. I look out the window. Crud. They saw me. I wave at them and scan the group. With a sigh of relief, I open the door. Makai, Abbie, and Grace stream into the room. Grace takes a drink from her coffee shop cup.

“Don't tell coach that I'm drinking coffee.” She winks at me. Her dark large angular eyes go wide as she looks at me. She teases, “Wow, I'm really overdressed.” Her glossy straight hair swings back and forth as she giggles. She dyes it a deep burgundy. It looks so lovely against the chunky loose-fitting mustard yellow turtleneck sweater she's wearing. She's also wearing royal blue high-waisted shorty shorts with big gold buttons on the front by her hips, slip-on Vans, and green and yellow tube socks. On her head is a slouchy striped, yellow, orange, and green beanie. Abbie and Makai look adorable as always.

“Make yourselves at home. I've gotta change.”

I go to my room, silently chastising myself. Why do I always wait for the last second to get dressed for the day? I go through my clothes. I put on a maroon baggy hooded t-shirt. Over it, I put on a matching plaid flannel. I tug my hood out from under the shirt while I decide on jeans or shorts. I slip on my funny pizza socks. I shiver. Jeans, it is. Before leaving my room, I shove my feet into my Chucks. When I get back, I see that Liam has made it here. His longboard is leaning by the door. He is wearing a black muscle shirt with an old motorcycle on it, tight jeans, and Vans. He brushes his sun-kissed curly locks out of those gorgeous eyes. He has a devil may care look going. He nods at me. I blush. Dang, it.

“Hey, guys, Let's go up to grandpa's study.” They don't move. “Guys?” I go to my half-eaten bowl of cereal. Abbie says, “Makai wants to tell you what he heard. Go ahead.” She glares at him. He laughs nervously, “So, we were walking home from your house the other day. I suddenly got this massive headache because everything was so loud.” He looks at Abbie. She says, “Yeah, apparently, I stomp the ground like a herd of elephants. What else? Oh, that's right, and chew gum like a cow!”

Makai says, “I told you that I had a headache, okay!”

Oh, so that's what's wrong with them. Geeze, she must have been furious at me if she had decided to talk to him the other day at school instead of me. She is still furious. “So, here's the freaky thing, I heard voices. I mean lots of voices and all at once, too. One stood out among the rest, and it said I am coming for it.” We are all sitting at the kitchen table now.

“Who is,” Grace asks, “And for what, exactly?” she adds.

“I bet you can guess what,” Liam says sarcastically. “The necklace,” she says, eyes darting from me to Makai to Abbie.



“Yeah, and the who must be Donovan,” Abbie says, “See, we can't go back. I don't care about our stupid vote. I just came here to tell you so.” She storms off in a huff. “Wait, Abbie! Don't go,” I plead.

She pauses at the door, “Why shouldn't I leave?” I answer, “Because I need you. You're good at reading people.” She asks, “Is that all? I'm good at reading people?” I meet her at the door and say to her, “Well, you are good at that, and you are one of my oldest and closest friends.” She looks over my shoulder at the others, and to me, she says, “Yeah, I know.” I look at her imploringly. She sniffs and walks back to the table. I shake her shoulders, “Thank you!” Technically, Makai is my oldest friend. Our moms have been best friends forever. Liam says, “Okay, let's do this!”

I try to read everyone's expressions. Curiosity, that's what I see—curiosity with a dash of worry. Everyone else is just as puzzled and anxious to figure this out as I am. I stand up and start climbing the stairs. They follow me, one by one. Abbie is the last.

We are huddled around the book. I feel the tug. Abbie is holding the necklace in front of her. She swallows hard. I am transfixed on the book. The room is spinning. I turn to Abbie. The necklace is swinging back and forth. The gems on the necklace appear to be spinning and emitting light. I hold my breath. Abbie places it in the secret compartment. My phone goes off. I am dizzy. Nothing else happens. I reach for the necklace. I'm falling. Someone catches me.

“Told you they were lying, Grace,” Liam says. I open my eyes. Liam is holding me. I push away, stand on my own, and try to play it cool. Abbie says, “I don't know what happened.”

I am still trying to play it cool. I look at my phone. It's a text from mom. It says, “I know all about it. We are going to have to talk.” I am freaking out now. My chest is tight. I need

to sit down. "Mom knows," I mumble. I look at the book and the brooch/necklace. I say, "Huddle up. I think I have to do this." They gather around. I pull the necklace out, and it dangles in my hand. I ask, "Are you ready?" Mom knows, so it's now or never.

I put the necklace back into the compartment, and I am yanked inside. I look around at my friends. Makai is sick. So is Liam. *Tuatha Dé O'Heanain* soars by my head. I now know what that means, the O'Heenan family, thanks to our research. Wait, the O'Heenan family! Why didn't I put this together earlier? We dive into a radiant pool of colors, and that peaceful muffled sound washes over me, and then I'm propelled into a harsh reality. Someone is retching. It's Liam.

I get my bearings and say, "It's me! It's my family! Guys, the words that soar by..." Grace is knelt over Liam, patting him on the back. Abbie is watching the pair with a disgusted look on her face, and Makai is studying the woods that we landed by. He turns towards us and inhales sharply. He points, and we all look as he says, "It looks like a fairytale!" Standing in front of us is the most magnificent stone castle.—the gray-white stones glimmer in the sunlight like the lake lying in front of it. Pennants and tapestries adorn its beautiful masonry work.

"Where are we?" Grace asks, "or I guess when are we?"

Startled out of my reverie, I continue, "Those words that soared by! My dad told us about them!" Liam says, "Your dad told us about a sunken treasure ship." I shake my head. "No, the other part," I say, "the *Tuatha De O'Heenan's*. That's my family name!"

Makai says, "Hmm, that's right. Your dad told us about the chieftain and his castle. Do you think that's where we are?"

Abbie exclaims, "Oh, look!" There, off beyond the castle, are hundreds of flags and banners. Drums beat an upbeat

cadence, and a trumpet blasts a sharp note. She dances in a circle and shouts, "A party!" There are crowds of people gathered watching men throw enormous logs end over end. Giddy at the spectacle in front of us, she stage-whispers to me, "Men in kilts!" She claps her hands together and says, "Oh, let's go!" She takes off.



## CHAPTER 16

Playing Dress-up and meeting Amos  
& Donovan again



“Wait, Abbie! We don't know where we are,” I call after her. She ignores me. Geeze, that girl is driving me nuts. She's just more and more impulsive lately. Liam stands up and says, “I bet I could do that,” he struts off in Abbie's direction. I guess log throwing is much more interesting than the words in a magic book because Makai says, “Heh, heh, yeah, it doesn't look that hard.” He walks towards the others, “They're just throwing frickin' trees over their heads! Hey, wait up!”

Grace and I watch them make their way to the games. She says, “You know if we really are in a different time, then our clothes are going to look peculiar to the locals.” We exchange looks at one another, and I put my hands on my head and gasp, “Oh!” Grace takes off, “Guys stop. Hey, wait!” I'm so happy

that she is the fastest on the team. She quickly catches up to them. I'm nearly there.

“Oh, for goodness sake,” I hear Abbie saying.

We hide behind a stone shed. “It smells like sheep poo,” Liam says, gagging. “I think we need to change our clothes,” I say.

“How,” Abbie asks.

Makai says, “I have an idea. Follow me.”

I am standing outside the door. Sweat drips down my brow, “Hurry up,” I whisper. No one responds. “Guys?” I hear footsteps. My muscles tighten, and seriously, my heart is going to pound right out of my chest. I lightly tap on the door. It flies open!

“What do you think?” Abbie twirls in a circle and then grabs my arms pulling me into the room. She quickly closes the door. She whispers, “someone's coming.” We stand there. I realize that I'm holding my breath and jumping when there is a light tap on the door.

“Hey, let us in!” Makai says in a hushed tone. We open the door and let the boys in. They are dressed in the most ridiculous outfits that I have ever seen. They have on blouses and pouty plaid pants that end at the knee. They are in brightly colored tights, too.

I smile and say, “Wha....”

Makai puts his hand in the hair, “*phsht*, Stop.”

“But you guys look ....”

He stops me again, “No.” He shakes his head, “Nope.”

I noticed that he'd taken his glasses off.

Liam says, "We look stupid."

Grace walks out from behind the changing screen. She is stunning. The crimson velvet gown with gold embroidery hugs her slim figure. The boys gawk mouths agape. She asks, "Will you help me with the ties in the back?" In true gentleman fashion, they practically push each other over to come to her aid. She blushes and looks at the cobbled floor.

"You two, I've got it," I say. I start tying.

Abbie is wearing a close-fitting lavender gown with full skirts and long flaring sleeves. The ends of the sleeves, dress and collar are fur-lined. The warm golden tones of her hair match the intricate embroidery. She flips her hair in a satisfactory manner, then holds up a forest green dress and shoves it at me. Here put this on. As I change behind the screen, I say, "This is a pretty good idea, Makai." I step into the dress, pull it up, and put my arms through the sleeves. "Most everyone is at the games, so I thought we might be able to sneak in," Makai says, proud of himself.

Liam laughs and says, "Well, it was pretty lucky that the two guards were busy arguing over who would be the victor. It sure sounded like they were bickering over whose fantasy football league was best." Abbie steps around the screen and helps me tie up the back of the dress.

Grace says, "We were lucky that they were so caught up in it that we were able to slip by. Although, it seems that it's a bigger deal than that. It's like the person who wins will seal the fate of the kingdom."

Abbie flings her hair back and says, "Dramatic much?"

I put the necklace around my neck and say, "Well, I'm

dressed. Let's go." We stash our clothes in what we hope is a good hiding spot and head to the games. Liam smiles at me and offers to carry the book.

In the corridor, we hear someone say, "Hurry!" We all backed up against the wall as a group of women rushed past in the hallway ahead of us. One of the women is pregnant.

She appears to be in pain, and she's holding her belly. She says, "I hope the midwife gets here in time." The lady next to her says, "Let's get you to your bedchamber, milady."

Liam mouths the words midwife.

I say, "She is having a baby." His eyes open wide, and he says, "oh." We creep up a bit, and Makai looks up and down the hall, "I think it's clear. Come on! Just blend in."

We enter the hallway and turn left, back the way we came in. Ornate tapestries hang on the wall, and our footsteps are muffled due to the rugs covering the stone floor. I stop and admire one of the tapestries. It is beautiful and so colorful. There are giant hounds and a guy carrying a box. They seem to be on a journey.

Abbie nudges me, "I feel like I'm touring the museum from the other night. Let's get out of here. It's giving me the heebie-jeebies." She pulls me away. We are practically out the door when a dapperly dressed old man stops us and says, "You should be at the games, young ones like yourselves!" We all agree at once, nodding and saying how excited we are. The old man leans in and looks at me warily. He hesitates and stands there for a painfully awkward moment. He straightens abruptly, chuckles, and says, "Well, you'd better hurry, or you'll miss the good parts."

I say, "Thank you. We are going there now."

We dash out of the castle gate and make our way down to the games. It feels like someone is watching me. I look all around and see that Grace is staring. She's practically boring a hole into me.

"What?" I ask her.

"It's nothing," but she continues to gape at me.

I shrug at her questioningly.

"I'm probably just imagining things."

She looks away.

I know what she is thinking. My hand goes to the necklace, "I saw it, too," I whisper. She says, "I am certain that he was staring at that." She points to the necklace and then hurries to catch up with the others. I slow my pace and mull over what Grace said. Who was that old guy, anyway, and why was he so interested in my necklace? It's hanging around my neck, but I am holding it in my hand. I trace each gems surrounding the fire opal with my thumb, and then I stop in the center and rub the smooth opal. I am caught in a trance. I retrace the pattern with my thumb, touching all the gems circling the opal and ending in the middle. I've got to uncover the mystery of this. Of everything. I drop the necklace, and it swings back and forth across my chest. I finally lookup. My friends are way ahead of me, and there are people everywhere.

It's crowded. I push forward until I catch up with my friends. I ask, "Where are we going to find a place to watch the log toss?" Makai squints and searches for a place. Liam says, "Hey, how about here," he motions to a small opening in the crowd.

As we push our way through, Makai says, "By the way, it's called a caber toss." He flops down to the ground and sighs.



"Those logs weigh at least 175 pounds." He shoots a look at Liam. He seems a little perturbed with him. Probably for finding us a place to sit before he did.

"How do you know that?" Liam asks.

Before Makai can answer, Abbie squeezes in between the two of them. "Makai is a trivia nerd. He just knows stuff." She pats the ground next to her. "Girls, come and sit. It'll be a great view of the guys in kilts." She looks around. Her face falls. "Hey, where are the kilts?"

All the men are dressed like Makai and Liam, or they are wearing long tunics. A man holding a log is facing away from us. He lets out a huge roar and throws it end over end. The man standing behind him calls out, "Twelve o'clock. Perfect score!" The crowd erupts with cheers. A third man walks up behind them and says something to them. He turns around.

I gasp, "No, it can't be!" I scooch back and bump into someone behind me, but my feet get tangled up in my skirt, and I don't get far. "What is it?" Abbie asks. My friends are all looking at me now.

I croak out, "It's him. It's Donavon!"

They all whip their heads back towards the athletes. "Which one," Liam asks, "Where?" They all look back at me. "It's Amos, too. The guy who threw the log. That is Amos. The other one is Donovan."

Abbie says, "The time guy is Donovan?" I shake my head in confusion. Makai says, "You mean the referee, Abbie." She shoots him a look. "Whatever." I answer, "No. No, the guy who walked up behind those two. That is Donovan."

Suddenly a grizzled woman in a threadbare dress pokes her face into my group of friends and says, "Oh, lass do you fancy

him? Butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, that one. He does seem to be a sweet soul, but appearances is deceiving." She nods her head with such enthusiasm that I thought she might give herself whiplash. She stands up and starts talking to the people behind us. They don't look too happy with her and shoo her away. She walks off muttering, "Old Zillah just tells things how she sees them." We turn back to the games.

Abbie exclaims, "Oh no!"

Both Amos and Donavon are walking towards us. I'm pretty sure that both curiosity and fear hold us in our place. Amos is the first to reach us. He smiles enormously, causing his eyes to crinkle and glimmer. He is also the first to speak.

"I see that you met our Zillah." His accent is adorable. He seems happier than when I last met him. I'm going to have to revoke his Mr. Grumpy card. Donavon is standing next to him. If his brother is the embodiment of joy, then he is his opposite. His expression is cold and dark. It is as if all the warmth has been sucked out of him. He starts to speak English but maybe Gaelic. I have a hard time understanding him.

"She always seems to come out of the shadows and tingle your ears with her opinions and advice."

Amos looks at us kindly and adds, "Don't be alarmed. She is harmless. She just wishes to find a friend." His expression changes ever so slightly. "You look as if you've seen a specter?" Donovan is staring at us warily. In a thick Irish brogue, he says, "I don't recall any of your faces. From what parts do you hail?" Makai licks his lips, sits up straighter, and says, "We come from a distant land, sir."

Donovan continues to eye us. "And a Moor among you." He shoots his brother a sour look. "Your clothes are fine, and your faces are exotic. What secrets do you hide?" He looks at

his brother like he is something to be scraped off his shoe. Amos puts his hands on Donovan's shoulders and squeezes. He erupts in joyful laughter.

"Little brother, must you always be so gloomy and suspicious? Do not pester our guests. Let them enjoy the games. Today is for festivities and celebrations. That is why we stand before you. Welcome, my friends." He playfully shakes his brother and then pats him on the back and leaves us.

Donovan lingers but says nothing. It's a chilly day, but I start to sweat. He continues to stare at us. I shift uncomfortably. Before he turns to leave, he smiles, but it doesn't reach his eyes. Zillah is suddenly beside me again.

"Eyes just like yours, lass, eyes just like yours."

"Zillah, what are you talking about?" I demand.

"I says things how I sees them, Zillah does."

Grace leans in and says, "Whose eyes, Zillah?"

She answers with a question of her own, "Can you not see the child's eyes are the same?" And just like that, she gets up and leaves to impart her wisdom elsewhere. I call after her, "Wait, Zillah! Please, come back." I get up and follow her. My friends trail behind me. "My dear, you know the answer. I see it in your eyes," she says to me and melts into the crowd.

"I think I saw her going into the woods over there," Liam says. We follow the well-worn path into the woods but can't find her anywhere. "I give up," Abbie says. She gives Makai an annoyed look when he says, "Shh!" We all stand still. The sound of crunching leaves and voices drift our way. "I think it came from over there," Makai whispers and points.

We try our best to creep over to the voices quietly. I guess it

works because I practically walk right into Donavon and Amos. Someone grabs me by the elbow and pulls me back. I turn and see Zillah with her finger on her lips. We all crouch down and eavesdrop on the two brothers.

Donavon is saying, "I know that you proposed to Branwen! The elders are here. Those children prove it!" He begins pacing, crunching leaves and twigs beneath his feet. "I talked to my adviser. We agree that you cheat and lie. He told me to confront you. You dishonor the clans!" Amos answers, "Atticus Rimeaux is right in that you should speak to me. Donavon, why did you not come to me first?" Donovan moves in quickly. He is right up in his brother's face, but Amos doesn't even flinch and says, "Lies and rumors are circling about me. The first is that Branwen and I stole away and were married in secret, and the other is that I have bribed my way to an assured win." Donovan somehow moves in even closer and sneers at his brother. I notice something shimmering in his hand.

I gasp and whisper, "He's got a dagger."

Zillah shushes me as the two glance in my direction. That's all Amos needs. He quickly disarms his brother and shoves him away. "I am not the liar or cheat in this family, little brother. I am not the one shaming our clan." Donovan roars and charges in again but stops short and looks at the knife now in his brother's hand. His whole body is shaking as he yells, "I heard you! I saw you that day in the clearing with Branwen!" Neither of them says anything for a moment. They stand there glaring at one another, but then Donavon slowly moves towards Amos.

He whispers, "I was there."

I lean in, straining to hear. Suddenly, Amos howls with laughter and startles me. I fall onto my backside. He throws the knife into the ground at his feet and manages to say through

his laughter, "Always sneaking and stalking in the shadows. You never change, little brother. You just follow me around wishing to be me." Donavon begins circling his brother and says, "You arrogant fool! I have put measures in place to stop you."

Amos steps forward and grabs his brother's shoulders, keeping him at arm's length away by sheer strength. "Oh, what have you done this time, my contemptible baby brother? You always think you can manage everyone's life better than they can. How many times am I going to have to clean up your messes?" Then, oddly he pulls his brother in and gives him a great big bear hug. I look at Zillah, and she shrugs. Amos whispers something into his brother's ear. I think I hear him say, "I love you." Whatever he said, it freaks Donovan out enough that he wriggles out of his brother's arms and sprints away.

We wait in the woods until Amos leaves. Abbie, of course, is the first to break our silence.

"Oh, my word! That was intense."  
I sigh and stretch my legs.

Zillah stands up and says, "I must go."

I grab her elbow this time and say, "Tell me about my eyes." She hesitates and looks deep into my eyes. She finally says, "Golden amber is very rare. And bless me, it protects from harm! Surely, you saw that yours mirror his. It comes from only one bloodline; it does!" I swallow hard and say, "Amos." She nods furiously. "I must go," she says again and fades away into the forest. As we watch her disappear, my courage seems to go with her. "Well, that confirms it. You are their kinfolk then," Makai says.

