

They watch me as I walk along the aisles of other workers and I think I see approval in their eyes. I feel relieved.

"Congratulations," the gray-haired Official tells me when I reach them. "You scored very well on your test."

"Thank you," I say, as I always do to the Officials. But this time I mean it.

"The next step is a real-life sort," the Official tells me. "At some point in the near future, we will come and escort you to the site of the test."

I nod. I've heard about this, too. They'll take you to sort something real—actual data, like news, or actual people, or a small subset of a school class—to see if you can apply things in the real world. If you can, you move on to the next step, which is likely your final work position.

This is happening quickly. In fact, everything seems hurried lately: the hasty removal of the artifacts from personal residences, my mother's sudden trip, and now this, more and more of us leaving school early in the year.

The Officials wait for me to respond.

"Thank you," I say.

In the afternoon my mother receives a message at work: Go home and pack. She is needed for another trip; it may be even longer than the last one. I can tell my father doesn't like this; and neither does Bram. Neither do I, as a matter of fact.

I sit on the bed and watch her as she packs. She folds her two extra sets of plainclothes. She folds her pajamas,

MATCHED

underclothes, socks. She opens her tablet container and checks the tablets.

She's missing one, the green tablet. She glances up at me and I look away.

It makes me think that perhaps these trips are harder than they seem and I realize that in seeing the missing tablet, I haven't seen an example of her weakness but an example of her strength. What she's dealing with is difficult enough to make her take the green tablet, so it must also be difficult to keep inside, to not share with us. But she is strong and she keeps the secrets because it protects us.

"Cassia? Molly?" My father walks into the room and I stand up to leave. I move quickly over to my mother to embrace her. When I step back, our eyes meet and I smile at her. I want her to know that I know that I shouldn't have looked away earlier. I'm not ashamed of her. I know how hard it is to keep a secret. I may be a sorter like my father and my grandfather before me, but I am also my mother's daughter.

On Monday morning, Ky and I walk into the trees and find the spot where we stopped the time before. We start marking again with red flags. I wish it were so easy to begin where we left off in other ways. At first I hesitate, not wanting to disturb the peace of these woods with the horror of the Outer Provinces, but he has suffered so long alone that I can't bear to make him wait one more minute.

"Ky. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry they are gone."

He doesn't say anything but bends to tie a red cloth around a particularly thorny shrub. His hands shake a bit. I know what that brief moment of losing control means for someone like Ky and I want to comfort him. I place my hand on his back, gently, softly, just enough so that he knows I am there. As my hand meets the cloth of his shirt he spins around and I pull back when I see the pain in his eyes. His look begs me not to say any more; it is enough that I know. It may be too much.

"Who's Sisyphus?" I ask, trying to think of something to distract him. "You mentioned his name once. When the Officer told us that we were going to start coming to the Hill."

"Someone whose story has been told for a long time." Ky stands up and starts walking again. I can tell that he needs to keep moving today. "It was one of my father's favorite stories to tell. I think he wanted to be like Sisyphus, because Sisyphus was crafty and sneaky and always causing trouble for the Society and the Officials."

Ky's never talked about his father before. Ky's voice sounds flat; I can't tell from his tone how he feels about the man who died years ago, the man whose name Ky held in his hand in the picture.

"There's a story about how Sisyphus once asked an Official to show him how a weapon worked and then he turned it on the Official."

I must look shocked, but Ky seems to have anticipated my surprise. His eyes are kind as he explains. "It's an old story,

from back when the Officials carried weapons. They don't use them anymore."

What he doesn't say, but what we both know, is *They don't have to*. The threat of Reclassification is enough to keep almost everyone in line.

Ky turns back, pushes his way ahead. I watch him move, the muscles in his back inches away from me; I follow close so that I can slip through the branches he holds back for me. The smell of the forest seems, for a moment, to be simply the smell of him. I wonder what sage smells like, the smell he said was his favorite in his old life. I hope that the smell of this forest is his favorite now. I know it is mine.

"The Society decided that they needed to give Sisyphus a punishment, a special one, because he dared to think he could be as clever as one of them, when he wasn't an Official, or even a citizen. He was nothing. An Aberration from the Outer Provinces."

"What did they do to him?"

"They gave him a job. He had to roll a rock, a huge one, to the top of a mountain."

"That doesn't sound so terrible." There's relief in my voice. If the story ends well for Sisyphus, maybe it can end well for Ky.

