



THE KNOWING

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SAMARA

Always I thought it would be my Knowing that killed me, when actually, it's going to be this rope.

I lower myself down, hand over hand, the sheered, sparkling rock of the cliff face slipping by at a pace that is agonizingly slow. I saw a boy from the Outside scaling a rope once, snatching fruit from the top of a spicemelon tree like he was running up a set of stairs. Down, I'd thought, would be so much easier. But I, Samara Archiva—the girl who is Knowing, who remembers so much—had no idea my body could feel so heavy. Or that rope could eat skin. My palms are tearing, muscles seizing, and I can't look down. I don't want to Know how far it is to the bottom.

And then the rope jerks and I drop, quick. If I didn't Know that rope could eat skin, it seems I was also unaware that rock can eat rope. Where my line hangs over the edge of a jutting stone, I can see the strands snapping, frayed ends lit by the lowering sun. I drop again, twisting, dangling in the air. Terror uncoils in my middle.

"Knowing," my mother always says to me, "is the pinnacle of human evolution and the birthright of the people Underneath. Doing is for those Outside." But when Nita's grandpapa is Outside with a ten-centimeter cut on his leg, then it seems to me that someone ought

to be out there actually doing what they Know. And so, instead of being where I was supposed be, ordering my mind in my bedchamber, I was climbing up an unused supply shaft. To the Outside.

And when Grandpapa's stitching was done, there was a group of supervisors in the old supply hut, standing around the boxes I'd used to cover the entrance to the shaft. I watched through the wall cracks as one of them picked up a thin scarf, beautifully dyed in blues and greens. What was supposed to be wrapped around my unbraided head when I slid back down to the city Underneath. And because Outsiders only wear undyed cloth, this was obviously a scarf of the Knowing, and because supervisors are the only Knowing allowed Outside, this was obviously a scarf that had been hoarded. Stolen. Held back from the requests of the city.

And then the supervisors were in the streets, metal-capped sticks breaking open doors, searching the houses of the dyers, and Nita was telling me to run. I did, hood pulled low to hide my face, flitting past furnace fires and workshops, carts, curtained windows, and cesspits, and up through five levels of harvested fields, terraced into the sides of the mountain. Across orchards stripped bare of fruit, and up again, pushing back the branches of thick, untended fern trees to the cliffs that separate what is Outside from what is not. To the rope I had hidden, dangling down a sheltered crack in the rock face, hung for just this sort of emergency.

It's really not a very good rope.

The rope jerks for the third time, and I loosen my grip and let myself slide. It doesn't just hurt, it burns. Enough to make me scream, ripping my hands, shredding my leggings. When I hit the ground, I hit it hard, pain shooting up my shins, air knocked from my lungs. I stare into the bowl of an empty purple sky, bruises spreading, hands bleeding onto the scattered stones. Amazed that I am alive. That I'm not in pieces. Amazed that I am not caught. Yet.

My breath comes back in a wheezing gasp. I get to my feet and stagger to a rivulet spilling down its own pale, encrusted path from

the cliff face. Salt water. I examine my palms. Bloody and blistered, each missing a wide strip of skin. I heard and therefore I Know every word of the recitations on wound healing—eighth week, second session of my physician training—and I won't be able to do any of it. Not in the medical rooms. Not without being seen. I grit my teeth and thrust both hands into the waterfall.

I yell with my mouth closed. A shriek inside my head. And the sound brings a memory pulling at my mind. A tugging weight. I Know what memory this is, and I don't want it. I close my eyes, breathe. Fight. But the memory yanks, dragging me downward. I sink into my mind, and then I fall . . .

. . . into the dark of a corner behind an open door. Someone is screaming. A deep voice. Full of pain. Adam. I don't understand. My father is crying in the corridor, but Mother says the Knowing never show what they feel.

I creep out from the corner. This is Adam's room. But it doesn't feel like Adam's room, and when I tiptoe across the rug, push onto my toes to peek over the edge of the bed, what I see is not my brother. This Adam is sweating, frothing. Broken. His fingers twist in the wrong direction. Then he opens his mouth, his back arches off the bed, and he screams and screams . . .

. . . and I shove the memory away, cache it back to a high shelf in the darkest corner of my mind. I'm beside the salty waterfall, on my knees with burning hands.

"To cache is to organize your mind," the tutor said, "and is the special privilege of the Knowing. Visualize a place to put your memories, a place far away and inaccessible. When you cache a memory there, it may only be retrieved when you choose to retrieve it. Cache both the very distressing and the very happy. The first is unpleasant, the second addictive, and both may interfere with daily functions . . ."

I was three years old when I heard these words, on my first day in the learning room. I was terrible at caching then. I'm terrible at it now.