Near us, a bird cries out. It startles me. I am jumpy and on edge, like when I haven't had enough sleep but have had too much caffeine. Then, echoing in the distance, someone in the

woods sings, *"A raven's song! A raven's song! Harbinger of powerful secrets, thoughts, memories, foreboding! A raven's song! A raven's song!"* My nerves are frayed. Thankfully, my friends and I huddle together, calming me just a little.

"What exactly was that?" Liam asks.

We are sufficiently freaked out, now scanning the woods looking for the voice. A way off, I see amongst the trees, instead of leaves and sticks littering the ground, there are hundreds of purple flowers.

"It was probably just Zillah," Grace says.

I break my gaze with the flowers and agree with her, but I turn back to the flowers and mumble, "That's odd." My curiosity gets the best of me, and I break away from the group and head that way. It's colder over here. I can see my breath. I shiver. Abbie is by my side, "So, what are you doing?"

I keep walking. "Look at those flowers. Isn't it weird that they're there?" "Mmm-huh, weird purple flowers in the middle of a creepy forest." She shivers. She puts her arm around my shoulder. "Come on, let's get out of the freaky-woods as quick as we can!" I try to pull away. I say, "But...I wanted to...hey stop yanking on my sleeve." She pulls me back to our friends. They surround me and herd me out of there before I do something stupid. We wander back through the throngs of people. They are even more joyous than before. "What happened?" I ask a random lady on my left.

She replies, "He did it! Amos has won the games!" Suddenly, loud blaring trumpets blast, and just as suddenly, they stop. It gets very quiet. A man starts speaking, "Today, Amos of the clan O'Heenan has won my daughter's hand in marriage!" The crowd raises a deafening applause. The noise slowly dies down. The man continues, "He is a strong warrior from a powerful family, and I will be proud to call him son!"

There is a moment of silence, then the people way in front of us cheer. We are too far away, so we can't see what's happening, but someone near us says, "He kissed her!" The cheers come in waves as the news travels further back. The man announces triumphantly, "The wedding will be held in three days!" And just like that, we are in the middle of a party.

"I've never seen anything like this."

All around me, people are cheering, dancing, laughing, and singing in an enthusiastic celebration. We jostle our way through the crowd. There is feasting and drinking everywhere—lots of drinking. Liam picks up a mug; before he can take a drink, he notices Grace. She is giving him a disapproving look. He smiles sheepishly and dumps out the contents. We walk by some guy playing with fire. We stop and watch for a while. He is juggling lit torches. Then he swallows fire and blows it out of his mouth like a dragon. "That's probably a terrible idea with all this alcohol being consumed," Liam says.

At least, I think that's what he says because I can barely hear him with all the noise. Behind us, musicians are singing and playing instruments. We make our way to the food. The feast is in a huge white tent decorated with heather, daffodils, roses, and multicolored bunting. We stop. Right outside the entrance, there is a large group of ladies lining the tent. They are belly dancing.

Abbie exclaims, "Oh, how fun!" Grace starts laughing. I turn to see that Abbie and the boys are mimicking the dancers. "Sure, why not," I say as I try it out. I bust out laughing as Makai mixes in his best dance moves along with belly dancing. We are trendsetters. More people join in the fun.

Big burly men, skinny little women, and children shake their hips and twirl to the music. The men are giddy and giggling. The women are guffawing. The children are squealing with delight as the grownups make fools of themselves. We laugh it

up, dancing as we go inside. It's louder inside the tent than outside. There is a table that is raised on a platform. I think it must be the most powerful clans at the celebration. I see that both Amos and Donavon are up there. Their plates are overflowing. I have never seen so much food. I think the feast is meant to last until the wedding.

Liam says, "Let's get some food. I'm starving." "So, how does this work?" I ask Makai. He looks around and shrugs, "I guess, just do what everyone is doing." Grace says, "It looks like the important people are waited on and the rest of us help ourselves."

We get in line behind a man eating a turkey leg. He turns to us and, with a greasy smile, giggles and says, "This is my third time through." As he turns back around, he pats his rotund belly and dreamily says, "Oh, I do love the games!" There is so much food, meats, cheese, fruit, and pies.

Abbie says, "Gross! What is that?" and points at something on the table. I look over her shoulder. Makai leans in and says, "I think it's some kind of green fish stew." I think I see tentacles bobbing around in the goo. Abbie looks so disgusted that I laugh. She rolls her eyes at me.

Makai points at a roasted pig with an apple in its mouth and says, "Look, I think it's wild boar." Its eyes stare back at me. I'm pretty sure that I can't eat things that look back at me. "Awesome," Liam says and looks back at us, points at a pie on the table, "Try the venison pie. It's perfect." I kind of smile back at him and put a little on my plate, but search for the turkey. We find a place in the corner to sit down and eat. "Did you try the goose?" Grace asks the boys. Makai points to something on his plate. I assume it's the goose. He says, "It's so good." Liam's plate is nearly empty already.

I'm pretty sure Abbie hasn't eaten anything and doesn't plan to. I turn back to Liam. He is looking at the platform with all



the important people. He catches my eye and sort of nods in the direction of Donovan. I look over and see that he and his advisor are hunched over, discussing something quite angrily. Then, abruptly, they leave the table together.

Liam mouths to me, "Let's go." but he says to everyone else, "I'm going to go for seconds." I jump up and follow him and hastily say, "Uhm, yeah. Me too." I glance back to see them shrugging at me. Abbie has that look on her face like she is about to embarrass me. I hesitate. She looks at me, grins, and motions for me to get going. I sigh and look down at my plate. It's completely full.

My friends are laughing now. I look at them, and Makai has that same look Abbie has. I awkwardly take off in Liam's direction. Ugh, seriously, Abbie is on my last nerve. As I walk away, I set my plate of food down on the nearest empty space. I'm not hungry anyway. Then, I nearly run into the well-dressed older man from earlier today. "Oh, pardon me, sir," I say.

He flashes a charming smile and says, "The fault is all mine." I weave through the crowd and run into the heavy-set man who loves weddings. "Oh, pardon me," he says. I feel like a pinball in the machine as I practically run into everyone in my search for Liam.



## CHAPTER 17

Kissing my crush, did he steal my necklace



“Hey, over here,” Liam stage whispers to me. I finally find him lurking behind a couple of barrels and sacks of something. “What are...” I start to say, but he shushes me. He whispers, “listen.” Not too far away from us, Donovan is nervously pacing back and forth.

He says, “I do not think that I can do what you suggest needs to be done, Rimeaux. My brother...” He hesitates. Finally, he says, “We spoke earlier. I may not always agree with him, but I don't think he's actually against me or a cheat.” Rimeaux glides in front of him.

“This is the time to be strong.” He crosses his arms over his chest and says, “Don't waver. Why do you think you always come in last when you are up against him?” Donovan stops pacing. He rubs his jawline, seemingly deep in thought. He

opens his mouth to speak. Rimeaux stops him by pointing his index and middle fingers at his head and taps on his temple, saying, "Think about it," Then he crosses his arms again, leans in, and states matter-of-factly, "Your father favors him."

Donavon sighs heavily and starts pacing again.

I have a hard time understanding Rimeaux. He says, "Pray tell, you know this to be true. He loves him the most. Donovan, you told me so yourself. I've seen this myself. Hearken back to when we were mere children? He would off' choose Amos's side."

Donovan shakes his head angrily. Through clenched teeth, he says, "I am vexed with the world, Atticus." He storms off, fleeing from his friend or maybe from the world. Atticus Rimeaux slinks off after him. "Donovan might need anger management classes," I say to Liam. He shakes his head and says, "You think? Before you got here, he and his buddy basically declared war against the clans." I raise my eyebrows, "Oh my word, seriously?" "Uhm, yeah." I scrunch up my face at him.

"No, really, Donovan feels jilted by his dad, his brother, and Branwen for some reason even though he doesn't love her like Amos does, but he does want the power that comes with marrying her." We sit there for a moment in silence when we hear Rimeaux's voice coming closer to our hiding spot. "What an insufferable fool." Liam reaches up and pulls me closer to him and says, "Uhm, sorry..."

He kisses me!

I don't have time to be shocked because Rimeaux quickly turns the corner and stops in front of us. I quickly kiss Liam back. We've got to make it believable, right? He stares at us for what feels like an eternity. "Ah, what have we here?" He walks away and sighs, "Young love." I push away from Liam. We are

lost for words. Liam finally says, “Hmm, now that I'm thinking about it, Donavon has a massive chip on his shoulder about everyone and everything.”

I feel like I'm going to explode inside. Liam just kissed me, and here he is, acting like nothing happened. Oh, my word, am I that bad of a kisser? Ugh, play it cool. So, I nod and say, “And I don't think his buddy/adviser, whatever he is, is helping much with that chip. If anything, he is encouraging it.” Liam tilts his head sideways and sort of just stares at me. He finally says, “Yeah, Rimeaux was really pushy about Donovan's dad not liking him. Let's tell the others what we just heard.”

Relieved, I nod my head. I don't want to be alone with Liam any longer. This awkwardness is killing me. Liam helps me up, and we head back to our friends. I decide that I am telling no one about what just happened. It's just way too embarrassing. We find them outside the tent sitting in front of a campfire. Amos is with them. He says to me, “Hello, lass.” He nods at Liam and says, “Laddie” We both smile and greet him.

Abbie's eyes are shining, and her face is flushed. “Amos has been telling us all about the upcoming wedding party. He says the troubadours and minstrels are the best around, and there will be dancing!” She smells the pretty purple flower in her hand and says, “And the bride and groom will be adorned in Bell Heather.” Amos grins at Abbie and says, “Fraoch Cloigíneach is Branwen's favorite flower.” He smiles even bigger, and his face lights up. He must be thinking about Branwen.

Suddenly, I am very aware of Liam sitting across from me, and I blush. I give a quick sideways look at him to see if he noticed. He didn't. Everyone is focused on Amos. Relief washes over me. Amos says, “Like her, it is blessed with the gifts of strength, fragrance, and sweetness.” Grace smiles and holds up her flower and says, “It's good luck, too.” She hands it to me.

It smells beautiful—the fire crackles. The smoke from the burning logs wafts up into the night sky. The aroma of the flowers and the campfire takes me home. It smells an awful lot like my mom's favorite candle. It wraps me in comfort, and for a moment, I forget that I am lifetimes away from home. “Please excuse me. I must be going,” Amos' voice breaks the silent reverie. He gets up and leaves us. When he is gone, Liam and I fill everyone in on Donovan's little temper tantrum. Of course, we both leave out our escapades. Makai muses, “Apparently, he hasn't changed over the centuries.” I nod, remembering the first time I met him.

Grace looks up at the nearly full moon and says, “It's late. Think we should go home?” Everyone nods. Makai says, “I have the book.” I reach for the necklace but stop. I hear Abbie laugh loudly, and then a group of people join in. We all look in the direction of the laughter. Abbie is absorbed in the festivities. She has joined a group of dancers and has attracted the attention of several men. It was my turn to save her from doing something stupid, so I joined in the dance. I have no idea what I am doing and end up stepping on some guy's foot and trip over some lady's dress. “Sorry.”

I get shot a bunch of annoyed looks. I sidle up to her and hook my elbow inside hers, pulling her towards our friends. We all surround her and walk quickly away. Abbie has the giggles, and I have to hold her up. She keeps stumbling over every little thing. She turns to me. “Oh, what a beautiful night. So much fun!” Then she makes a high-pitched squeal sound. We stop and gape at her. The boys giggle, and Grace looks concerned. I'm miffed and say crankily, “Abbie, you didn't!” Her countenance changes in a flash, and the same tone that I had just used with her, she says, “No!” She looks at each of us individually, horrified and disapprovingly, “I can't believe that you thought I was drinking. I was just really caught up in the moment.” Our joyful moment is squashed. We walked back to the castle in silence.

The room where we stashed our things is still empty, luckily. "I'm so glad I can wear my glasses in here," Makai says. Grace adds, "I cannot wait to put my comfy sweater back on." I pull the rest of our things out of the cubby hole and say, "Me too." I look around at everyone and say, "I think we all are."

There is a knock on the door. We freeze. Makai yanks his glasses off of his face. No one moves. *Bang, bang, bang.* There it is again. I gulp and walk to the door. As I get closer, I hear a muffled voice. Before I open the door, I turn back and motion for the boys to hide behind the screen. I don't want to get in trouble for having them in the room with us.

Grace says, "Wait, Kalea!"

She takes the bundle of clothes that I have shoved under my arm. I smooth out my dress and pull my shoulders back, straightening up. I grab the door handle and slowly turn it and crack open the door. A young girl greets me about my age. I raise an eyebrow and say, "Yes." She curtsies and says, "Our laird hopes you and your companions are comfortable for the night. Is there anything m'lady needs?" I quickly shake my head, "No, hmm-uhh. Thank you. That is very kind."

I shut the door, fall back onto it, and breathe deeply. Makai and Liam poke their heads out from behind the screen. Grace says, "How does he know we are in here?" Makai flops down into a straight-back chair and says, "Better yet, who is the laird?"

Liam is standing at the window gazing at the moonlit landscape. He turns towards me and says, "Let's go home." I reach for the necklace, but it is missing!

"Wait! No. No. No.

My necklace. It's gone! It's missing!" I exclaim!

Abbie says, "It can't be."

Liam is staring at my chest. He chuckles nervously, blushes, and says, "Do you think it fell into your dress?"

My face is burning, and I know I am blushing, too. I choose not to focus on it, and I say, "That's not a bad idea. Grace, Abbie, help me out of this thing." As I walk towards the changing screen, I notice that Makai looks sick, and he is mumbling to himself. I'm beginning to wonder if we are all going crazy. It feels like I have rocks in the pit of my stomach. I say, "I really hope it fell into my dress because we have got to get home."

Home. Gosh, I want to talk to mom. Oh, yeah. I stop walking. I remember the text I got from her before we used the book, and the rocks in my stomach started jumping around. Grace is saying something to me. I open my eyes. I didn't realize I had closed them. I say, "Yeah, I'm fine. Untie the back, wouldya?" I step behind the screen. Grace and Abbie both work on the knots. "Seriously, Grace, why did you use knots," Abbie says. Grace retorts back, "You helped." They struggle for a while. Makai says, "The suspense is killing me." Liam adds, "He looks like crap. I think it actually is."

I feel the dress loosen, and Abbie says, "Finally." I search the inside of the dress. Abbie and Grace search as well. I say, "Nothing. It's not here!" My hands are shaking. I think I might puke now. "Where could it be?" I ask. Abbie and Grace look like they are both going to cry. Grace laments, "We are stuck here." I quickly put my jeans, t-shirt hoodie, and flannel back on and helped the other two out of their dresses. We hang them over the screen. The boys changed while we worked with the knots in our dresses. Abbie jumps onto the bed and sits crossed-legged leaning against the pillows.

She motions for us to join her, "Let's figure this out," she

says. So, we all crawl onto the bed, huddle together, and retrace my steps. Makai says, "I bet it was that creepy old woman. She probably snatched it when we were in the forest."

Grace says, "I don't know Makai. That old guy from earlier seemed pretty interested in her necklace." Liam says, "Sure, but what about that weirdo Donovan? He just stood there staring at Kalea for like a really long time." I say, "But he didn't run up and snatch it off me in front of everyone, though. Did he Liam? You don't think that Rimeaux took it when...well, you know." Liam looks away and mumbles that he doesn't think so.

Abbie hones in on our awkwardness and says, "When what?" I clam up. She gives me *googley* eyes. I still don't say. Grace rescues Liam and me by changing the subject. Judging by the look, she shoots me, I'm pretty sure she did it for Liam's sake and not mine. "Let's search the room. We haven't done that yet."

"Guys, This is a lost cause. It's not here," says Makai. I try to distance myself from my friends. I feel like such a screw-up. I've lost the necklace and been humiliated by my kissing skills. The others are busy hunting other parts of the room, so I find a little nook in the corner where I can sulk for a while. I am out of everyone's line of view. I know that I won't find anything here, but I scour it anyway. "Just keep looking," Liam announces.

Ugh, Liam. Think about something else. I wish I could confide in my mom. She'd understand. Well, maybe not. Both she and Auntie have been acting peculiar lately. Peculiar. Yeah, add Abbie to that list, too. She's been so moody lately. And Makai and his headaches. I think we all need a break. Once we find the necklace and get home, I'm going to chuck it in the ocean. I rummage through a wooden chest. I pull out an old book. It's mainly painted pictures, but there is some writing. Although, I can't read it because it's in a foreign language. It is beautiful. I turn the page, and a small metal disk with random



holes all over it falls out onto my lap. I wonder what this is? Makai wanders over to my hiding spot and sits down by me.

“Hey, look at this,” I show him the disk. He puts it up in the air and studies it. “You know, I think this goes inside a music box, but they aren't invented until the 1700s.” I take it from him. Makai would know stuff like that. “What's odd about it,” he says as he pushes up his glasses, “is that it's really old.” I look at it closer. “What?” He is in his element now. He points at the disk. “You see this dark blue-green kinda brownish patina?” I nod. “That's how you can tell it is aged. I think it's bronze.” He took it from me again and kind of shook it in his hand. He gave it back. “Here. Feel that. It's fairly hard and heavy.” He thumps it with his hand as he talks. “Bronze is usually an alloy of copper and tin. And I think that's what you've got right there.”

I playfully ram my shoulder into his and say, “You nerd.” We laugh, and then he says, “Don't blame yourself for the necklace, okay? We'll find it in the morning.” Wrapping him in a bear hug, I say, “Thank you, Makai. How'd you know I was pouting?” He grins at me. “Kalea, we are best friends. I've known you my entire life. I totally know when you're upset. Speaking of things, I know,” He lowers his voice. “I know you kissed Liam.”

I blush. I feel my face burning. I start to ramble. “Technically, he kissed me, and it was just so the evil guy wouldn't catch us eavesdropping on him and Donovan. Judging by the look on Liam's face, I'm a crummy kisser, anyway.” Whew, I feel better just telling that to someone else. Makai laughs. “I doubt it. Come on. Everyone's calling it a night.” I decide to keep the book and disk.



## CHAPTER 18

Finding clues and meeting Cookie



I shake my head. “I’m not sure. Super early, I guess. We’ve got to get going. Go wake the boys up, okay.” She stretches and says, “Okay.” I watch her go to the other side of the room near the fireplace where the boys made pallets on the floor. It was so cold by the time we went to bed last night that they opted to sleep over there. I turn to Abbie. “Hey, time to get up.” She mumbles something and rolls over. I shake her this time. “Abbie, get up.” She pulls the covers over her head. Ugh. “Hey, get up!” I shove her. I knew she’d be hard to wake up, so I put my cold hands on her face and neck.

“*Ack!* What are you doing?” She sits straight up, and her eyes flash with annoyance. “It’s morning. We gotta go look for the necklace. Get up.” I take the blankets away from her. She throws her pillow at me. I stick my tongue out at her and walk

away, making sure she can't reach the blankets. She growls at me and gets out of bed.

We are all awake now. I'm not sure if anyone slept at all. I know I didn't. I am too freaked out about being stranded here and all the other crazy stuff happening in my life.

"It's freezing in here," Abbie says as she stuffs her feet inside her shoes. The others come over and sit on the bed. They are already in their medieval clothes. "Good morning," Makai says to Abbie and me. "How did you two sleep?" I ask. "Terrible," Liam and Makai say in unison. "Ya, me too," I say. "Well, at least you had a bed," Makai grumps. "True," I say. Before we all get grouchy with each other, I add, "Let's start searching. Makai, grab the book." I pick up the disk and book that I found last night and walk to the door. I stop and glance behind me. They are slow-moving, but they are headed my way. I don't blame them for being mad at me.

