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— ONE —

The sirens behind us wailed, growing louder with every passing second. I tightened my grip on the door handle. The police were closing in, and our old car wasn't built for a fast getaway.

"They're coming for us," I whispered to Asher. I inched down a little more in the backseat. "My dad said we couldn't trust anyone, including the police. We should make a run for it."

"Not yet." Asher scanned the streets, checking to see who was out there. "Those sirens might not have anything to do with us." He leaned forward, between the gap in the front seats, to talk to his old friend Gisak, who was driving us. "Think you can drive a little faster? We really need to get to the Knights of Malta compound quickly. Maybe go a different way?"

Gisak took a quick glance at the rearview mirror and then at the sea of red brake lights shining in front of us as traffic snarled to a standstill around the Roman Colosseum. "Why the big rush?"

Neither Asher nor I answered. There was no way we could tell him the truth . . . He wouldn't believe it anyway. *I* could barely believe what had happened.

A few days ago, I'd been a normal American girl studying in Rome . . . but now my life was anything but normal. I had discovered that I was actually part of an ancient bloodline,

one of the only people left in the world who could use the Spear of Destiny to change the future. Because of this, a secret organization called the Hastati wanted to kill me. Not only did this all sound crazy, but my life depended on making sure no one else found out about any of it.

“Are you in trouble or something?” Gisak prodded. “I might be able to help you. I’m quite resourceful you know, and I’ve been in my share of . . . *situations*.”

“The less you know the better,” Asher answered. “But we can’t just sit here in traffic. We need to go.”

“Let’s make a run for it,” I whispered again. I was certain that the Hastati were right on our tail. We needed to be on the move. I knew getting to the Knights of Malta compound might take longer on foot, but at least we wouldn’t be sitting ducks.

Asher shook his head. I didn’t understand why he was being so stubborn.

“Asher, we’ve known each other a long time,” Gisak said. “Don’t you trust me?”

I stared at Asher. Gisak might be Asher’s friend and he may have allowed Asher to use the secret tunnel that ran through his curio shop, but I’d learned the hard way that even friends could betray you.

My stomach clenched just thinking about how my own best friend, Simone, had betrayed me by stealing the spear away from us and giving it to her power-hungry mother. It was because of her that I now had to track down the spear

again. If I didn't, the horrible vision I'd had of people dying would come true. Getting the spear was my only chance to change the future.

The sirens outside sounded like they were coming from every direction. We were running out of options, and Gisak wasn't helping. It was time to make a choice. I'd been told that choices determined destiny, and now I had to choose to take charge of my own fate.

I thrust open the door. "Let's go!" I said, darting out of the car.

BEEEEEP!

I froze as a police motorcycle came barreling toward me.

"Cassie!" Asher leaned out of the car and pushed me so hard that I went flying across to the far side of the sidewalk just as the motorcycle cop zoomed past me, blaring his horn.

"What do you think you're doing?" Asher yelled.

"But the cops, I thought they were . . ."

"Not everyone is after us . . . not yet anyway. There's probably an accident or something up ahead." He lowered his voice and spoke a little softer. "Look, I know you want to get the spear back, but we have to be careful. Think things through."

I nodded, realizing that I had to make better choices. I had already messed up once, when I used the spear: I thought that I was saving my father's life when in reality I had set up a chain of events that would cause thousands of people to

die. It was the reason I had to get the spear back and fix everything. The fate of so many rested on it.

Gisak tapped the passenger seat's headrest as Asher and I both got back into the car. He studied me for a moment, then sighed. "All right. No more questions. You wanted fast; I'm going to give you fast."

Asher slammed the door as the car in front of us moved up a few feet.

"Hold on tight!" Gisak shouted as he gunned the engine and jumped the curb. Before we could say anything, Gisak maneuvered the car down the sidewalk, forcing a few pedestrians to jump out of the way, before turning onto a narrow, cobblestoned street. From there, he took several backstreets and alleyways until we arrived at the front of the massive door of the Priorato of the Knights of Malta.

Gisak parked next to a large tour bus. "One more chance to fill me in on what you're doing."

"Cassie has family here," Asher said, putting a hand on Gisak's shoulder. "We'll be fine. But thank you."

I watched as a few tourists wandered around the outside courtyard, waiting to take their turn peering through the door's keyhole. It was a well-known "secret" of Rome that visitors could see the dome of the Vatican perfectly lined up through the tunnel of trees on the other side of the compound's door.

They didn't suspect the truth.

That as they looked at the pretty view, something was looking at them. A retinal scanner that searched for people

like me. A descendant of Saint Longinus, with the mark of the spear.

A person who could change destiny.

“Want me to wait for you here?” Gisak asked.

I opened the car door and shook my head. “No, we’ll be fine once we’re inside the compound.”

At least I hoped we’d be. We were counting on Dame Elisabeth, the grandmother I had only met the day before, to help keep us safe while we came up with a plan for regaining the spear. She had saved my life once already, so it seemed like our best option.

“Asher”—Gisak grabbed Asher’s backpack before he got out of the car—“you have to be careful.” He glanced over at me. “Some people aren’t always what they seem.”

That was something he didn’t need to tell us. We’d already experienced it. A stranger was my grandmother. My best friend was a traitor. I wasn’t even who I thought I was.

Apparently, in my life, no one was who they appeared to be.