



CHAPTER
ONE

My last supply duty before Sanctuary Night, I get home and Atticus is waiting.

It's half past three already, and nobody awake except for Hide and Mack and Mercy and me, unloading our week's ration of scuffed-up bottles and tins into the broad-wide kitchen cabinets. Most supply nights that's all there is to it: the swish and thunk of stacking tins, the slow quiet of faucets stopping, pipes sleeping, water mains humming lower as the city Above goes to bed. The air moves slower with everyone laid asleep; gets dustier, goes back to earth. There's a light by the kitchen, run off a wire drawn down off the old subway tracks, and the rest is feel-your-way dark until morning, when Jack Flash lights the lamps with a flick of his littlest finger.

Jack's got a good Curse. He might have made it Above if not for the sparks always jumping out of things to kiss at his knuckles. Me, the only thing good 'bout my Curse is that I can still Pass. And that's half enough to keep me out of trouble.

But tonight it's not the half I need, because there's Atticus, spindly crab arms folded 'cross his chest, waiting outside my door. His eyes glow dim-shot amber — not bright, so he's not mad then, just annoyed and looking to be mad. The glow's enough to light up the tapestry on my door: the story of Safe as far as I know it, in bits of paint and pictures, carved so everyone knows the Teller lives here. Atticus blinking makes it flicker like firelight.

“Up late,” I say, stretching the knots out of my arms and pretending I'm not a little scared. Atticus's eyes have made grown men cower and run for the sewers. I carved it myself on his twice-thick board-wood door: Atticus standing tall and pale-armed, his eyes the brightest red I could scrounge up. There's no reason for that blink-glow, that flicker of Atticus's eye.

“She's got out again,” is all he says, and shifts his weight to his other foot.

Every ache in my shoulders catches and double-knots tight.

“Oh.” I can't even get upset anymore. I was upset the first time, and the fifth — afraid she'd run into the bad things in the sewers or the tunnels, that she'd make it Above and get caught by the men in white coats; not afraid enough of what scares Atticus, which is the Whitecoats following her back and finding Safe. She's

run away too many times for me to believe that anymore.

“She’s your responsibility,” Atticus says. His claw-hands snap until the echo sounds like a hundred running feet: a sure sign he’s annoyed.

“She’s Sick,” I say faint. I’m not usually one for talking back, but it’s half past three and my mouth tastes sour and the ache in my back is a night’s bad work, and I know Ariel’s my responsibility. I stood up and swore her protection before everyone.

I’ve asked-told-begged her to stop running.

Now Atticus’s eyes flush red, and I gotta clench both fists to keep from going *I’m sorry I’m sorry* like a little kid. “Teller,” he says, calling me so instead of *Matthew* to say it clear: that I owe him my life, the food in my belly, the tin roof and plank walls and tapestry-carved door of my home. My Sanctuary. “She’s your responsibility. And you’re responsible to Safe.”

To keep Safe. To do my best for Safe, so there’s a place for people like us always.

I know.

“I’ll find her,” I tell him, and don’t meet his eyes.

Atticus doesn’t have to say *You better find her*.

I start fast down the footworn path, clenching and unclenching fists to get my body moving again. No time to stop at the kitchen for provisions, but I still

have all the other things important for heading out of Safe: matches in my pocket, an unlit brand at my back, and twenty-five dollars tucked in my shirt. What Atticus calls emergency money; in case you have an emergency, he says, but really it's if you use it, it had better have been an emergency.

Maybe I can sneak a dollar to buy her a chocolate. Maybe if I do that it'll make her want to stay.

"This is the last time!" Atticus calls after me, his voice dry and hoarse-quiet from the things the Whitecoats put down his throat back before there was anywhere like Safe. Atticus can't shout anymore, but when you're Atticus you don't need shouting. People shift in their sleep, rustling like roaches ahead of the sound of his voice.

The last time, I think, and shove fists in my pockets where the matches are. *Oh, Ariel.*

"All right," I say out loud, and head back up the tunnel that goes Above.

It's cold Above. The first time I went up I thought it'd be warmer, with all that stone and dirt and loose history trapping the cold into Safe. 'Course, I went up first in the middle of winter, with snow patching the dead lawns and thin scruffy ice on the sidewalks, and it was colder than anywhere in the whole of the world. I shivered under the beat-up jacket I thought was going

to be enough and thought no wonder people were so cruel up here, if the wind bit your bones all day and the sky stared you down into nothing with stars.

I know about things like winter now, know them as more than a Tale, and even still the cold starts on me the second I leave Safe. I keep my hands in my pockets once I open the big barred door and cross the Pactbridge into the old sewers. My toes prickle through my shoes and start to scrunch up. I straighten them out and walk faster.

It's eight steps, nine steps, ten before the big door shuts behind me.

I carved the big door too, on the inside, not out. Not Tales; just faces. On the big door is where we put our martyrs.

And outside it, the old sewers. Dead-dry, and cold. Footsteps echo here, no matter how soft you shoe along the ledges. The new sewers are louder, warmer, and damp, and I get to the new sewers before I settle my head down to think where the hell my Ariel's gone.

I don't know Above like most of them. Most of them ran from there when they were young, made it down to Atticus and Corner and made themselves a home. But I was born in Safe; the only one 'til this year, with Heather and Seed's baby yet to come. There's nothing Above in my bones.