We find that the castle is all aflutter. People are scurrying around everywhere. Liam catches up with me matching my stride. "I guess they are all morning people," I chuckle, "Yeah, I guess so." We stop in the middle of a great hall. I am so caught up in people watching that I'm shocked when I look around. "Where are we?"

I take it all in. The ceilings are as tall as a three-story building. There are at least twelve beautifully carved columns holding up the ceiling. Set back about five feet and framed perfectly between the columns are enormous stained glassed windows that shine in the morning sun like glistening jewels. The servants are putting up a garland of evergreen and those pretty purple flowers that Amos talked about last night.

They are on ladders hanging it in between the columns. It's stunning. Grace says, "They must be getting ready for the wedding."

To my right, near the windows, I hear, "No dallying, Hazell!

The chieftains of all five clans will be here soon. Bless my soul! All five!" It's the girl from last night and an older lady. They are rushing off to someplace. The girl is about two steps behind the other.

"Come on. Come on," the lady says.

I look at those spectacular windows again. You know, those windows remind me of something. I need a closer look. My friends follow me. Abbie says, "Hey, these windows look like your necklace." I have to lean back to see them. They are much bigger than I thought. I nod. "I think you are on to something." Right in the middle of the window, there is a creamy iridescent color, and surrounding it are the four colors of the stones, just like the necklace. That's not all that's there, though. Makai says, "Look at this; there are scenes played out on every window!"

The one we are looking at has two sad birds watching a massive group of people. I can't tell what they are doing or if they are going somewhere.

Liam says, "Hey, look at this one." I go over and see that it's five feathers with writing under each feather. The writing matches the book that I found last night. Makai is with the girls down at the first window. They are motioning for us to come over. Grace says, "This one shows the bird couple with one of the gems from the necklace! They are pouring something over it." I look closely at it. There is also a picture of someone sleeping.

"Weird," I say aloud.

Everyone is examining a different window. Abbie says, "This one has the same birds, but with a different gem and picture." Liam hollers, "Same here!" He is on the other side of the room, studying the windows over there. In all, we found five gems. I am a little disappointed because the fire opal isn't

unique. It was the same as the others, except the person depicted was standing near a river. Amos walks up behind us while we are looking at the stained glass.

“Beautiful, aren't they?” I jump. Geeze, this guy is everywhere. “Yes, they are. The whole room is.” His face lights up with a smile, and his eyes do the smile crinkles like my mom's do. “It's the O'Heenen clan castle, my dear. We spare no expense. I am happy to see you and your friends enjoying it. Did you sleep well?” Ah, he's the laird, duh. I answer, “Yes, thank you, sir.” My friends gather around. Amos says, “Please enjoy my hospitality. If you are in search of things to do, may I suggest that you visit the family chapel or explore the gardens? Have you eaten? I dare say, probably not. Just ask Cook to prepare you a meal. I must leave now. There is so much to do before the wedding.”

We all thank him. As he turns to leave, he says, “I am looking for my brother Donovan. If you see him, please tell him so.” And with that, he strides away. We watch him as he leaves. He stops and looks up at the garland. “Carrick, Conner marvelous job, lads!” He hurries off to the next thing. “Let's get breakfast. I'm starving.” Liam heads off in a random direction. “Uhm, dude, do you even know where the kitchen is?” Makai yells after him. Liam retorts back, “Well, do you know?”

I can tell the boys are about to start bickering, and I'm hungry, too. I didn't eat much last night. I go over to the two guys that Amos had spoken to. “Pardon me, but could you tell me how to get to the kitchen?” They both are about my age. The older of the two answers, “Take that hallway there.”

He points behind us. “Go all the way to the end and take a right and then an immediate left. I should warn you, though, that Cookie has a bit of a temper; she does.” The other guy starts nodding. “She threw a pan at me once!”

Oh great, just what we need. "It still had boiling water in it!" I grimace and say, "Thank you for the directions and the warning. Hey guys, this way." I make my way to the hallway, and my friends follow. Abbie is at my side. She says, "I'm sure food will help us be less hangry with one another." I nod. "Yeah, I'm pretty hungry. It'll do me good."

I glance behind me. Grace and Liam are laughing about something one of them just said. Makai has stopped and is admiring one of the paintings on the wall. Abbie sighs loudly. "I think that after breakfast, we should retrace our steps from yesterday and find that stupid necklace. I am ready to go home." I say, "But I thought you were having a good time."

Her lips are tightly pursed, and she blows air out, making a rude sound. "Sure, it's been exciting and all, but I don't want to be stuck here. Jordan could be texting me!" We make it to the end of the long hall. "Turn here." We walk through the doorway. "I heard him. And we turn left, now," Abbie says. The room is exploding with activity and noise. A voice barks out orders over the banging pots and pans, then suddenly, a group of people scurries. When they scatter, I see in front of me the biggest stone fireplace I have ever seen. I can't believe I didn't see it when I walked in. It's got to be the size of the room, and a guy is spinning several whole deer over the fire.

"How can he stand so close?" Grace and Liam are beside me. Grace adds, "I know; I can feel the heat of it way over here." I shrug and look around for Cookie. I find a short red-faced lady bustling around the room. She stops in front of a bunch of carrots and begins chopping. "I think I found Cookie." She locks eyes with me and frowns. "What are you doing in my kitchen! Out. Out with the lot of you." She waves the knife in the direction of the door. "Uhm, well, Amos said that we should ask you to fix us breakfast." "Oh, he did, did he?" Her face turns a deeper shade of red, almost purple.

I'm eying the quickest exit strategy. I bet if I run behind

that group of people, they would create a screen for me, and I could make it through that open door leading outside. I mean, she looks like she is about to hit the roof. She puts the knife down slowly and inspects me like one of her dishes. She places her hands on her hips and opens her mouth, but before she can say anything, Liam flashes her a huge smile and walks towards her.

“Amos told us that no one in the world makes better eggs than you. And that your sausages are to die for! I told him that there was no way. She couldn't possibly be better than my Grammy, but he said to me; obviously, you have never had my Cookie's food.” Her expression softens just a bit. Then, her eyes twinkle, and she smiles fondly. “I am his Cookie. I've known that child since he was in short pants. He's like me own son, that one.” She motions for us to sit at the table in the far corner. “Nothing like your Grammy's, ha! Dear child, sit there. I'll show you that there is nothing like Cook's food.”

We sit, and she busies herself cracking eggs and frying sausages. The room already smells good, but when she begins frying food, my stomach starts to rumble. We sit in silence, waiting for our food, each of us immersed in our thoughts, hungry, tired, and homesick. At that moment, I felt like a lost little kid. All the stuff that has happened to me the last few days that I had neatly packed away and hidden in the deep recesses of my brain slam into the forefront of my mind, and for the life of me, I can't push it back. I struggle to breathe. I suddenly feel claustrophobic in the dress that I am wearing. I gasp for air. I close my eyes childishly, believing my friends can't see me now. When my eyelids close, the tears that pooled up in my eyes rush down my cheek. I wipe them quickly away with the back of my hand.

“Hey, Kalea.” Abbie hugs me. I push away. “This is my fault. It's not like I don't know that.” I open my eyes and see my friends staring at me with goofy looks. I guess they're concerned about me. I look down at the table, unable to look

at them. Thankfully, I am saved by Cookie. She brings five plates of food to us. She pulls up a chair and waits expectantly for us to take our first bites. The plate of food looks amazing. Liam tucks into his meal first.

“Cookie, Amos is right! This is better than my Grammy's breakfast.” She leans forward and pats him on the cheek. “Such a handsome boy and smart too. You know what's good.” She watches us a little longer. I grin at her appreciatively. She looks away at the boys. “The way you tucked into my food has made my day. So nice.” She stands up and pats Liam on the cheek again for good measure. “Such a good boy.” She looks over at me again. “You put me to mind of someone. Whom did you say you were again?” I clear my throat, sit up, and glance at her. “My name is Kalea.”

I quickly slouch again and look away. My eyes keep getting me into trouble. I don't want to risk it again. Cook scratches her head and folds her arms in front of her. I guess it worked. “I rightly haven't heard such a pretty name, Kalea.” She says my name like she was testing it out. “Oh, that's enough lolly-gagging. There's so much to do before the wedding!” She lingers a moment longer, staring at me, then takes off in the direction of her pots and pans. “She isn't so bad,” Grace says.

Makai slaps Liam on the back and says, “Thanks to Liam.” He stands up and says, “Yeah, I was pretty awesome, wasn't I?” We collectively roll our eyes at him. Abbie leans over the table and punches him in the arm. “Ouch!” Liam frowns at Abbie. Not knowing what to do with our plates, we leave them on the table and decide to exit through the back door that I saw earlier. We weave our way through staff, making sure not to get in the way.





# CHAPTER 19

## The assembly of the ancients



“Look, it's just not here. We've searched everywhere,” Abbie says. She looks as defeated as I feel. We have looked at all the places we were in yesterday and found nothing. Judging by the sun, it's probably mid-afternoon. We are in the garden now, sitting under a giant palm tree. Grace says, “I don't think we are going to find it.” Liam grunts, “Thanks for the pep talk.” I agree with Grace. “I think we might be looking in the wrong places.”

Grace nods her head. Makai stops picking bark off the tree. “You know I think you two are right. We need to think about this differently.” Grace says, “Exactly, it's not a question of where it is, but who has it?” Makai finishes her sentence, “Because the necklace isn't lost. It's been stolen.” Abbie sniffs and clears her throat. “Well, that means it could be anywhere by now. We were with so many people yesterday.”

Liam picks up some type of green fruit off the ground and starts peeling it. "Not necessarily." Abbie shakes her head and shoots him a look. Obviously, she disagrees. Liam continues, "Donovan seemed interested in her necklace."

He smashes the fruit on a rock revealing the flesh inside. The boys study the fruit. Makai says, "Interesting; it's a date." I look up at the tree again, "Wait, we are in Ireland, not California. There are date palms here?" We all look up at the tree when a rumble with a slight accent says, "It's a lovely specimen, isn't it?"

An older man with deep umber skin, almost the color of coffee beans, is walking toward us. His goatee, black flecked with gray, is perfectly trimmed. On top of his head is a turban with a white feather sticking out from the folds. He is wearing a blue velvet robe adorned with golden filigree. Under the robe, he wears a burgundy tunic. The tiny delicate flowers on the tunic's collar match the bottom of his sleeves and hem of his robe. He is wearing sandals and is using a walking stick. His voice is amazing. It is a deep bass that resonates through the air. His presence is calming. I only heard one sentence but, I think I could listen to him all day. His kind eyes smile as he sits down next to us under the palm tree.

"May I?" We all nod that it's OK for him to sit down. "I am Masego. Are you here for the wedding, too?" I answer him. "Yes, we are here for the wedding." Then I ask, "You must have traveled a long way to get here?" He smiles. "Every time I visit my kin, I must come to the garden and sit under this palm. It reminds me of home. And yes, I did journey a great distance, but I would never miss the games, and my attendance is required for the wedding." I smile back and say, "I'm Kalea, and these are my friends, Grace, Liam, Abbie, and Makai." Each smile or waves when I say their names.

He follows along and says, "I feel as if I know you, but I

have not met you before. You must be kin as well.” He looks from Makai and then to me. I shrug and say, “maybe.”

He stops studying my friends and me and looks up at the tree. He seems to be focused on the cluster of dates hanging from its fronds. Then he says, “Many years ago, this tree was a gift to Amos and Donovan's great-great-grandfather, Efron. Efron's father, Aapo, and mother, Abria, gave it to him. It was one of the parting gifts symbolizing health and fertility to their branch of the family.” He stops speaking and continues to observe Makai. I'm not sure Makai likes being examined so intently. He's fidgety. Being my smart know-it-all friend, he says, “so the tree must be a couple of centuries-old, then.”

I have an idea, but before I can say anything, Liam blurts out, “This is Ireland. How exactly does a date tree grow here?” Our new friend's attention is now drawn to Liam. He smiles at him. “It is quite curious that it thrives here.” His eyes twinkle. “It is rumored to have magical qualities.” Liam nods his head in agreement and says, “I believe it.” He picks up a fig and examines it closely like he thinks it's going to sprout in his hand or something. I clear my throat and voice my hunch, “The other gift, it was a gem, right?”

He nods. If he was surprised, he didn't show it. He asks, “Are you kids familiar with our family lore?” Makai speaks up, “You mean the bitter song of the Sparrow? I've heard a little of it.” We all look at him in disbelief. Abbie quickly asks him, “Where did you hear that?” He seems uncomfortable yet again, and he looks at me for help. I just shrug. I don't know what he's talking about. He sees that I'm not going to be any help and says, “Doesn't matter. I'm pretty sure I've heard pieces of it.”

I narrow my eyes at him. What is he not telling us? Gosh, he's being uncharacteristically vague. Masego, the guy with a voice as smooth as butter says, Aapo and Abria were great scientists; some would say wizards; They were masters of the

elements. It begins with them.

He gestures at me and says, "The book. May I see it?" I panic. He wants the book. We will never get home if I give it to him. What am I going to do? I rack my brain for a solution when he leans up and takes the book sitting beside me. He opens it, and the disk falls out. He hands it to me. "This must be yours." I have never been so relieved. He wanted to look at the book that I found in our room. I notice that Makai is now sitting on our book. So, I wasn't the only one freaked out by his request.

Masego says, "It is surprising that you have this book yet have never heard the story. You see, each of the five was given a copy." Then he looks up and says, "Yes, along with a tree and a gem. And a gift is only known to the clan leader." He clears his throat and continues, "It is written in the ancient language of our ancestors. I can only decipher a few words, but I don't need to read it to recite it. My father would often tell me the story." He starts speaking in another language. I can't figure it out. It sounds harsh to my ears. It doesn't sound all flowery or romantic like Señor Lancaster does in my required Spanish class. Translating, he says,

*"Sparrows take flight and learn to thrive  
as brilliant gems that are alive  
run and flee they must survive  
Woe to those who chase the five  
From days long past and ancestors told to Alexandria, Cairo or  
chains of gold  
they dream and echo; they morph and spin  
...they cry ... the bitter song of the sparrow's end  
Look to the future, look toward the past  
A disk, a box, a book, hold fast  
As life twists and twirls, and magical thread barrows  
into the blood flows a bitter song of the sparrow."*

"That's a nice poem," Abbie says, "But what does it mean?"

He begins to say something, but a clamoring noise rounds the corner and marches towards us. The unsettled group of people stops right in front of us, and within the disorderly raucous, a firm voice of a woman speaks. "Masego, come quick." It's Donovan. "Amos needs you."

I continued to observe the one who spoke. She is respected by the men surrounding her. She is also gorgeous and Asian. Her black hair is in a braid done up around the top of her head. There is a huge knitting needle sticking out of the back of her hair, too. Well, it's probably not a knitting needle, but that's what it looks like to me. Anyway, crowning her head is what looks like a tiny hat. The hat is burnt orange and matches her high-waisted silk skirt. The sash around her waist is brown silk and matches bits of the embroidered flowers on her tiffany blue silk top. The bottoms of the sleeves flair out, bell-shaped. She has on a stiff white collar, and sewn on the collar is a huge blown floppy ribbon that matches the sash of her dress. I finally tear myself away to look back at Masego.

He gets up from the ground and nods his head at us. "We can share stories later, children. It was a pleasure to meet you." I notice that he is locking eyes with Makai, and then he turns on his heels and leaves with the others. As he strides away, melting into the clamor, I hear him say, "Yes, Chae-Lin, we must hurry."

"I say we follow them," Liam says, throwing figs in the direction that they left. "Me, too," Grace says. She is now standing and brushing off her dress. "We should see what Donovan is up to now. I'd also like to talk to the Korean lady." Abbie is also standing now. "Yeah, let's follow them. They were really upset. Couldn't you feel it?" Makai hefts our book off the ground and shoves it under his arm, then asks, "How'd you know she was Korean? Oh, and Kalea, Masego took our other book with him." I spun around to where Masego had been sitting, and sure enough, the book was missing.

I frown. Makai says, "I don't think he did it on purpose. He had to leave in a hurry. He probably just forgot he had it." I see that Abbie is nodding in agreement with Makai. She adds, "I mean, he didn't feel like a threat, did he?" I sort of smile in their direction, thinking, Okay, sure whatever, because I'm more interested in knowing how Grace figured out that lady was Korean. Liam stands up and continues to throw figs. I say to him, "You know they might actually eat those." He considers this for a moment then drops the rest at his feet. He says to Makai, "Grace is Korean. That's how she knows."

I do a mental facepalm. I knew that. I'm part Korean too. Remember, I'm a Heinz 57. I've been a little hyper-focused on being Irish and related to the infamous Amos and dopey Donovan. Grace says, "Chae-Lin is wearing a traditional women's hanbok. The pretty blue blouse shirt is called a jeogori, and her orange wrap-around skirt is called a chima. Sometimes the whole outfit is called chima jeogori. I wear one on special occasions."

We decided to follow the direction that the group of grown-ups had gone. While we walk, we talk about Korean clothes, food, and K-pop. Abbie sighs and says, "Now I have a hankering for some Korean BBQ! Think they'll have a take-out place near us? Mmm, Spicy Dak Bulgabbi. I can almost smell it." Now I am thinking about boneless skinless chicken made super spicy, and my mouth starts to water.

Liam growls, "Stop it. You are making me hungry." Grace laughs at him and says, "Well, I want to be at home in my room watching Youtube videos of K-Pop sensation SNSD." I nod in agreement and say, "Yeah, they are classic. Who doesn't like Girls Generation?" Makai says, "Well, me for one." And Grouchy Liam says, "Me either." Abbie says, "I think it's time to feed the boys. We girls giggle. The boys groan. I realize that we are walking back to the castle and say, "Maybe Cookie knows how to make Korean!" My friends just give me weird looks. Makai says, "Nah, doubt it."

In the kitchen, Liam can sweet talk his way into getting Cookie to give us each a cold hand pie. I'm not sure what the mystery meat is, but honestly, it's pretty tasty. We walk down the long corridor, making our way back to the great room with the pretty stained-glass windows. I shove another bite into my mouth, savoring it. Up ahead, we can hear people discussing something from another room. It sounds important. Liam and Makai motion for me to hurry up.

Makai asks, "How do you still have any of that left?" I shrug at him and take another bite. We stop just before the entryway of the room and do a little eavesdropping. I take a chance and quickly peer inside.

I gasp and choke. Through my coughing, I try to whisper, "It's a beautiful library." In response, my friends say, "Shh."

"What?"

"Be quiet!"

"Kalea, come here!"

I'm not sure who said what, but Grace grabs my arm and pulls me away from the entryway. Someone was also patting my back, hoping that it would stop my loud coughing and gagging. Amos' head appears in the doorway. He is craning his neck to see who is outside his door. The rest of him follows. He put his fists on his hips and leaned forward in my direction. "Kalea." He narrows his eyes at me. I think he may be concerned for my well-being. He looks at the rest of us, motions inside. "Care to join us?" We go through, and everyone's eyes are on us. That's ok because we are studying them, too. Amos hands me a cup of water. I take a sip and look around. I see that Masego is there. He walks over to us and gives Makai the book.

"I believe this is yours."

He walks back to the others and sits down without another word. I spot Chae-Lin. She is standing next to a man. He is sitting on a wooden chair. He is dressed like her, only under his long dark dress; he has on pants. It's probably not a dress. I'll have to remember to ask Grace what it's called. He is wearing a Thanksgiving pilgrim's hat on his head. OK, I'm sure that I'm wrong about that too. Under his Pilgrim's hat, he is wearing a skull cap and in the middle of the hat is a green gem. Hanging down from his hat is a stampede string. You know the thing that keeps a cowgirl's hat on when she's out horseback riding. Abbie used to be a cowgirl. She would barrel ride and everything.

Anyway, the string has huge beads on it, and it hangs all the way down to the middle of his chest. He has a crisp white collar and ribbon like Chae-Lin's; only his ribbon is tied around his neck like a bow tie. He has a black mustache and goatee. It is thin and trimmed neatly. Opposite of them is a bench with a thick gray and yellow plaid wool blanket thrown over it. Sitting on top of that is Masego and someone I did not know.

The new guy's knee-high black leather boots are pulled up over his charcoal gray pants. He is wearing a sleeveless navy-blue robe that hangs to his knees over a loosely fitted cream blouse. Sandwiched in between the two garments is a velvet vest that matches his pants. On his mahogany skin, peeking out from behind his stiff collar, is a honey-colored tattoo. It's a bunch of dots in a circle. Hanging from his neck is a single strand of amber beads. His most striking features, though, are his shock of blond curly hair and blue eyes.

There is another guy in the room that I find interesting. He is sitting on a cushion on the floor, and he is a legit Native American. Judging by his clothes, he's from a southwestern tribe, too. I search for Abbie and find her gawking. I can tell she's geeking out. I did mention she went through a whole



cowgirl phase, right? And she is still in love with the whole southwest boho thing.

He is wearing a long white tunic and pants decorated with turquoise, black, orange, and yellow handiwork. Over his chest, he is wearing a white and turquoise breastplate made from long beads, and around his neck, he is wearing a choker necklace made of turquoise. He has a colorful beaded band around his head with a plume of feathers sticking out of it. His long hair is in a braid. Oh, by the way, he's not the only guy sitting on the floor. The room is full of important people milling about. Some are standing, and some are sitting on chairs, and others are on floor cushions. My friends and I decide to stand. Amos walks over to the desk and leans. That's when I see that the older man from yesterday is sitting there.

Amos says to him, "Father, what are we to do about Donovan?" Everyone in the room quiets down. His father's elbows are on the desk, head in his hands. Very softly, he says, "Lies and deviousness." I lean forward to hear. In the same voice, he continues, "Lies and deceit." Quickly he smacks his hands on the desk and yells, "Lies and deceptions!" When he does this, a little spittle flies out of his mouth. He stands up and gets within inches of his son's face and stage whispers, "Such a sting of betrayal. Who is to blame, my son?"

Putting his hand on Amos' shoulder, he continues, "Which one has been wronged?" He sidesteps Amos and walks in my direction, stops abruptly, and spins back towards him, "A brotherly quarrel." Apparently, the old guy is working the room now. I sort of scooch behind Abbie. I'm not a fan of confrontation, and this guy is riled up. I think it's best to be out of his way. I feel a little guilty hiding behind her, but Abbie's been pretty mouthy lately; I'm sure she can defend herself. Suddenly, he flails his arm out and motions around the room while spinning in a circle. OK, I don't feel guilty anymore. I would have got clocked in the head by his wild gesturing.

“So small and trivial. So insignificant.” He pauses for effect and shouts, “Your small battles have turned into war!” He stomps forward, pumping his arms back and forth like a speed walker does. I notice that everyone in the room is giving him plenty of elbow room. Then, incredibly he wraps his son in a giant bear hug and laments, “I have failed you both!”

Abbie nudges me in the ribs and side whispers, “and the Oscar goes to....” I suppress a giggle and continue to watch the scene unfold before me. Father and son continue to embrace one another when someone clears his throat and says, “We have the matter of the stolen livestock, my lairds.” Someone adds, “And the death of my kin! Whoever is guilty will pay for his crimes!”

A very elaborately dressed man goes up to the two, who have stopped hugging, and says, “My daughter, precious Aoibheann, is missing! I know it was your brother!” He shoves his finger into Amos' chest and says, “Donovan is to blame.” Things went from bad to worse. Anger erupts through the room, slowly consuming everyone with its fiery rage. Abbie takes my hand and pulls me out of the room. The other three follow us. Before we reach the door, a man steps in front of us and says, “all our trouble began when you young people arrived. Where do you come from again?”

We hurry past him and down the hall. Abbie is still holding on to me. She is trembling. We stop in the great hall. Makai says, “Coast is clear. No one is following us. They stayed in the library.” Grace glances in my direction and looks concerned. She rushes up to Abbie and feels her forehead, “You're burning up!” I look around the room and see a couple of stairs at the front of the room leading to a platform of sorts. We take her to them so that she can sit down

She says, “Guys, I'll be fine. It was just too much for me.” Liam sits down on the step below her and says, “yeah, it was a bit tense in there.” We sit in silence for a while, absorbed in our

thoughts. I am sitting next to Abbie, Grace is next to Liam, and Makai is lying on the stage looking up at the ceiling. He is the one to break the silence. “Donovan didn't get his way, so he went on a murdering, thieving rampage and most likely kidnapped someone.” He sits up and adds sarcastically, “What a stand-up guy.”



## CHAPTER 20

### Locked in the Castle's keep



Only a couple of hours have passed since we ate lunch and watched the train wreck in the library. Makai gets up off the floor and goes to the stained-glass windows. “These make more sense after hearing Masego's story.” Liam goes over to study them too. It's now just us girls sitting on the stairs. Abbie looks better. She has calmed down. Grace, on the other hand, looks sad. With as much gusto as I can manage, I say, “Hey, we'll find the necklace, and we'll make it home.”

I'm not sure that I fooled them, but at least they smiled. Groaning, Abbie stands up. “You're right. We need to get going.” I don't remember saying that, but okay, I'll go with it. Both Grace and I are up now. Abbie hollers at the boys, “Let's get it together. It's time to go home.” Liam turns and says, “Yeah, let's get out....” He stops mid-sentence.

Makai points behind us. We spin around to see what on earth is going on. Grace exclaims, "It's the shadow lights!" I shake my head in disbelief. "Here. How?" Liam, full of bravado, says, "I don't feel threatened." He strides to the other side of the room, stops in front of it, and says, "What do you want? Huh? Answer me!" There is a hiss-pop sound, and it's gone. Liam yells in frustration. Footsteps approach and a voice says, "You really shouldn't go chasing shadows, my dear boy, or you will end up looking foolish."

"Amos!" I'm pretty sure we all said his name at once because he says, "That's nice. It's good to see you again as well." Makai pushes his glasses up and realizes that he isn't wearing them, so he fixes his hair instead. He is squinting at Amos. I ask, "How is your meeting going?" He makes a noise through his teeth and says, "That's why I am here. You need to come with me." Makai is still staring at Amos, and he says, "You look different." "I'm sure I do. This tedious gathering is wreaking havoc on my nerves. The clan elders are asking for you."

I eye him suspiciously. My friends gather around me. "They want Kalea?" Grace asks the question. Amos answers, "No, they would like to speak to all of you. Come. We must hurry." I feel my friends digging in their heels. They have no intention of leaving with him. I have a bad feeling about it, but despite my better judgment, I follow him anyway.

Makai pulls at my sleeve. "Yo Kalea, what are you doing?" I pull my arm away. "I want to see what's going on." My friends think I have flipped out. Maybe I have. There's just something about Amos. I feel like I can trust him. I don't say this out loud. Nobody says anything on the way to the library. We arrive. Amos ushers us through the door. He says to me, "I shall return. I have one more errand to run."

With that, he left. I notice that Amos' father is gone. We are alone, it seems. Not really. All those people are still there

staring at us with their judgy eyes. Remember the nice dress guy whose daughter had gone missing? Well, he is now at the desk, and he is examining us with disgust. His lips are pulled tight over his teeth. Three guys who look vaguely familiar point at us. "It's them. Undercover of night, they stole the laird's cows."

I narrow my eyes at them. We're cattle rustlers? Oh, please. Wait, I remember why they look familiar. They're the guys who danced with Abbie the other night. I'm mulling this over. Why would they blame us for stealing Amos' cows? The guy at the desk gives us a tongue lashing. All he needed was an accusation. I feel like I'm in the principal's office again.

Someone says, "I would not trust these fly-by-night visitors. Their womenfolk did not eat a scrap of food from their plates. They left it for waste!" It's the jolly guy from the wedding; only he is scowling at us today.

One by one, each of our characters is defamed, and all of Donovan's crimes are pinned on us. I feel like I'm staring in one of those lawyer dramas that my Auntie loves so much. I'm beginning to think that because the guy at the desk is so cruel and hateful explains why his precious Aoibheann ran away. I'm also kicking myself for trusting Amos. I wish my friends had just dragged me away. Masego stands up from his bench and approaches the desk. I do a mental woo hoo! He'll stop this madness.

Then he says, "Good sir, perhaps we should lock them in the tower for the night while we discuss how to chastise them." Someone shouts, "lock 'em up!" Another person adds, "hang 'em!" Are you kidding me? That went from bad to worse in record time. An enormously bulky man grabs my arm and drags me through the castle. I trip over one of the rugs in the hallway. The man roughly yanks on my arm, pulling me upright. My shoulder pops.

“Ouch,” I whine at him, but he keeps walking.

We stop in front of a doorway that leads up a stone spiral staircase. He shoves my back, “walk.” I realize that he has led me to the tower. Behind me, I hear, “Come on! Quit pushing me!” It's Liam. We climb the winding stairs. The man by my side unhooks a set of keys from his belt. He unlocks a massive door in front of us. It is made of wood and looks strong. Right in the middle of the door is a small window with iron bars. I try to peer through, searching for what's waiting for us is inside. I only see a soft flickering glow surrounded by darkness. One by one, we are shoved into our new quarters. The door slams, and a key clicks, locking us in. I rub my shoulder and make my arm go in a circle. I feel it pop back into place. I feel a pity party coming on. That tiny sliver of hope of getting home vanished. I can only think of one thing, and that is, once again, I screwed everything up.

“Way to go, Kalea,” Abbie says. I see that all my friends are glaring at me. Abbie continues, “Now we are going to die in the wretched Middle Ages!” She flops to the ground in a rage. From the shadows, someone says, “Ahem, one night in the castle's keep most definitely will not kill you, my dear young ones.” I cannot believe my ears. I know exactly whose voice that is. I march over to him. He is reclining on some cushions on the floor. I squat down and stick my finger in his chest. “You set us up, Amos. I should never have trusted you.” My voice cracks. “We didn't do all those icky things that your slimy brother did!”

He blinks but says nothing while I throw blame at him and Donovan. Finally, my rant is over, and Amos says nothing to correct me. Our eyes are locked, and I can feel my friends' eyes on me, too. Uncomfortable, I clear my throat and sit down. I pull my knees to my chest and wrap my arms around them. Amos and I are still boring holes into one another. I'm afraid that if I look away, I'll start crying. I am on the verge of a breakdown, and the atmosphere in the room is super tense and

eerily silent. The silence is broken by a sorrowful howl that makes the hair on the back of my neck stand straight up.

I ask, "Did you hear that?"

My answer, the harmonious sound of another voice joining in the unearthly tune; the baying of a song that I would rather not hear. A shiver runs down my spine as yet another voice joins in and then another. I feel my anger melting into fear. I'm suddenly cold and shiver. I slide closer to Amos and glance toward the window and then over at my friends. They look as scared as I feel. I look back at the window, fearing that whatever it is will burst through the barred windows at any second.

Amos finally speaks, "You are perfectly safe here. They are far away." Seriously, I think. I say, "It sounds as if they are in the room with us!" He replies, "If their howls were as soft as a whisper, then I'd be worried. The closer they are, the softer the howl." That doesn't make sense, but he seems sad and not terrified. Why? So, I ask. "What is it?" My friends huddle into our corner. An icy wind blows through the window. The three candles in the room flicker and one of them is snuffed out—a bolt of lightning flashes, followed by a low rumble of thunder and another howl.

Amos answers, "My sweet brother has chosen a treacherous path. He struggles to overcome a common nemesis that we all battle. His pride is victor for the moment." Amos stands and stretches and continues, "Donovan is witty and cunning and knows our clan ways, perhaps, better than the elders. His intelligence and eloquence have been noticed. He will most likely be chosen for clan *shanachie*."

The fierce wind whips through the tower again and extinguishes another candle plunging our corner into near darkness. Another bolt of lightning flashes through the sky outside, filling the room with bursts of light and then darkness.



He stops talking, walks over, picks up the only burning candle, and lights the other two. He returns the candle to its holder and walks to the window. He is staring out into the storm.

“What's a *shanachie*?” Grace asks.

He answers her without turning around, “The keeper of our history and laws.” Makai jumps in, “That means he would be the clan's storyteller.” Amos nods, “Yes, he would be the keeper of important information and be well respected. The title is inherited.”

He turns away from the window and looks at us, “It could have been me, but Donovan showed a talent for it early on. As soon as our father discovered this, he became harder on him. He pitted us against one another in an unending competition for his love and respect. He challenged Donovan daily, believing this would keep him mentally sharp, but I'm afraid our father's way is folly. His method has only stabbed Donovan in the heart and cut out his agreeable nature. There's only a shell of what was once there. Donovan now possesses a deceitful charm and none of the kindness. My sweet little brother is allowing himself to be consumed by jealousy, pride, and lust. He is turning into something I no longer recognize. Although, at times, I still see a glimpse of who my brother was.”

Grace is playing with a button on one of the floor cushions. She says, “That's so sad. It's pretty crummy when your dad's hard on you like that.” She and Liam exchange a look. I wonder what that's about. My attention is drawn to Abbie. She blurts out what I had been thinking during Amos's story. “That explains your dad's sensational performance this afternoon.” One side of Amos' mouth turns up into a smile, and he kind of chuckles, “Yes, my father has a flair for the dramatic.” As soon as he says dramatic, the room fills with light from the electrical storm outside.

Amos walks back to our corner and sits on the floor next to Makai. "So, you're saying that your brother made that awful noise?" Amos shakes his head, "No, Makai. But he is the reason that the Peadar's Hounds are on the great hunt. The Sapphire Hound will escort a soul to the otherworld tonight. A death in my clan is imminent. I fear it will be at the hand of my brother."

The air is bristling with electricity from the storm. I think Abbie said something about Donovan, but I didn't hear what she said because suddenly charging through me were waves of panic and jolts of strong emotions. I don't think that I can keep it together. I've managed to get us stuck in the Middle Ages and imprisoned in a castle tower. I am struggling to breathe. I'm trapped in a world where a madman wreaks havoc on his kin while a pack of ghostly dogs reaps souls or something, and I'm being blamed for it.

I hear a weird noise then realize that it's me. I was sobbing again like I did in the kitchen. I turn away from my friends and try to hide my face. Ugh, when did I turn into such a sissy, crying at anything? Oh, I know, when I lost the necklace, and now we can never go home. Of course, I didn't say any of this out loud.

Makai and Abbie are by my side. Abbie wraps her arm around my waist and pulls me into a hug, "Hey, you know I didn't mean it. It's not just your fault. We've all kinda epically failed this past week."

I stifle a sob, "Sorry. I know. I mean, I've been a mess lately." Amos is in front of me now. He leans forward and says, "Dear girl, don't blame yourself. I'm sure it was my father who had us all locked in the tower for the night." I must have looked at him oddly because he throws his hands in the air and, with a hilarious falsetto, says, "Remember his flair for the dramatic!" We laugh. He says, "This is not the first time that he has locked me in here. Trust me; I am as innocent as you. I

promise to talk to my father tomorrow."

At some point last night, we all fell asleep. A chattering noise awakened me. The sun is peeking through the window, and sitting in between the bars are a couple of house sparrows relishing the warmth and stillness of the morning. I sit up. They flutter away. I stretch and stand. I go to the window. The birds are long gone. They are probably nesting in one of the nearby trees. I can hear a choir of bird songs coming from them. It is a beautiful breezy spring day.

The air smells of damp earth and flowers. White fluffy clouds float across the bright sky. The landscape is full of brilliant shades of greens. I can see a large creek from here. There are people on its banks fishing. A couple of small boats are being rowed in the stream. They float by the fisherman and slow down to greet them. I watch a man walk from the creek towards the castle. He has a cluster of fish dangling on a line at his side. A child, at his heels, is laughing and chasing after him.

Closer to the castle, I hear squeals of laughter from a group of women. I find them off to the right near the glistening lake. A young boy is racing towards the women with an enormous toad in his outstretched arm. I chuckle and watch the scene for a moment. He runs through the middle of them, and they scatter. One of the ladies has one hand on her hip and the other pointing at the boy and toad. She swings her arm towards the lake and frantically points at it. The boy looks at the ground and slumps his shoulders. He marches off to the lake and sets the toad down. I smile, remembering when I got that same lecture for chasing my mom with a baby octopus that had gotten trapped in the tide pools.

I look at the garden. It is fragrant and just as pretty as yesterday. Ugh, yesterday. I take a deep relaxing breath through my nose, and then I notice that mixed with earthy florals, there is the distinct smell of bacon—my stomach growls. I think Cookie is baking something, too. I turn around and lean

against the stone wall. I let myself slide to the floor. I pull my knees to my chest. Darn it. Now I'm hungry.

I look around the room. I see that Amos is awake. He is reading a book. He sees me and lifts the book up. "Both Donovan and I have hidden away a few things in this room throughout the years." He points to a hoard of books on the floor beside him. He smiles at me then turns his attention back to his book. Grace is starting to, sir. She sits up and takes in our surroundings, and looks a little confused. Realization hits. She stretches. I say, "Good Morning." She spots me by the window and comes over, "Morning." Standing next to me, on her tiptoes, she looks through the barred window. She sighs, "It's so nice outside. Oh, look! There are those angry men from last night with Amos' dad. They are all stomping towards the castle."

I jump up to watch the scene. Amos is by our side in a flash, "Well, I image they will make their way to the tower." They are getting closer, and we strain to hear their conversations. Grace says, "I can't make out what they're saying." Someone creeps up behind us and asks, "What's going on?" Both Grace and I startle, but it's just Makai. I think he did it on purpose because he is snickering.

Amos says, "I think Donovan did something regrettable last night." The men are crossing the castle bridge. Their voices carry up to us now. "Your wicked son has my daughter! She was seen with him in the glade." Another man says, "Never mind that. He is gathering men to fight Amos. It's a coup! I narrowly escaped. If you refuse to be his acolyte, then he...." They walked inside the castle, and we no longer could hear. "He what?" Makai asks. Liam says, "I bet he said, 'kills you.'" We all turn around. I ask the obvious question, "When did you get up?" He smiles, and his blue eyes twinkle, "I've been up for a while. I thought this might be worth hearing." Makai elbows him in the gut. "You woke up after me, you big dork."

Liam continues to smile and shrugs his shoulders. He says, "Think we'll get out of here? I'm starving, and I smell bacon." The men from outside did not come straight to the tower like we hoped. I am still leaning against the wall under the window. Grace is sitting beside me again. Makai is pacing the room and muttering to himself. Liam is lying on his back in the middle of the room, throwing a small piece of stone in the air and catching it. I think it might have been chipped off the wall. Abbie is still asleep. Grace asks me, "Do you think we should wake her up?" I think for a moment and then say, "No, she's been kind of off lately. You know, like really moody. She might just be tired. Maybe we should let her sleep."

Suddenly there is a creaking noise coming from the door. I notice a little metal flap at the bottom of the door. It's kind of like the mail slot in the middle of my door at home, but this one is much lower. It creaks open again, and I see a chin and someone's puffy lips. The lips say, "Breakfast, my Laird."

Then, a plate of food is shoved through the slot. Liam already has the plate of food in his hand. There is a thick slice of toast on the plate with a rounded heap of some type of fruit spread smack in the middle, a pile of scrambled eggs, and two link sausages. He tears his eyes away from the plate to look at Amos. He nods his permission. Liam snatches the toast up and starts to take a bite, but there is a muffled commotion outside the door. It gets louder. Liam is right next to the door and backs away just in time as Cookie bursts through. The guard with the puffy lips is gingerly rubbing his temple. Cookie has four plates balanced on her arms.

Out of breath, she says, "Oh, Amos! Again. What has your father done, locked you up again? I brought you some breakfast, I did. This oaf," She turned to look at the guard, "Well, hurry it up. Bring the other plate." He walks through the threshold, hands a plate to Makai, then scurries back to his station outside the door. She continues, "*Hmmph*, wasn't going to let me see you." She passes out the identical plates of food

to the rest of us. Abbie is finally sitting up. She takes the plate from Cookie and yawns. "Thank you." Amos stands up and wraps his Cookie in a bear hug. "I'm sure you set him straight, my dear Cookie." She makes another noise and bobs her head up and down energetically.

He backs away and says, "Thank you for the lovely breakfast. You always take such wonderful care of me. I am eternally grateful." She smiles proudly at Amos and says, "I have news!" The guard clears his throat and warily looks at Cookie, "Make it quick, Miss." I feel sorry for the guy. He looks so uncomfortable. His words don't sit well with her. Her eyes flash, "Are you bossing Cookie?" She marches toward the guard with a scowl on her face. He quickly shuts the massive door and says, "I'm just going to shut the door for a moment." She is at the door with a fist raised in the air. Suddenly she drops her arm and twirls around, erupting with deep belly laughter. She laughs so hard that she starts to cry. She wipes a tear from her eye.

Quietly she says, "I got that one fooled. I showed him who is boss." She walks back to Amos. He says, "What news do you have?" She ponders what she will say for a moment, then says, "Your brother Donovan is plotting to take over. He is spreading rumors that you won dishonestly. He tried to win over many last night. I had an invitation to the clandestine meeting, but I'm loyal to my Amos. Anyhow, the ones that refused to become his acolytes he murdered! So thankful that I refused to go. And only one escaped, and he is in the library now with the elders. I must go before they finish."

We eat our meal. The bread is crusty on the outside and soft and flavorful inside. The fruit spread is basically mashed-up dates mixed with something savory. The eggs and sausages are delicious like yesterday. The simple meal is marvelous. We are just finishing up when we hear someone clanging keys at the door. Slowly a key scrapes on the inside of the lock.

I set my plate down beside me and watched. At a snail's pace, the doorknob turns, and then the door is gently pushed ajar. Amos' father pokes his head through the opening. His mass of unruly gray hair is standing on end. His face is covered in matching stubble, patchy and coarse. His hazel eyes are red-rimmed and glint with a bit of wildness. He lets the rest of himself through the doorway. His fine clothes are wrinkled and unkempt. He is examining the stone floor at his feet. Quickly, he looks up at Amos. He half-smiles and shrugs.

Then running his words together, he says, "What's there to do? I was wrong. Meet me in the library." By the time I understand what he has said, he is gone.

Amos groans and stands. "Well, what did I say about my father? Shall we join in the drama?"



## CHAPTER 21

### The Gathering



The library is jam-packed full of people. Many I recognize from yesterday, but most I don't. There's a man with skinny legs sticking out from his brightly colored tunic. The white blouse that he wears is covered in splotches of brown. Most likely dried blood. He has a bandage wrapped around the top of his head, causing his auburn hair to stand on end. His back is towards me, and he is staring out the window. Amos makes his way to the desk in front of the picturesque window where the man is leaning. He nods at him and then stands beside his seated father. When Amos turns around, he looks shaken. Situated on the other side of the desk is the persnickety man who sentenced us to a night in the tower. Amos's dad stands and motions to his left.

Addressing the room, he says, "I give the Baron Turlough Blather-Smythe permission to precede." He then plops down



into the oversized desk chair and sighs heavily. The Baron clears his throat. In a high-pitched nasally voice, he says, "My apologies to Amos and his young guests." He doesn't sound like he is sorry. He peers down over his rather large nose at me and continues, "My protective instincts for my daughter caused me to behave rashly. It has come to light that indeed you were telling the truth about your brother Donovan."

When he talks about Donovan, he gives Amos a disapproving glance. He then looks around the room. "Thank you all for coming on such short notice." Annoyingly, he clears his throat again. "I have sad news about our jolly Duke of Dunsany. Quinton McGlinchy has been brutally murdered!" Gasps and hushed whispers gush through the room. He pauses for like a second for us to take it in and bellows, "Hear ye, Hear ye! Come to order. We must..." I tune out. He must be talking about the guy who loves weddings. I let that sink in, and I feel sad. He wasn't that bad of a guy. He was just flabbergasted at the thought of someone wasting food. I feel a hand on the small of my back.

Hot breath whispers into my ear, "Hello, Lass."

It is the strange old woman from the other day. She walks past me and says, "Old Zillah knows. Yes. Old Zillah knows." All eyes are on her, "I was tucked away and bedded down for the night. I hear. I see." Barron Blather-Smyth talks over her, "Now see here, Zillah! What's the meaning of this outburst? I will have you locked..." Amos's dad jumps out of his chair and takes over. "Our dear duke has fallen at the hands of my son. A rift in the Tuatha Dé O'hEanain! Woe to he who declares war on his own kin. My Dear Zillah, tell us what you know."

He then walks towards the back of the room and stops in front of a wisp of a man sitting in an oversized chair. He just stands there, awkwardly staring at him. The guy shifts uneasily and then jumps up. Amos's dad throws himself into the now

empty chair. I'm starting to enjoy this guy's antics. Zillah is talking, "...crept up to the edge. I saw Donovan, that vile man Rimeaux, and a group of our most upstanding clansmen. He says that together they will seize power! Oppression no more. Revolution! He shouts it. A spark is all it will take, he says. Falsely accused of slander, he thinks. He wants Amos stripped of power! Old Zillah just tells it how she sees it." She is standing next to Amos now.

The man at the window turns around, and I suddenly feel squeamish. Across his pale face is a gash running from his right ear, over his nose, and ending at the bottom of his left jaw. It is barely healed and oozing. The bandage over his forehead is soaked in blood. He is woozy and stumbles. Amos catches him and offers him his father's chair. He sits there a moment, regaining his strength.

Finally, he says, "She is telling the truth. I narrowly escaped. Last night, Donovan called for a meeting in the glade. He is forming an army of acolytes to war against his brother. He demands allegiance. If you refuse him, then he murders you in cold blood. Many heads of families throughout our lands received an invitation. Last night, men came to my door and said the O'heanain's request my attendance in the sacred glade. I assumed it was Amos. I had no idea that he was locked in the tower."

Rubbing his jawline, Amos says, "We must find my brother before any more damage is done." Masego says, "The clan elders will help you find Donovan. We will organize a search party." Che-Lin stands up, as does the man at her side. They go to the back of the room and send everyone away except for the clan Elders and leaders. It feels a lot like school. The bell rang, and the teacher dismissed the class. We file out of the room one by one. "Now what?" I ask. "We find your necklace and get out of here," Liam says. Abbie stops in front of us and says, "I kind of want to help stop Donovan." Makai says, "I know Abbie, but you forget that this is ancient history. It

already happened.” Grace adds, “True; we don't want to screw anything up.”

Sighing, I say, “Yeah, but I still would like to help. Guys, why don't we check out the mausoleum? Amos seemed to think that we'd like it.” Amazingly, everyone agrees. I know it's not searching for the necklace or helping Amos with his plight, but it seems like an excellent way to kill time while the elders devise a plan. Maybe we'll find the necklace, too. Yeah, probably not. “Does anyone know where the mausoleum is?”

We wander the gardens until we spot a white stone spire extending up above a grove of the trees. We head towards it, hoping that this is the building. As we get closer, the dirt path turns into a rosebush-lined cobblestone road. Abbie smells the flowers and plucks a few from the bushes. “Ouch!” She sticks her thumb into her mouth and then takes it out and examines it. There is a little droplet of blood forming on the tip of her thumb. “Stupid thorns.” She wipes her thumb on her dress while absent-mindedly picking thorns off the stems of her flowers. “There we go.” Abbie reaches over to Grace, who is walking beside her, and tucks the thorn-free rose behind her ear. She then starts on another flower.

“Quit dawdling,” Liam grumps as he passes the two. His demand doesn't quite have the effect on Abbie that he wished. She slows to a stroll and tediously picks at the thorns on the roses. Finally, she reaches up and puts one behind my ear. Then she puts one behind her own. We round a corner, and a church comes into view. Abbie and I gasp in unison. It's stunning. It's not really a church, but it sort of looks like one. It is the glimmering white stone, just like the castle. It has a huge green metal door and a matching metallic roof. Grace says, “Wow, It's pretty.” Makai adds, “Hard to believe it's a tomb. I follow a path that goes to the left of the building. I stop at the corner. Liam says, “I wonder if we can get in?” He goes to the door and jiggles the handle.

I turn my attention back to the building. There is a steeple on top, and along the apex of the roof are many small pointy pokey things, probably to keep the pigeons off or something. Also, on the roof, flanking either corner of the mausoleum are bird gargoyles. Each is peering down at us with fierce glares. The one that I am staring back at has his talons sunk into the building, causing indentations. It's like his claws are actually gripping onto the roof. Its beak is opened to allow rainwater to flow through. Above the enormous arched door is the family crest and above the crest along the roofline are pictures carved into the stone. They are familiar. They match the ones in the castle's stained-glass windows. There are no windows along any wall but only climbing roses and ivy where the windows should be. Whoever constructed this building did a fantastic job.

Liam says, "Hey, guys!" He opens the door, "Let's go inside." I watch my friends go, and then I follow. I expect to be plunged into darkness. "It's amazing, Kalea." I am standing beside Makai. "There's sunlight somehow filtering inside without windows. Fascinating."

He wanders off, speculating on the source of light. It's not creepy in here either. It's peaceful. There are symmetrically carved columns lining all four corners of the room. I notice where the tops of the columns meet the ceiling that light filters in. Makai notices, too. He is squinting up at them. The others are in the middle of the room. They are looking at a life-sized bronze figure of a man. I go over to the statue and look closer.

He is lying down on a marble slab with his elbows at his side and his forearms stretched out. His palms are facing each other and between his hands is a wooden box. The bronze guy is inside a bronze netting of sorts. It kind of looks like he is inside a pneumatic tube. You know, like those things the banks use at the drive-through. I back up and look down. Below where he is lying, there are bronze carrots, radishes, cabbages. There is an assortment of veggies.

“Weird” I flick a cabbage with my finger, and it makes a pinging noise. Grace says, “I know, right? Think he was a gardener or something?” Abbie is shaking her head, “If he were a gardener, then he must have been an important one.” Makai is now by Abbie's side, “It has to be one of the clan chieftains, but I don't know why he'd be lying on top of a bed of vegetables.” Liam is reaching inside the bronze netting. “What are you doing?” Grace asks quickly.

He doesn't answer but grabs the wooden box and tries finagling it out of the netting. Abbie reaches in to help, “I want to know, too.” They manage to maneuver it out of his hands and up to the netting. Makai is pointing at the opening. “Go to the right. There's a wider opening in the netting there.” Grace chimed in, “Guys, maybe we should leave it alone.” I am more curious than ever. I race over and poke my hands into the netting. “Here, I'll help, too.”

Our hands are dancing in and out of the netting as the box glides to the opening. Makai joins in the hand dance, too. Liam says, “You never know; the thief could have hidden Kalea's necklace inside the box.” We nearly drop it. Grace races over to help. She still looks a little unsure about moving the box. I reassure her, “We will put it back when we are done, Grace.”

“Woo, Hoo!” we all cheer in unison. We manage to free the box. Liam is holding it. It is ancient. There are carvings on it that I can't quite make out.

Grace touches the front of it and says, “I think it opens here.” So, Liam unlatches it and slowly starts to open it. Light begins to shine through the cracked opening.

“Whoa, Liam, stop, man. What the heck!” Makai slams the top of the box, and it shuts. “You guys saw that, right?” He snatches it from Liam. “Hey!” Liam grabs for it, but Makai sidesteps him. “I'll give it back, Okay? I'm just a bit wiggled out,

dude.” He holds the box up to his eyes and examines the carvings. “It was glowing.” Abbie distances herself from Makai and the box. Liam seems worried that Makai will open it without him, so he is standing practically on top of him.

Liam says, “Yeah, but what is making it glow?” He reaches for the latch. Makai spins away from him. “Guys, these markings.” He turns back toward us. “It looks like computer coding!” I touch the carvings on the box. “You know, I think I have seen these before.” I look back at the bronze sarcophagus. Then it hits me. “The book.” Makai answers, “Huh, I still have it.” It is shoved under his arm, making it awkward for him to hold the box. I flop down on a marble bench beside Grace. I suppose it is there for viewing the dead guy’s bronze statue. I say out loud, “No, not that one.” as I hold up the book from our room. I place it on my lap and begin to thumb through it. The disk inside falls out. I catch it and hold it triumphantly. “Here!”

Grace takes it from me and gasps. Then, Abbie snatches it from her. Finally, Liam plucks it out of her hands. “Wow, Check it, Makai.” He holds it out for him to see. He peers up at it, squinting. Then looks back at the box in his hands. “Come on, take it,” Liam says. Makai reaches up and grabs it, and Liam reaches for the box. “Ha!” Makai turns away from him in the nick of time, but Liam trips and flails his arms around, knocking the box out of Makai’s hands. The box lands on the floor, and the room is flooded with blinding white light. I cover my eyes with my arm.

I hear Grace beside me. I think she is humming. The boys are bickering. Abbie is saying, “Open your eyes. The light has faded.” I do as she says. She picks up the box and brings it over to me. Grace says, “Liam, bring the disk here, please.” He does as he is told. Now everyone is hovering around me and the box. “Here you go, Kalea.” Liam hands me the disk. Inside the box are gears whirring away. Some mechanisms are movable. It seems like you program it, but the language is foreign. Makai

says, "The whole thing sort of looks like a clock." Abbie nods and reaches inside, and pulls on a latch. It makes a *kathunk* noise and hisses open, revealing a slot for the disk. She says, "It's a rad record player. Remember when your grandpa would play us his favorite jazz bands on his?"

A smile lights up Makai's face, "I loved when he did that." We three are lost in our memories when Grace says, "See, there. It's a pin and turntable that the disk would slide onto and rest on." Liam nudges me, "Hey, put the disk on."

"Oh, there you are!"

Amos comes through the door. He smiles broadly. "My wedding is happening, now. I would love for you to attend." He walks over and gently takes both the disk and box—no one protests. "I do hope that you have enjoyed exploring. Follow me, please." Amos walks through the doorway and into the garden. We don't move. Amos comes back inside and motions for us to follow him. This time we all do. He takes us through a shortcut in the garden. I say to Amos, "I thought the wedding wasn't for another week." My friends pipe in with a bunch of me too-s.

He says, "We couldn't find Donovan. We will have to go back out and search for him, so we decided to move the time for our wedding. Branwen agrees that tonight we should wed because, on the morrow, the elders and I will continue the search and not return until we find him."



## CHAPTER 22

### A Wedding



We follow him through the gardens and to the castle in silence. The garden is in full bloom, the birds are singing, and there is a slight breeze smelling of flowers, but I am too annoyed to enjoy it. He took the box and disk right out of my hands. True, it's probably his, but he did it before we could figure everything out. I'm pretty sure my friends are just as perturbed. We don't say much of anything. Well, Amos does. He excitedly rambles on and on.

“Everyone is waiting for us in the throne room. My servants have done an excellent job making it beautiful. It is what Branwen wants. Her father agreed to have the wedding sooner. You know that he is the branch chief. He's not just a chieftain. All the elders are here, too. My father was an elder, but he chose to have us appointed as elders when my brother and I were born. We both have trained since we were only tots.



And now Donovan....” He stops speaking. I’m sure it is because he’s upset about his brother. Abbie pats Amos on the back comfortingly, “Donovan will be found.”

The castle is up ahead. We walk up a hill towards the gate. A duck squawks, raising a ruckus. The pond is behind us now, and I glance over at the noise, but it’s just a duck. However, I see a glimmer of something beyond the pond, like the sun reflecting off metal. So, I stop in my tracks and stare in that direction. My eyes linger on the bright light. I can’t figure out what it is. The duck catches my eye again. It splashes around and then dives into the water after something. Its cute little duck bum is stuck up in the air wiggling around. Then, it bursts out of the water flapping its wings and squawking.

“Hurry, my dear child,” Amos urges. His voice startled me, and I quickly looked away from the duck to the spot where I saw the flash of light, but whatever I saw was gone now. It was probably nothing. I am getting so paranoid. I turn and jog up the hill to the castle, forgetting about the glimmer. We are inside now. “My laird, where would you like these flowers?” That kid from the other day is asking Amos. “Sir, your father, is looking for you,” another man says. “Oh Amos, child! What to do? What to do?” Cookie seems distraught. “My laird, my laird,” Someone else is vying for his attention. People are racing to and fro. Amos waves them all away. Someone knocks into me, and I stumble, but he catches me with one hand.

“Sorry, miss,” he says as he steadies me. He is balancing a massive cake, on the other hand. I nod and step back, hoping he and the cake don’t topple over. He bolts off in the direction of Cookie. She smacks him upside the head and gives him an earful about almost dropping the cake. They march off in the direction of the kitchen. The interior of the castle has been completely transformed. Since the games, I know, they have been working on it, but they must have gone into overdrive to pull this off. I mean, it is stunning!

The smell of freshly cut flowers and food is almost overwhelming. I look at my friends. They look goofy with their mouths wide open. We are walking forward and, at the same time, slowly turning, just trying to take in the elaborate display. Amos seems oblivious to the chaos and splendor in front of him because he just plows right through the crowd and doesn't look up. Somewhere, a clock chimes. He says, "I must be off to me chambers. I need change into my best tunic." He points in the direction of the throne room. "I'll see you in about an hour's time." An enormous grin lights up his face, and he is off to his room, taking the box and disk with him.

The throne room is decorated lavishly with white roses, larkspur, and thistle flower garlands and bouquets. The garland is draped from column to column, and the flower displays are just about everywhere I look. Holly wreaths that make me think of Christmastime are above each stained glassed window connected by burgundy, navy, and gold ribbons. Brightly colored tapestries and pennants, some displaying a coat of arms, are tastefully draped here and there. Unlit white candles are perched atop shiny golden candelabras, which are strategically placed around the room. Below my feet is a red carpet like I have seen on TV for Hollywood premieres. It leads to the front of the room. There, at the front, is a blue velvet canopy trimmed in gold.

Masego greets us. "Hello, friends." He puts his arm around Makai and leads him away from us, "Makai and I are going to chat." Confusion clouds Makai's face, "Uhm," he manages to say, and he wiggles away from him. A deep belly laugh comes from Masego, "There is nothing to fear, my son." We watch them go off to the other side of the room. Masego motions to one of the enormous stained-glass windows, and they sit under it, leaning against the wall. Abbie says, "I wonder what that's about?" She then leads the four of us farther into the room. We stop in the middle of the room. I see that standing under the canopy; the elders are all dressed in their finest clothes. It is spectacular: the castle, the decorations, and all the costumes.

Chae-Lin is coming toward us. She bows.

"We have been expecting you. Follow me, please." We do. She is taking us over to the elders. I feel nervous. These are some powerful folks. She says, "We have not been properly introduced. I am Chae-Lin of the Jade clans." I smile at her despite feeling timid and say, "It's nice to meet you." I motion to myself and say, "I am Kalea Jameson." I thump Abbie on the back a little too enthusiastically. "*Umph!* Kalea." I shrug sheepishly at her and say, "This is Abbie Diaz." She waves at everyone. Liam steps forward and says, "Hi, I am Liam Inala. When everyone looks at him, Abbie jabs me in the ribs. I cough, and I motion to Grace, "This is Grace Kim." Chae-Lin smiles back at us and says, "This is my husband, Ji-Yong." He bows, "Manna-so pangapsunida. Pleased to meet you."

Grace steps forward, bows deeply, and says something in Korean to them. A smile lights up their faces, and then all three bow to one another. Chae-Lin then motions at the man with the shock of blond hair. "This is Jannali of the Amber clans." He nods at us. "And this is Elan of the turquoise clans." He says, "Ya'at eeh. Hello, friends" I look each of them in the eyes. I say, "It's nice to meet all of you finally." Suddenly we are greeted by a tiny angry wail. I turn to see what it is, but Abbie beats me to it. She makes a high-pitched squeal noise and says, "Oh, it's a baby!"

There is an elegantly dressed woman entering the room holding a newborn. Abbie is by her side in a flash. She says, "Oh, he is so cute! Look at those tiny *nittle fweet*." The woman smiles politely. She says, "actually, he is a she. And thank you. I find her adorable, too." The woman has an entourage trailing behind her. She approaches the canopy and then air kisses in the direction of the elders. "Oh Chae-Lin, darling. It's so good to see you! Ji-Yong. Elan. Jannali." She blows air kisses at each of them. The baby is still wailing. "May I?" It is the deep resonating voice of Masego. "Oh, what a dear! Please, be my guest, Masego."

She hands the little bundle to him. "My cousin would never forgive me if I missed his wedding. I brought the newest member of the clans to witness it, too. She is a bit choleric." Makai says quietly to me, "She must be the woman who was in labor that we saw our first day here." I nod. "Yes, you're probably right." Liam asks Makai, "What did Masego want?" He ignores him and asks, "How much longer, do you think?"

Grace points and quickly says, "I suspect not much longer. There's Amos." He looks very handsome in his dapper tunic. He is followed by his dad and a score of other people. On either side of the canopy are stone balconies decorated with gorgeous garlands. Suddenly instrumentalists popped up in the balconies and began playing joyful Celtic-sounding ditties. Then what looks like a solid wall behind the canopy slides open, and out comes Branwen and her father. Liam says rather loudly, "Now, that is awesome!"

The door slides shut, and the ceremony begins. It goes by in a flash. Branwen's parents, Branwen, Amos, and Amos's dad, turn around. They join hands and put them in the air. Amos says, "Now we feast!" The room erupts in cheers, and I jump. The noise is deafening. I had no idea that so many people were crammed in here with us because I was so enraptured with the wedding itself to notice anything else. Abbie is exuding excitement, "Oh, let's go!"

"I bet there will be dancing." She has a faraway look on her face, and she is swaying to the music. I can't help but smile at her. Then, the crowd parts, and the lairds and ladies leave the room while the band played the happiest song I've ever heard. My friends all have the biggest grins on their faces. Makai says, "Seriously, the excitement is catching." Liam pretends to throw a football, "It's like when you're at the game and your team scores a touchdown."

I notice that all the people in here with us are dressed in

their finest. There is the new mister grumpy pants and some others from the library. Then it hits me that these are important people from the clans. They all begin to follow the guests of honor. We melt into the crowd and are led out of the castle and greeted by even more people. "Holy cow, where did all these people come from?" The tents are still set up from when we first got here. So, we make our way to them. Makai says, "One of these people has your necklace, Kalea."

Grace takes a bite of the turkey leg, "This is totally like the other night," she says with her mouth full. We are sitting on the ground in a circle eating our dinner. Thanks to Grace, now all I can think about is the other night when Liam kissed me. I look over at him and blush. Dang, it. I wish my face wouldn't do that. I look away. It was obviously nothing to him. He is leaning over Grace and whispering something. I look down at my plate. It's still a plate full of medievally food. I take another bite, and suddenly I have a craving for tacos or pizza. With my fork, I absentmindedly mush the food around the plate, drawing a funny-looking face. I put my fork down and stared at the face. All I can think about is going home, even if my mom knows all about the necklace and book. I miss her. I need to tell her about Liam. Someone nudges me. "Penny, for your thoughts." It is Makai.

I see that Abbie is looking at me, too. I say, "I'm just homesick." He says, "Yeah, me too. I want to go home. I miss my mom's meals." Abbie smiles, "Your mom is the world's best cook, Makai. I miss her meals, too!" I say, "Pizza sounds so good right now." Abbie says, "Or tacos!" My two besties continue to talk about food. I smile and nod, but I'm a million miles away.

Liam has his arm around Grace. Argh, why do I care so much? I put my plate down and stand up and stretch. Then I notice something. I grab Abbie and drag her with me. "We'll be right back," I say as I excuse us. "Where are we going?" she asks. I point outside of the tent, "Look." She gasps. We should

warn Amos. Others are noticing. Someone calls out a warning from the tent's entrance, "My laird! It's..." But the warning is drowned out by screams.

The tent is instantly plunged into confusion and chaos. Swiftly and without a word, Chae-Lin and Ji-Yong are in front of Amos. I'm not sure I've seen anyone move so fast. As Donovan presses forward, people try to stop him, but he marches on. Someone latches onto his waist and is trying to pull him down. Then someone else attempts to punch him, but at the same time, another man lunges for Donovan, and the punch lands squarely on the lungier's jaw. His wife, the daughter of Mr. Grumpy Pants, is holding her husband's hand and laughing as if she were watching a funny movie. He says something, but I can't hear it. Whatever it was makes his wife laugh even harder. They are in stitches. Another guy advances at him with a sword, but he sidesteps the swordsman.

In a thunderous and somewhat cranky voice, Amos says, "Leave him. Allow my brother to come to me." He is standing up. His big frame is looming over the table. His entire manner commands attention. I happened to look up at the right time because I caught the micro-expression flash across his face, that of a lost little boy, but in an instant, it was gone. One of the elders say, "That may not be a good idea, my friend." Chae-Lin says, "Let us take care of him."



## CHAPTER 23

### The castle is under attack



“Brother, was I not invited to your wedding?” I look to Abbie, “What is Amos going to do?” She shrugs and shakes her head. Her eyes are wide with fear or excitement; I can't tell. I put my arm around her shoulders and gave her a side hug. The place is now in absolute silence. Amos doesn't speak. He motions for his new wife, Branwen, to stand next to him. All the elders look like they are about to pounce.

Amos says, “Get my brother and his wife plates of food. Come meet my wife and introduce me to yours.” Mr. Grumpy, otherwise known as Baron Turlough Blather-Smythe, screams and rushes for Donovan, but the elders form a wall of protection around him. The guy is going ballistic. He is screaming something about his daughter, Aoibheann, but that's all I can understand. His face is nearly purple, and spittle is flying out of his mouth as he screams.

I look at Abbie. "How could Amos invite his brother to dinner after what he's done?" Abbie doesn't answer but is staring intensely at the scene in front of us. I look back at the scene in front of us and then back at Abbie. "He hurt people, like really badly, and he killed that Duke McGlinchy." Still, no answer from her. She has inched forward as close as she can get to Amos and his stupid brother. I say, "Don't you think prison would be more appropriate than a plate of dinner?"

Abbie says, "It feels like Amos wants to know his brother's motivation first. There is such sadness between the two of them. It's all over Amos' face. Can't you see it? Donovan is joking and making light of everything, but he's trying to hide his deep sadness, and he's not doing a good job of hiding it." She raises her eyebrows at me. "Seriously, look. don't you see it?" I'm a little frustrated with her. "After all, he's done! You say, look, he's sad. Of course, he's sad. The psycho's killed and maimed people!" O.K. maybe, I'm a lot frustrated. Abbie grabs my head between her hands and points my face at Donovan.

"Look, already." Ugh, she better let go of my face. I flick at her hands with my thumb and forefinger, but she won't let go. With my cheeks all squished up in a fish face, I reluctantly look at the two brothers. I start with Amos. It's his wedding day, so he should be exuding happiness. I squint, peering into his eyes. Well, his brother just crashed his wedding, so I get why he might not be ecstatic. I move on to Donovan. He erupts in deep belly laughter, but the joy doesn't reach his eyes. Dang, it. She's right. It's not anger but deep sadness.

Slurping spit through my teeth, and in a nasally voice, I say, "*Wa, you're night, vervee thad.*" She lets go of my face. I open and shut my mouth, rubbing my face. I smack her on the shoulder. "That hurt." She rolls her eyes at me. "Well, you wouldn't look." Our friends have joined us. Liam huffs, "Can you believe that he is entertaining that creep?" It's my turn to shrug. "Really, you are just going to shrug it off?" I open my



eyes wide at him. "Look closely at the two of them. It's not what it seems." Grace picks up on it first. "They are both going through the motions, but why?" Abbie gives me a look. You know the one. The one your best friend gives you when she knows that you just stole her idea.

I smile weakly at her. She sighs heavily. Makai leans forward, squinting at them. "They seem..." Someone interrupts, "Grief-stricken." It's one of the elders. Elan, I think. He says, "Donovan went too far. Amos is trying to come to terms with what must be done," Abbie says, "I don't envy him." Elan nods, "Both brothers are calm, but strong emotions are brooding underneath. I fear a foul storm is brewing. I hope Amos makes a swift decision." Elan leaves us. Abbie says, "I like that guy. He knows what he's talking about."

Grace points and says, "Look at that Blather-Symthe guy. He's up there with Donovan and his daughter." It looks like he is trying to talk sense into his daughter. The mood has changed. It went from joyful to... well, I'm not sure. It's like right before the teacher enters the room after the bell rings. Everyone is chatty and having a decent time, then *brrring* the bell goes off and bang the door slams shut. Everyone is quiet or speaks in hushed voices. It just feels awkward. Some of the merry-makers have left out of anger, and others are too curious to go. I wonder to myself how many of the people left have been swayed by Donovan?

"Do you think Donovan will attack us in this tent?" Makai answers, "Maybe. He has followers, and we don't know how many." Abbie shivers, "That's a terrible thought." Grace says, "It looks like Donovan and Blather-Smythe are getting along now." They are happily discussing something. Branwen and Aoibheann are talking to one another. Amos looks miserable. "Poor guy," I say, "Look at Amos." We decide to go back to the castle. We overhear one conversation after another on the way back about how no good will come of the brothers.

"I believe it." Liam says, "Back home, remember, those shadow lights tormented us. I think it has to do with them." Visions of the stormy evening on the beach flood my mind. My dad, Amos, and Donovan's faces flashed in front of me on the blackened canvas of the night sky. I don't tell my friends. It will just make them upset with me because I didn't say anything before. Besides, I'm still trying to convince myself that I was delirious or something.

I see a flash of light near the woods. It's the same as earlier today by the pond. I'm curious, so I go towards it. "Yo, where are you going?" It's Makai. He sees it, too. "Why go in the cold, creepy forest when we can go sit in front of a roaring fire in the welcoming castle?" Grace is now somehow in front of me. She looks back and says, "I see it, too." Liam pushes ahead. "You know it could be a trap." Abbie is off to the side of us, sitting on a tree stump and gazing up at the moon and muttering to herself, "It's just so beautiful." Old Zillah comes out of the clearing and picks up whatever was on the ground. "Young-uns, how nice to see you! Are you on your way to visit old Zillah? Well, here I am." She smiles widely and chuckles merrily. She looks up at the sky. "It's late; it is."

Liam marches up to her and points at the ground, "What..." I quickly interrupt. "Zillah, have you heard that Donovan is back?" Liam is glaring at me. Zillah takes a step back. "He is a trickster, that one is. I must warn him." She starts to go back into the woods. Liam sighs heavily. "Zillah, wait! What was that that you picked up?" She pulls out a shiny piece of rock. "My summoning stone, it is." She smiles at me. "I signaled for you to visit me today. I thought you saw it! Zillah has something to say; she does. I must warn him." She playfully skips into the woods.

I follow. As soon as I take a step inside, everything is quieter and colder. The temperature must be at least ten degrees cooler in here. I can see my breath. I look for Zillah in the darkened woods. The moon shines silvery light on the tops

of the trees, and some of it spills down to my level. Seriously, how does she disappear like that? I go farther along the worn path.

“Zillah,” I call. My friends rush in behind me, bumping into me. Everyone makes an “oo!” sound, but I am listening for her. Zillah's name is still echoing off in the distance. My breathing seems loud in the forest, but my footsteps are muffled. I'm at the clearing in the woods. The moonlight is illuminating the purple flowers on the forest floor. Finally, she answers back in echoes, “A trickster, trickster, trickster... he is, he is, he is.”

This wakes up some of the animals, and we hear scurrying and scratching. Then a bird screeches and swoops down at us. My friends and I are out of there in a flash. Who is a trickster? Amos or Donovan. Surely, she was talking about Donovan. We get back to our room, and there is already a roaring fire in our fireplace, and candles have been lit around the room. I feel the events of the day melting away. I almost feel content, except that I can't shake this nagging homesickness.

Abbie says, “I cannot wait to get back in my comfy clothes!” We all agree. Makai has already pulled his glasses out of hiding and has them on his face. “It's great to see everyone again.” A huge grin lights up his face. Liam's blousy shirt is already off, and he is putting on his t-shirt. I realize a little too late that I am staring at him. He catches my eye and smirks. Of course, I blush. I turn away quickly.” Abbie, help me get out of this dress.”

I walk behind the screen. Grace is already there, and she shoots me a dirty look. Great, everyone saw me leering. We all get changed and gather around the fireplace. “Zillah's weird,” I blurt out. “You're just figuring this out?” Makai teases. “Well, who was she talking about? He's a trickster.” I stare into the fire watching the logs burn down. Liam uses the poker and stirs it up, trying to get it back to a roaring fire. He waits for a second and then throws on another log. Sparks and ash

intermingle, swirling and dancing up the chimney.

Abbie says, "Of course she is talking about Donovan." I nod. "Mmm, of course." But I'm still not sure. We have been relaxing for hours now. Abbie is sprawled out on the only comfy piece of furniture in the room other than the bed. It's a blue and yellow plaid chaise lounge. She is staring at the pattern on the chair. "I bet this came from France," she muses. "Next time we jump into a book, let's go somewhere exquisite like 1920's Paris." The blanket she stole off the bed she pulls over her shoulders, covering her chin, so all you see is the top of her head, eyes, and nose. "or at least somewhere warmer like Mexico."

The rest of us are sitting on top of a carpet on the stone floor. Makai says, "Isn't this cozy? Boy girl, Boy girl?" I laugh and elbow him in the ribs, "That's from your mom's favorite Christmas movie, dork." He squirms and laughs. Grace leans forward, looking in our direction. "White Christmas! Oh, I love that movie. My little sister and I put on boas and dance and sing along to the Sisters Song." Liam gives her a funny look, "I'd love to see that!" Laughing, she says, "That'll never happen! It's a sister thing."

Liam continues, "I know the song. My mom makes us watch it with her every year. She makes peppermint hot cocoa and popcorn. If Dad's in town, he will build a fire in the fireplace and curl up on the couch with mom. Then, annoyingly, they quote the whole movie together." Makai says, "My favorite part is when the guys perform to the record of the Hane's sisters. It's hilarious." I nudge Makai, "Doesn't your mom make sugar cookies to frost after the movie is over?"

Liam jumps up off the floor, "Dude, that's it. I'm starving. Makai, come with me to rustle up some food?" He's already out the door before Makai can answer. "Well, I could eat." Makai rushes off to catch up with Liam. I notice that neither of them takes the time to put their Medieval costumes back on, but it's really late, so probably no one will see

them. Apparently, I'm not the only one homesick. Makai made us think about Christmas even though it's springtime.

Abbie says, "I love decorating the paper bags with my brother and sisters. We cut out some really cool designs. It's so pretty when they are lit." She looks at Grace, who seems a little confused. "I sometimes see those things at Christmastime. Why do you do that? You know, instead of hanging a string of lights?" Abbie shrugs. "Tradition. They are called farolitos. We fill the bags with sand and line our driveways and streets with them. It's so pretty when the candles are lit."

I excitedly say, "I love the small bonfire you have on Christmas Eve. You guys make a box out of pine branches and then light it on fire. It just smells like Christmas." Abbie says, "Dad says that they are juniper and piñon branches." She looks at Grace. "It might be more common in New Mexico. Both of my parents were born in Santa Fe. Actually, so was I. Anyway, Dad's job made us move to Chicago and then to southern California. I definitely like the beach better." I start laughing. "You were so little when you lived in Chicago. I doubt you remember it that well. We became best friends when we were in kindergarten!"

Abbie huffs at me, "I do, too, remember!" Grace blurts out, "Our Santa is dressed in blue, not red! For whatever reason, Christmas colors in Korea are blue." She laughs. Abbie smiles. "One of my favorite colors!" Grace continues quickly, "And mom buys a Christmas cake from Baskin Robbins, and on Christmas morning, we get money."

This is fun. I say, "My grandpa always lit candles and put them in the windows and hung a holly wreath above the front door and..." Out of nowhere, we hear a huge crash outside our door. "What was that?" Abbie asks. Then it happens again, but even louder! I get up and slowly peer out the door. "Guys, is that you?" I see the Baron running towards me with his arms above his head. He slides to a stop within inches of my face.

His breath smells of pickles and fish. A drop of sweat drips down his nose and splashes on his shoe. I quickly move my head back inside but leave the door cracked just a bit.

“Is everything all right?” I ask him. He blinks wildly. He exclaims, “The castle is under attack!” He backs up slowly like I’m going to attack him. Then he looks down the hallway staring at some invisible something. He, then, locks eyes with me and forcibly whispers, “Run.” He takes off in the direction that he just came from. As he runs, he laughs manically like a mad scientist in one of those cheesy horror movies that I love so much. He stops in his tracks and turns in my direction. He suppresses a giggle, mouths the word run, and points down the corridor. I look.

Bounding down the hall are two humongous wild-looking men. Their crazed eyes are bulging out of their heads. They have long blond hair and beards. Their bodies are covered in blond fur and white feathers. Their teeth are bared like the animals they have tethered to leashes. At the end of each of the men’s fingers are razor-sharp talons dripping with blood. Leading the way are four strong fearsome panthers. Their dark fur is a stark contrast to the white-blond of the men. The cats’ eyes glow yellow, and their lips are turned up in a sneer showing off their long incisors. I can’t tell if the men are wearing some weird costumes or if they actually look like that. Absurdly, the only thing I can think of is why on earth does the Baron think this is so funny. I shut and locked the door quickly. Grace and Abbie are beside me.

“What is that out there?” I’m not sure who asked me. I swallow hard. “I don’t know. I mean, well, there are these giant furry, feathery men that look like some sort of were-griffin, and they have pet panthers on leashes.” We hear a *thwung-screee* sound. We back away. I say out loud to no one in particular, “I think one of them must have sunk his talons in the stone wall.”

The shrill scree sound gets louder, and then it turns into a

*kathunk-brrr* sound as the creature drags his talons across our door and a blood-curdling scream from one of the panthers fills the room. The scratching at our door continues. I silently wish the creature to go away. The three of us huddle together in the corner of the room, holding on to each other. Then the noises from the creatures just fade away as they leave our area.

“The boys. They don't know that the castle is under attack. We've got to warn them.” I feel panic taking over. “Those things are out there,” I squeak. Abbie's eyes match my level of fear. She simply says, “How?” And shakes her head, “How?” I straighten my shoulders and take a deep breath. This is not a time to let fear get the better of me. “We will be brave.” Grace is taking deep, calming breaths. “You are right. Let's go.” I open the door just wide enough to see if those things are still there. I feel bile rising into my throat, and my heart is racing out of control.

Abbie whispers, “I might need to pee first.” I close the door again and give her my best 'Are-you-kidding-me?' look. She rushes off to find the chamber pot. Relief washes over me, though, because for the moment, we aren't headed out to become griffin kibble. Grace is pacing back and forth. Her body is trembling. I put a hand on her shoulder. She is fiery hot. She stops pacing and starts taking deep breaths. Then, I notice that she is chanting something in Korean. Suddenly she starts jumping up and down and tilting her head back and forth like a boxer inside the ring. I pulled my hand off her shoulder. She just notices that I'm there. “Oh, I'm fine. Let's do this.”

Abbie comes back. “I guess I'm as ready as I'll ever be,” she says as I close the door behind us. We examine the strange marking carved on our door. Abbie says, “It looks like the end of one of my first-place barrel racing ribbons.” It has a straight line on top and two right angles facing one another. Abbie asks, “Does that mean they'll be back?” Grace whispers, “It looks more like vampire's teeth to me.”

I shrug, and we start to creep down the hallway. There is a noise from behind us. We whirl around to see that it's someone else escaping to another room. Then another sound makes us jump, but it turns out to be nothing. I run my hand along the huge gashes along the wall where the creature scraped his claws. Grace does the same. "Wow!" is the only thing that she says.

Thankfully, the marks lead away from the kitchen. The castle is a wreck. Tapestries, carpets, and tables have been torn to shreds. The beautiful wedding decorations are strewn all around. Off in the distance, I hear a panther scream again, and I shiver. Abbie and Grace walk closely behind me. We round the corner to see a group of servants holding a lifeless body. It's the body of the chambermaid who welcomed us on our first night here. One of the older women is quietly sobbing. It must be her mother.

Someone from the group says, "We must get out of the corridors. The Wild Men, Finbar, and Ainbertach, and their great cats will be back. They left the cat's teeth mark on our door!" The man takes the girl and carries her away from the sobbing mother. She says, "Donovan is behind this. I know it."

They all file into the nearest room. They shut and bolt the door behind them. Tears well up in my eyes. Memories of my grandpa's death flashed through my mind. First, I cannot get the lifeless body of the girl who is no older than me out of my mind. Finally, a different image is there, but it's not one that I want. All I can see is my grandpa on the night of his death.

I blink, trying to think of anything else, and tears roll down my cheeks. More memories come. I'm back in the present. I can't shake the image of the mother crying over her child, and suddenly her face disappears and is replaced by my mother's. She is crying over her father's death. I'm frozen in place and stuck in a place that I didn't want to be. Tears sting my eyes. Abbie is shaking me. I see that she is crying. "We've got to keep going."



We make it to the kitchen but, the boys aren't here. There is one of those panthers on the prowl. He is making chirping sounds and sniffing the air, and pacing back and forth. Grace notices something, "Look!" The larder door creaks opened just a bit, and a pie flies out, landing at the cat's feet. The boys are inside the larder. It's the thing medieval kitchens had before fridges. The big cat gobbled the pie down. It heard Grace and emitted a low growl. His attention turns toward us.

I yell, "Run, boys!" The panther hunches low to the ground and slowly moves toward the girls and me. Abbie says, "Are you kidding me? Now he's stalking us, Kalea!" We frantically look for a hiding place. Over in the corner are sacks of flour piled high into the air. We squeeze behind them and stand up on some so we can peek over at the cat. Makai pops his head out and throws a handful of turkey legs at the cat, hitting him on the haunches. Startled, he jumps up in the air and bats at the food. Grace whispers, "He would be cute if he weren't trying to eat us."

She's a self-described crazy cat lady. Now, I understand why. The cat continues playing with his food, and while he eats his snack, I frantically try to think of a plan. There are knives in the drawers, but there is no way I can get to those. There's a giant panther between me and them. Oh gosh, think, Kalea, think... The back door isn't that far away. Maybe we can make it over there. The cat is done eating now and is eyeing our hiding place. I look around for a distraction.

Then, it hits me. I jump out from behind the sacks of flour and grab a chair. I hold it out like they do in the circus. I shout, "No. Bad kitty! Shoo. Get back. Shoo. Go away!" I turn my head for a second. "Grace. Abbie. Go to the back door. You too, boys!" I turn back and lunge at the animal with the chair. "Get back!" I notice that all my friends are together now. I've got to get over there, too. "Shoo, back. Get back!"

The panther seems more curious than anything. He playfully touches the chair. Then he sits down and watches me for a second. Then he gets down on all fours like he is about to pounce. "Hey, what are you doing, kitty? No, don't do that." He wiggles his behind. "Oh, crap," I shout. He then reaches up and whacks the chair out of my hands. Then he laughs at me. Well, it looks like he does.

I back up. He creeps forward. I back up again and grab the first thing I see, a heavy basket of apples, and I begin to pelt the big cat with them. He swats them away. I get a good hit right between the eyes, and this makes him really angry. Right, when I think I'm a goner, Liam and Grace come rushing over holding the biggest ham I've ever seen. They run around the cat. "Here, kitty, kitty," Grace says. Makai is by my side, in a flash. He pulls me in the direction of the door. Liam says, "Smell this nice tasty ham. Come on, boy." Grace continues with the "Here, kitty, kitty."

They run off in the direction of the larder. The cat chases after them. "Go, guys! Woohoo." I cheer after them as Makai yanks my shoulder out of the socket, pulling me away. They toss the ham inside the larder, and the cat pounces on it. Abbie slams the door shut. All we hear is a loud purring and the cat smacking his lips. "He's happy," I say.

Makai says, "Yeah, he's going to feast like a king and probably take a nap." We stand there, kind of not knowing what to do next. Abbie says, "That was some quick-thinking Grace and really brave of you'n Liam." Liam half smiles and shrugs it off like it was nothing. Grace blushes and says, "Well, I couldn't let our circus ring leader become panther food." And Makai adds, "Those are my monkeys, and this is my circus!" We all laugh.

An overwhelming sense of love and gratitude for my four friends fills me. I feel like I could conquer the world with them by my side. Liam is hugging Abbie, and Makai is hugging

Grace. This is the first time that my two best friends in the whole world became true friends with Grace and Liam. I hear a scratching at the larder's door.

“Let's get out of here,” I say.

My friends hear it, too. We jog out of the kitchen and run down the hall. It is easy going. No one is out, and about which is great because I suddenly remember that we are all in our normal clothes and not in our medieval costumes. We round the corner and almost run straight into Atticus Rimeaux. We scurry under the nearest shredded tapestry. I had no idea that behind the tapestry would be an enclave with a giant window and built-in seat. We all squish onto the seat, pulling our feet off the floor and pushing our backs up against the window. I peer out of a hole in the tapestry at Rimeaux.

I whisper, “I think he heard us.”

His head is cocked sideways, and he is staring in our direction. He walks over and stops right in front of us. We inch farther backward. He reaches out and grabs the tapestry.

Then, someone says, “Atticus, there you are!”

He drops his hand and walks away. I let out a silent sigh of relief. “I think that was Donovan's voice,” Makai says. “Guys,” Grace whispers. I take a chance and look out the same hole in the tapestry. “It's him,” I say. “Guys,” Grace says again, only a bit louder. We all turn to look at her.

She points outside through the window. It's Amos and Donovan's father. The moon illuminates him, so we can see that he's standing in the garden, but most astonishingly, he has both arms outstretched, and dangling from each hand is a necklace that looks like mine! Wait, he has two necklaces? I let out a gasp. “We have to get mine from him.” Everyone shushes me.

Makai whispers, "The book is still in our room. I should have grabbed it." Liam shakes his head. Quietly he says, "Then it would most likely have been shredded by that panther." Abbie says, "How would you have known that we would be trapped here with no way, no way out?" Makai glares at Abbie, "Well, that's not helpful." I say, "Grace, I can't believe you found it!" Liam says, "Now what do we do?" I look out at our two biggest foes.



## CHAPTER 24

### Grace's secret and the dragon



They are having a discussion. “Amos has to be in the castle somewhere. He didn't just disappear.” I look back to my friends because Grace is chanting again. She is rocking back and forth, but my attention is drawn back to the corridor. Rimeaux answers Donovan, “The Wild Men of Wood are on the hunt. The brothers will find him.” Donovan is visibly upset. Rimeaux says, “My friend, we cannot fail, now.”

Donovan pauses for a moment, thinking about his words. In no more than a whisper, he says, “I have given up so much.” In a moment of rage, he reaches up and wraps his hands around Rimeaux's throat, “I have trusted you. I have listened to all your advice. Has it all be for naught?” He squeezes tighter and Rimeaux gags and gasps, clawing at Donovan's hands. Suddenly he releases him with a shove.

“We should look behind the tapestry. Just over there,” Rimeaux manages to choke out. Grace yells loudly at us. “Get out. Get out. Run.” Something is happening to her. Her eyes are glowing. Her face is morphing into something not human. “Please, run,” she growls. Suddenly she has fur all over her body. Liam scooches back and falls into the tapestry, ripping it off the wall and landing on the castle floor with a thud.

Makai grabs Abbie's and my hands, and we run. Liam is already up and running. I look back. Rimeaux and Donovan have their swords drawn. They are staring at Grace, though. She no longer fits inside the window seat. She has turned into a huge panther. She hisses and growls at the two of them, but instead of attacking them, she jumps up and crashes through the window and into the night. We try the first door we come to, but it is locked. It only takes them a moment to recover from seeing Grace shapeshift. They sprint after us.

“She's going to get the necklace,” I say gleefully, “we get to go home!” Liam tries the next door. It is locked. Then, I try the next one. It's locked, too. They are gaining on us. Abbie tries a door, and it opens. “Hurry,” she hollers. We rush into the room and bolt the door. There is no one else in here. It's just like our room except there is more furniture. Liam and Makai start pushing a wardrobe in front of the door. I rush to the window and search for Grace. I can't find her.

Abbie is beside me and says, “There.” Near Amos and Donovan's father, I see glowing eyes. Her sleek black fur shimmers in the moonlight. She's creeping low, stalking him. He continues to stand there in a daze staring up at the necklaces swinging from his hands. Someone loudly knocks three times on our door. I ignore it. My eyes are glued on Grace. She pounces, grabbing a necklace between her teeth. We all cheer from the window. Then, she howls in pain as an arrow pierces her shoulder. The necklace is dangling from her lower tooth.

I scream, "No, Grace! Oh my gosh, Grace!" I am frantically looking for a way out. Liam is crying. Abbie is crying. Makai is trying to climb out the window. I grab him before he does something stupid like fall to his death. Someone or something is slamming against our door. The wardrobe falls over with a crash. I turn for long enough to watch the door crack. It makes a deafening sound. I am frightened. I know that it's just a matter of time before Donovan gets through that door. I know that I won't be going home. This is the end, but Grace, oh poor Grace. That's when I notice that I am crying, too. I look back outside as the assault on our door continues.

Amos and Donovan's father seems to have come out of his stupor. He is kneeling over Grace. She is no longer a panther. She is a small girl curled in a ball. The pain must have brought her back to being a human. The necklace is lying beside her head. He is cradling her in his arms and rocking back and forth. He searches the turrets of the castle, looking for the shooter. He yells into the night. Just then, another deafening crack causes me to turn from the window.

A man covered in blond fur and white feathers breaks through the opening he created. He marches over in my direction. Rimeaux's scowling face appears, scans the room, and he enters. He makes his way to my side. Finally, Donovan's lanky form breezes in through the broken door. "Hello there," Donovan speaks, "It seems that I was right after all. Our exotic friends are hiding secrets. Where has your little shape-shifting friend run off too, hmmm?"

He saunters past me, purposely brushing up against me. He peers out the window searches the grounds for a moment, and walks back to me. Slowly, he eyes me up and down. "What odd clothing you have on. A woman in trousers is quite scandalous, indeed." The three men leer at me. Donovan brushes the backside of his hand across my cheek, wiping away a tear. Makai moves protectively closer to me. Donovan turns to him.

“You have the look of Masego.” He studies him. He reaches up and snatches the glasses off of Makai’s face. He holds them up and looks through them, then tosses them aside. He leans in closer to Makai, and with his other hand, he grabs his chin between his thumb and forefinger. He forcibly turns his face one way and then the other. He lets him go but puts two fingers on either side of Makai’s head, right on the temples. Makai squeezes his eyes closed, pinching up his face. He looks like an infant who doesn’t want to eat his spinach.

“How young are you, little Masego? You hear it, don’t you? Oh, yes!” Donovan leans his forehead against Makai’s forehead. “There.” Silence takes over the room as Donovan does whatever weirdness it is that he is doing. Finally, he says, “Oh, you don’t know yet.” He lets go of him, erupting in deep harsh laughter. Donovan’s laughter echoes off of the stone walls banging into my ears. His two goons start laughing. The four of us back away from them, but he snatches Abbie away.

Sneering, “Oh, so pretty.” He catches hold of her around the waist and pulls her close. I try to go to her, but the Wild Man were-creature holds me back. He and Rimeaux hold all three of us back. “Let go of her, you creep,” Makai yells. Liam breaks free and tries to pull Abbie out of his grasp, but Donovan’s gangly frame is stronger than it appears. He easily pushes him away. “Oh, you feel left out? Don’t worry, you’re next, little boy.”

Liam visibly flinches at the words ‘little boy’. Donovan pulls Abbie even closer to him and whispers something in her ear, causing her to wretch. He twirls his spindly fingers through her long golden blond hair, wrapping it around his hand. Then he suddenly yanks, pulling her head backward. Abbie whimpers. He mockingly says, “So sensitive. What am I feeling, dearie?” She shudders. He pushes her away, and she falls into a heap on the floor. Donovan quickly wrings his hands together.



"Oh, this is such great fun. Where's the boy?" The Wild Man has him by the nape of the neck. He holds him up. Liam's feet aren't touching the floor anymore, and he swings his legs back and forth. He manages to kick the creature right in the middle of the stomach, but he just chuckles and flings Liam at Donovan. Donovan catches him before he stumbles to the ground. He spins him round and round. Dizzy, Liam falls backward to the ground, and the air is knocked out of him. Then that jerk jumps on top of him and sits down on his chest. Liam is struggling to get free and gasping for air. Donovan puts him in a chokehold and says, "Strong. Proud. Fierce." He lets go just enough so Liam can get air but quickly latches down on him again and sneers, "Vulnerable. Unimpressive. Pathetic."

He stands up, looming over him. Liam kicks at him and scurries away. Donovan spits at Liam. "Nightmares consume you, little boy." Liam is coughing and choking. Abbie is in the corner puking. Makai is holding his head, and his face is all scrunched up again. I am desperately looking for a way out. We are trapped in here with that mad man. He is pacing in front of the only way out. He stops and locks eyes with me.

"You are a gift. Oh, the plans I have for you and your friends. You think you know me like Amos knows me? He's wrong, you know. He's gravely wrong. You can trust good ol' Donovan." He is starting to circle me. "I have gone around our beautiful land learning the histories of our people from our clansmen. I am to be the great storyteller. Bitterly, I have watched Amos. I know more than he does. I know the ancient learnings and language of our ancestors. Amos thinks he understands. He does not. I know the science. I know the why. We were too powerful as one. We were forced to leave by our very own flesh and blood."

He is still circling me. I watch him. I regret ever finding the secret of the book and necklace. He passes by the window, and I see my reflection. I look down at the floor. I can't stand to

look at myself. It's my fault that we are here. Donovan is still talking about memories and how misunderstood he is, but I've stopped listening. I miss the sea mist blowing through the air. I miss my mom. I miss my friend, Grace. I've lost my friends. The looks they give me are heartbreaking, and there is nothing that I can do. I'm stuck as Donovan scurries to and fro. I watch and cry.

Donovan is saying, "Amos thinks it's dangerous to collect them." I listen again as tears fall down my face. I hate that I am showing weakness. I feel like all I have done lately is cry. He says, "He is wrong. I am smarter." He taps one of his bony fingers against his head and says, "I have shared my knowledge with my kinsman. I am gathering an army. I will be more than a laird. I will rule all our clans. I will unite us once again. We will be unstoppable. I am stronger than Amos. Our Sycamore, he will break. I will..."

Ugh, I look outside the window again. He just keeps raging on about his brother and how his abilities are better. Methinks that Donovan's a tad envious of Amos, way too into himself, and blinded by greed, but he's not asking for my opinion. My self-loathing is gone, and I just want to smack him. I turn back toward him. His fury is filling me with rage. I want to punch him in his big nose. My whole body is white-hot with rage.

"Kalea," Abbie has her hand on me, "Kalea." Donovan pushes her aside. "What is that you are saying," he demands.

My insides are shaking. My heart is racing. I am breathing quicker. Suddenly, a searing pain rushes through my body. Something is happening, and I can't stop it. My eyes are burning. I hear a deep voice yell, "back, back, get back!"

It sounds like they are in a tunnel. Suddenly, a sharp pain in my leg causes a deep guttural roar to escape my lips. I grab my thigh. I open my eyes. There is an arrow sticking out of my leg. I look up. Elan is in front of me, holding his bow out, and he

is about to grab another arrow out of his quiver. I feel blood trickle down my leg. I touch the arrow. I look up again. I must be losing my mind. There is a dragon and a unicorn in the room, but everyone stares at me like I'm the freak. The dragon has Rimeaux in its talons, and the unicorn has a muscular leg resting on the were-griffin's chest. Amos and Jannali each have one of Donovan's arms. Masego is walking towards me. I pass out.



## CHAPTER 25

Lots of things happen, did that really just happen



I open my eyes. I am in a well-lit room. I am lying in bed. I turn my head. Beautiful stained-glass windows are lining the wall. “Hello,” I say to all my friends. Even Grace is sitting there. “You’re okay!” I exclaim. Grace smiles. I sit up. Amos and the elders are on my other side. I put my hand on my leg where the arrow had been. Masego puts his hand on top of mine. “You are healed. It took a little longer than Grace because you were in the middle of transforming.” I must look confused. Amos leans forward. “You are a shapeshifter like Grace.”

I let myself fall back onto the pillow. I’m a shapeshifter? No way. I decide to sit up on the side of the bed. Amos helps me while the room full of people watches me. It feels a little awkward, so being me, I try to fill the awkwardness by talking. “No, I’m not a shapeshifter. Nope. Grace is. Sure, but not me. So, I think you caught Donovan. Did you?” I didn’t pause for

an answer. "Oh, Grace, the necklace. You are so awesome. Thank you. I'm so glad that you are o.k. I would never have forgiven myself if you..." I trailed off, and I glanced down at my leg. "Oh, my favorite jeans. You cut the leg off!" Thankfully, Abbie interrupts before I can keep rambling.

She says, "You can cut the other leg off now and have a pair of shorts, silly. The other leg was covered in blood and had a huge arrow hole in it, remember. So, this is definitely better." I nod my head. "Oh yeah." Before finally standing up, I examine my leg. There's not even a scar where the arrow went in. "I'm starving," I say to no one in particular. Grace says quickly, "So am I after I change shapes. That's why I drink so much coffee. It takes a lot of energy for your atoms to reprogram themselves. Honestly, it takes an electrical charge to jump-start them."

Staring up at the vaulted ceiling, I say, "I was filled with rage like I've never felt before." She says, "Well, that would jump-start it, all right. That's all they need to start binding and reforming in different ways. Believe it or not, it's an ancient science. I thought my family clan was the only group of shapeshifters. I almost told you about it that morning on the track." Amos says, "I think Kalea is not done surprising us yet."

I must have slept throughout the rest of the night and into the noonday. It's the following afternoon. Makai is sitting in a chair next to my bed. "Oh good, you're awake. We are all meeting in the dining hall," he says as he helps me to my feet. We make our way to the dining hall. I haven't been in this room yet. It looks a bit like a high-end cafeteria. "I can't believe I was shot with an arrow, and I don't even have a scar," I say through mouthfuls of Sheppard's pie. "Cookie, this is delicious." She lays a loaf of bread beside me and smiles. "Try chewing your next bite." Chae-Lin says, "Your body can change into whatever animal you want. It has no problem healing itself." Ji-Yong is nodding in agreement. Science nerd

Grace adds, "It's just like anyone else, but only your cells are regenerating and growing at a rapid pace."

Liam and Makai are eating, too. Makai is sitting next to me. He finishes chewing his food and washes it down with a gulp of water. "I've never seen anything like it. I have no idea what you were changing into." Chae-Lin interrupts, "We practice. We train. We learn how to control it." She gives me the stink eye. So does her partner. I look away. It's not my fault. I didn't even know I could do that. I see Liam. He is hunched over by himself in the corner. He doesn't seem like himself. I think Donovan really got to him. I want to help but don't know-how.

Abbie smiles and quietly says, "Nothing can get me down. We can go home." She hands me something under the table. I know what it is. I don't even have to look. I put the necklace in my pocket. Makai and Grace smile, too. They know. Makai says, "I retrieved the book from the room. I'm never letting that thing out of my sight again. Grace hefts it up. "You mean like right, now." He rolls his eyes and says, "No, not like now. I know you have it. It's more a figure of speech. Fine, I meant I won't go anywhere if I don't know that it's close by." Grace and I giggle.

Amos and his father come through the door. The elders stop eating. So, I put my spoon down, too. One by one, they stand up and file out the door with Amos. His dad comes over and sits next to me. "My dear, I must apologize for my behavior. I stole the necklace from you. You see, I have one of my own. Our ancestors discovered that the fire opal's properties of silicon dioxide and ferric oxide with the attached water molecules could also bind to a strong gravitational field and be used to warp space-time." He shows us his necklace. As soon as he does, I can feel my necklace in my pocket. It feels like my phone is vibrating. I put my hand over it.

He continues, "You see, I thought you had mine, but as soon as I had your necklace, a madness came over me. The

same necklaces together formed a paradox, and I became confused." Now, I'm confused, "How do you know about time travel and chemical make-ups of matter? This is all new science." He shakes his head and frowns. "It's old science. Very old. Our ancestors contained time travel to the past and only within the family tree time stream. Only members of this clan branch can activate the stone."

He nods in the direction of the book that is still in Grace's hands. "I must go. The elders need me." After his metaphorical mic drop, he stands up and leaves the room through the same door like the others. I look at Grace, Abbie, and Makai. They look gobsmacked. Well, two of them do. Grace just shrugs, "Old science, like our atoms reprogramming themselves. Are you going to eat that?" She slides my bowl over to her and starts eating my food.

Liam comes to the table, "I want to go home." I nod my head, "Me too." He shakes his head, "No, now." We all stare at him. Cookie enters the room from the kitchen door and says to Liam, "My dear boy, your Cookie has made you a cherry pie!" She is grinning from ear to ear. She puts the pie down on the table and looks at him, but he storms off. "Well, I never!" Makai smiles sheepishly and says in the form of a question, "I don't think he likes cherry?"

Cookie stands there with her hands on her hips, watching him storm off. Then hollers, "Young man, you will not be getting any dessert today!" She turns on her heels, walks off, then suddenly stops and returns to the table to retrieve the pie. "Hey," Makai says. He barely gets a piece onto a plate, but she snatches it away, too. "Geeze, it wasn't me, Cookie. I love your food!"

She contemplates what he said for a moment then flops the whole pie back onto the table. Sticky, gooey pie guts splash everywhere. A glob of it hits Abbie in the face and oozes down her cheek. She jumps to her feet and glares.

Cookie hands Makai his plate back and pinches his cheek. "Eat up, sweetheart." She marches off back to her kitchen. I start laughing with Makai, and Grace joins in, and finally, Abbie cracks up. We sit there, gorging ourselves on the pie, when Amos comes back into the room.

"It is settled. Donovan will be cast into the expanse. Meet us at the edge of the wood." I ask, "What does that mean, and what's an expanse?" My friends just shrug and shake their heads. Grace says, "We should find Liam." She leaves the table in search of him. Makai takes one last bite of pie and jumps up to leave. I stand up too. "Let's go." We catch up with her. She didn't get far. She is at the end of the hallway just outside the kitchen. "Where would he go?" Abbie asks. "I think I know," she answers. We follow her outside to the pond. He is there, skipping rocks across the surface of the water.

"Hey," Grace says to him. He looks at her and then the rest of us but says nothing. He throws another rock across the pond. When he does, his sun-bleached dishwater blond hair falls over his eyes. He pushes it back angrily. "You shouldn't have followed me." He separates himself from us by looking for more rocks. He is kicking at the dirt and making a big ruckus. Grace goes to him, but he angrily pushes her away. Grace and I lock eyes for a moment. She quickly wipes a tear and turns her face away. Abbie rushes to her side and hugs her. I march over to Liam and push him hard. I say, "Stop being a jerk."

He stumbles a little, causing him to drop his handful of rocks. He glares at me but says, "Whatever, you should have pushed me harder. I might have fallen and bashed my head in; then, you guys wouldn't have to deal with pathetic me. That psycho dude is right. I ruin everything or hurt everyone that I come in contact with." While saying this, his eyes follow Grace.

Stupidly, all I can think is, oh man, he's really into Grace. My thoughts consume me; why did he kiss me? It felt like more



than playing pretend, for Rimeaux's sake. I look at my feet. Well, it did to me, anyway. I turn my body toward the pond leaving him to stare at Grace. My mind is racing. I thought they were just friends, but apparently, they are more than that? Of course, he feels like a heel. He kissed me, and it must have meant something, or he wouldn't be beating himself up like he is now. Donovan really gave him a verbal beating last night.

Of course! My encounters with that jerk prove that he can really get inside your head and mess you up badly. It's so bad that you don't know which way is up. Yeah, Liam's feelings for me and Grace might have a little to do with his current mood, but I think the root cause is Donovan. I notice that Liam is looking at me quizzically. I open my mouth to speak, but he cuts me off. "Just leave me alone, o.k.?" I shake my head and say, "No, I'm not going to do that. You know why?" He shoots me a skeptical look, scoffs, and pushes past me. He strides quickly away, but I chase after him. I grab his shoulder, stopping him for the moment.

I say softly, "Because you are a good guy and my friend."

He yanks his shoulder away and goes to a grouping of cattails along the pond. I stop and put my hands on my hips, watching his back as he walks away. I yell, "You think that jerk, Donovan, has exposed some truth about you, huh?" He slowly turns, and that's when I see the hurt in his eyes. I forcibly say, "but he's a liar." He walks back towards me while I continue, "Look, he said a lot of crap to all of us last night. You know, this isn't my first time to deal with him either. He messes with your head and weaves twisted words into the fabric of your reality. I don't know how he does it..." I stop to catch my breath. Liam is right in front of me now. I gaze into those gorgeous eyes. "...but, it's your choice to believe it or not. I choose to believe the truth, Liam. You are a handsome, funny, and amazing guy. Snap out of it, already!"

His mouth twitches up into a smile, and his eyes give off a

bit of a twinkle. He raises an eyebrow. "You think I'm handsome?" Seriously that's what he's focusing on? I've embarrassed myself, again. I can feel my face blushing. "No. Yes. Wait. Of course, you are." I look down at his feet. "I mean, Grace thinks you're good looking..." I mumble. He puts his arm around me. Ugh, what is he doing? What about Grace? Now, it's my turn to try to pull away, but he locks me in a hug and kisses me on the top of the head. He says, "Thank you for being a good friend." He lets me go, and I sneak a glance over at our friends.

He says to me, "You're right. Donovan was just trying to get into my head, and I was letting him. Not anymore. So, what's up? Are we leaving now or what?" He doesn't wait for an answer, though. He sprints over to Grace and picks her up, then gives her a big kiss. Oh great, I've just been friend-zoned. I stop watching, pick up some rocks, and skip them across the pond, telling myself that I did the right thing. I hear Liam apologizing to Grace now. All my friends are coming over to me. Grace gives me a great big hug. "Thank you. I don't know what you said, but it sure worked." She lets go of me and grabs Liam's hand. They both have goofy grins plastered on their faces.

So, I paste a paste one on my face, too. "It was nothing. I just helped Liam see the truth." I think Abbie must know that I still have a thing for Liam. She puts a comforting hand on my back and whispers to me, "It's going to be okay." Makai is by my side. He says, "They'll be waiting for us. We should go."

As we walked to the edge of the woods, we explained to Liam what was going on. We see a group of people already congregating. Makai is next to me and is lugging my book along with him. This reminds me, and I reach into my pocket. The necklace is still there. I take it out and put it around my neck. I notice that Liam and Grace are walking with their arms interlocked around each other.

Abbie points and says, "I think they are waiting on us." The elders come over and greet us. Jannali says, "Come, we must hurry." He shelters his eyes with his hand as he looks up at the sun. We speed up. There is Donovan. I shudder. Amos and their father each have a hold of him. Branwen is on the other side of Amos. In Amos's free arm, he has the box and disk that he took from us yesterday. "Now is the time. Say goodbye, my son," his dad says. Donovan replies, "No need, father. I shall see you soon." Amos gives his brother a withering stare and latches down harder on Donovan's skinny bicep, and drags him into the forest.

He says, "Please, brother, stop this madness." Donovan only laughs. Baron Blather Smythe and his daughter Aoibheann are right behind Amos. We all follow them into the woods. I shiver. We walk along the path through that field of creepy purple flowers. With so many other people around, they don't seem so bad. Up close, I can see that they have a silvery hue. I reach down to pick one, but someone whom I don't recognize stops me. "Don't touch, Missy. They have a powerful sting." I pull my hand quickly back. As we go deeper into the woods, it gets cold enough that I can see my breath. The flowers end at the edge of a cliff.

The cliff is a sleek gray stone. It is massive. The forest is behind me, and a great big expanse of milky gray is in front of me. It looks like when you pour cream into your coffee before it mixes together. The dark and light swirl together like oil and water in a rhythmic pattern. I lean in closer for a better look. It is made of glittery translucent threads of air, yet somehow it looks like a liquid. It forms a swell and crashes against the granite cliff leaving ice crystals clinging to the edge. I stand straighter and take a quick step backward, bumping into Makai. My feet start to slide out from under me, but Makai wraps an arm around my waist and pulls me upright.

"Thank you," I gasp. Eyeing the edge, I move farther away; I'm probably fine where I'm standing, but I don't want to be

the ultimate klutz or anything. Donovan's father starts to speak. "You have been found guilty. My dear son, I have failed you. I pushed you too far while trying to make you stronger. I want the best, no, the most for you." He touches Donovan's face tenderly. "You were such a kind, gentle, and funny child. You brought your mother so much joy. When she passed...." Amos is searching his brother's face. He interrupts. "Donovan, please." Amos glances into the great expanse.

Their father shushes him and continues. "When your mother died, I knew. You were so small, but I had to...." He sucks in a huge gulp of air, steadying himself. "I had to make you strong, but instead of strength, an icy hardness encased you and broke your spirit." He wraps his son in a hug. Tears are streaming down his face. "My actions were wrong. I see that now." He nudges him onto the slippery edge. "You shall be cast into the expanse for your crimes against the clans." He backs away and shakes his head.

"My dear son," and he suddenly shoves him into the expanse. At that moment, Baron Blather-Smythe tosses Donovan a thin metal disk like the one we used to have until Amos took it. Chae-Lin and Ji-Yong seize him. He is laughing maniacally. Amos screams, "No!" He paces back and forth along the edge. I look back to Donovan. Holding tight to the disk, he puts his arms over his chest, closes his eyes, and continues to fall backward. The expanse absorbs him. The last thing that I see is his face. He opens his eyes, a creepy smile spreads across his face, and then it melts into the gooey expanse.

Amos is rubbing his chin, covering his mouth with his hand. He is pacing. Their father is already leaving the forest. It must have been too much for him to bear. His shoulders are slumped, and his head is hanging low. A couple of people attend to him, but he waves them away and speeds up his pace. They chase after him. Amos says to the clan elders, "The disk, for the love of Pete, he has one of the disks." Masego

ominously says, "That's not the last of Donovan. We shall see him again. Most likely sooner than we wish."

The crazy Baron is still giggling, but now his daughter has joined in. She is buzzing around Chae-Lin and Ji-Yong like an annoying little fly. She is dancing around and singing, "My father did it, and my love will come back for me." I hurriedly step in front of her and block her from circling them because she is bugging me. She throws her hands in the air, shakes them around, and laughs even harder. Oh, my word, she's annoying. I peer around her.

I say to Blather-Smythe, "I thought you hated Donovan." She is dancing around me now. I try to look around her and ask, "Why'd you give him the disk?" After asking, I realize that I really have no idea what the disk is. His response is to giggle. Aoibheann stops dancing around me. She answers me in a sing-songy voice, "They talked at Amos and Branwin's wedding." All the while, she is throwing me a you-must-really-be-some-kind-of-idiot look. "Oh, okay, that makes sense," I reply and shake my head. She starts singing again and dances away from me. "What's her deal?" It's Abbie. I just shrug.

The elders begin to leave the woods, and everyone follows. I stay to take one last look into the expanse. I hear a slight rustling, and then echoing off the expanse, comes a voice. "A Raven's song, powerful secrets, thoughts, memories, foreboding! A Raven's Song, the future's past and the past is now."

I turn on my heels and sprint to catch up with the others. People are milling about everywhere celebrating the defeat of Donovan. Those of us coming out of the woods have heavy hearts. Abbie says, "I don't really feel like celebrating." I nod at her, "Me either." I pull my friends aside and tell them what I just heard, and we all agree that it's time to leave.

Amos and the elders aren't far. We go to them. I say, "We

are going home now. Thank you for everything." They aren't surprised by my announcement. Makai hugs Masego and says, "Goodbye." I follow his lead and hug and shake hands with everyone.

Ji-Yong is still holding the Baron prisoner. Suddenly Blather-Smythe's eyes glass over. He manages to break free. He starts walking towards me. He says, "He is coming. He is coming." I look to the elders then back at the Baron. "What? What's that?" I ask, backing away. I bump into someone. It's Aoibheann. She is doing the same thing as her father. "He is coming. He is coming. The Weaver is here!"

She wraps icy hands around my neck and tries to take my necklace. Amos stops her. There is screaming and chaos everywhere. People seem to be under some sort of spell. In a zombie-like fashion, they creep towards the elders and me. The chanting of "He is coming!" is deafening. Amos wraps his new bride in an enormous hug, and he kisses her, "I love you, Branwen." With wide eyes, she says, "No, Amos. Please, don't." She has him by the hands and won't let go.

Ji-Yong turns into a dragon to keep the zombie-like people back. All the elders are trying to hold them at bay, but they are breaking through. Amos says, "You know what I must do to stop my brother." Branwen nods. Tears stream down her cheeks, and gasping for air, she clings to him.

The look on her face is heartbreaking. "What are you doing?" I yell over the noise. The elders continue to fight off the zombies. Amos says, "I must go into the expanse. Use the necklace, Kalea!" He walks over to me. He is holding tight to the box and disk. He locks eyes with me, "watch for me." He sprints into the woods. My friends and I huddle together.

Zillah rushes to us. "Hurry, children. Hurry!" The Zombies break free right when I put the necklace into the book. One of them grabs me as I feel myself being pulled into the book. I

turn my head, and there is a distorted face beside mine. I gasp  
and look down at the pool of light.



## CHAPTER 26

Going home, I think



I'm free-falling through the air; a hand grabs my ankle. It's not friendly. It's not trying to rescue me. I kick my leg free. Soon I will dive into the pool. There are disembodied hands and faces all around me. One of the faces gets close, "Give it to us!" I search for my friends. They are ahead of me. I pull my limbs closer to my body, becoming more streamlined and speeding up. I splash into the pool of light. Calmness washes over me.

I hear a voice saying, "Come with me. Make haste!" I open my eyes. I am sitting in yellowish dirt. It is bright and warm. There are scraggly pine trees all around me. I can smell the ocean, but something isn't right. I turn to see the jolly Duke of Dunsany, Quinton McGlinchy, standing at the mouth of a cave holding a brass cabbage. Liam says, "This isn't home." The Duke motions for us to hurry. Makai is holding his head again.



I rub his back and tell him, "It'll be o.k." Grace and Abbie are standing over us. "Think we should go with the dead Duke?" Abbie asks. I get up and say, "I guess so. Do we have a choice?" We rush inside the mouth of the cave.

"What's going on?" I ask, but the Duke doesn't answer. He holds his finger in front of his mouth, shushing me. We look out to the spot that we just left and see figures appearing out of nowhere. The Duke whispers, "They followed you. They latched on when you time jumped."

Slowly, they turn around. One of the figures has the tattered clothing of Blather-Smythe. There are hollows where his eyes used to be. Where his nose once was, there are two holes. Drool is falling from a slight opening where his mouth used to be. He no longer has any hair on top of his head. He makes the most unearthly sound, and the rest of the things join in. He raises an arm and points at us.

"We must leave. Now!" the Duke yells. We scurry further into the cave tripping over the uneven ground. "What are those things?" Liam asks. "No time. Quick," the Duke is brushing dirt off of the wall. "The necklace," he says and holds out his hand, and with the other hand, he continues to clean the wall. I back away from him. Grace is looking at the wall. There are markings. She runs her hand along with them. The Duke says, "The necklace. Hurry."

I'm still not liking the situation and back up some more. An ungodly sound echoes off the cave walls. Abbie, Liam, and Makai huddle together. I move closer to Grace. She says, "This is Korean." She reads it out loud. I shake my head. "I don't understand." There is a smile on her face as she says, "Oh, this so is cool." Turning to me, she says, "Give him the necklace, Kalea." I do. He inserts my necklace into a hidden slot. The ground begins to shake as a door slides open. Rocks start to tumble around us. We run inside. The duke grabs my necklace as he enters, and the door quickly slides shut. We run through

the carved-out corridor. Darkness surrounds us, but suddenly I hear a woosh, and we are flooded in light. The ground is soft. I stop running and blink because the light is so bright.

My eyes finally adjust. We are standing in a beautiful meadow. The cave is nowhere in sight. Grace says, "Where's Liam?" I look around. Liam is missing.





# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Kelly Douglas is a former teen librarian and middle school teacher with a Master of Arts in Teaching with a middle school emphasis. She is a huge nerd who loves all things history and books! This is her first novel in her Streamrider Chronicles. She lives in Missouri with her goldendoodle, 3 cats, and sisters. Find her online at **[kellydouglasauthor.com](http://kellydouglasauthor.com)** & on Instagram: **[@kellydouglasauthor](https://www.instagram.com/kellydouglasauthor)**.