"It wasn't as easy as it sounds. As he was about to reach the top, the rock rolled back to the bottom and he had to start again. That happened every time. He never got the rock to the top. He went on pushing forever."

"I see," I say, realizing why our hikes on the little hill reminded Ky of Sisyphus. Day after day we did the same thing: climbed back up and came back down. "But we did make it to the top of the little hill."

"We were never allowed to stay there for long," Ky points out.

"Was he from *your* Province?" I stop for a moment, thinking I've heard the Officer's whistle, but it's merely a shrill birdcall from the canopy of leaves above us.

"I don't know. I don't know if he's real," Ky says. "If he ever existed."

"Then why tell his story?" I don't understand, and for a second I feel betrayed. Why did Ky tell me about this person and make me feel empathy for him when there's no proof that he ever lived at all?

Ky pauses for a moment before he answers, his eyes wide and deep like the oceans in other tales or like the sky in his own. "Even if *he* didn't live his story, enough of us have lived lives just like it. So it's true anyway."

I think about what Ky said while we move again, quickly, tying off areas and helping each other around and through the tangled parts of the forest. There's a smell here that I have smelled before: a smell of decay, but it doesn't seem rotten. It smells almost rich, the scent of the plants returning to the earth, of wood giving way to dust.

But the Hill could be hiding something. I remember Ky's

words and pictures and I realize that no place is completely good. No place is completely bad. I've been thinking in terms of absolutes; first, I believed our Society was perfect. The night they came for our artifacts, I believed it was evil. Now I simply don't know.

Ky blurs the lines for me. He helps me see clearly, too. And I hope I do the same for him.

"Why do you throw the games?" I ask him as we pause in a small clearing.

His face tightens. "I have to."

"Every time? Don't you even let yourself think about winning?"

"I *always* think about winning," Ky tells me. There's fire in his eyes again, and he snaps a branch off a tree to make room for us to go through. He tosses the first branch to the side and holds another one back, waiting for me to pass, but I stay right there next to him. He looks down at me, shadows from the leaves crossing his face, and also sun. He's looking at my lips, which makes it hard to speak, even though I know what I want to say.

"Xander knows you lose on purpose."

"I know he does," Ky says. A smile tugs at the corners of his mouth, like the one I thought I saw last night. "Any other questions?"

"Just one," I say. "What color *are* your eyes?" I want to know what he thinks, how he sees himself—the *real* Ky—when he dares to look.

"Blue," he says, sounding surprised. "They've always been blue."

"Not to me."

"What do they look like to you?" he says, puzzled, amused. Not looking at my mouth anymore, looking into *my* eyes.

"Lots of colors," I say. "At first, I thought they were brown. Once I thought they were green, and another time gray. They *are* most often blue, though."

"What are they now?" he asks. He widens his eyes a little, leans closer, lets me look as long and as deep as I want.

And there's so much to see. They are blue, and black, and other colors, too, and I know some of what they've seen and what I hope they see now. Me. Cassia. What I feel, who I am.

"Well?" Ky asks.

"Everything," I tell him. "They're everything."

Neither of us moves for a moment, locked instead in each other's eyes and in the branches of this Hill we might never finish climbing. I'm the one who moves first. I step past him and push my way through some more tangled leaves, climb over a small fallen tree.

Behind me I hear Ky doing the same.

I'm falling in love. I am in love. And it's not with Xander, although I do love him. I'm sure of that, as sure as I am of the fact that what I feel for Ky is something different.

As I tie another red flag on the trees and wish for the fall of our Society and its systems, including the Matching

System, so that I can be with Ky, I realize that it is a selfish wish. Even if the fall of our Society would make life better for some, it would make it worse for others. *Who am I to try to change things, to get greedy and want more? If our Society changes and things are different, who am I to tell the girl who would have enjoyed the safe protected life that now she has to have choice and danger because of me?*

The answer is: I'm not anyone. I'm just one of the people who happened to fall in the majority. All my life, the odds have been on my side.

"Cassia," Ky says. He snaps another branch off and bends down in a swift movement to write in the thick dirt on the forest floor. He has to push away a layer of leaves and a spider hurries away. "Look," he says, showing me another letter. K.

Thankful for the distraction, I crouch down beside him. This letter is more difficult and it takes me several tries to even come close. In spite of my practice with the other letters my hands are still not used to this; to writing in any way but tapping. When I finally get it right and look up, I see that Ky is grinning at me.

"So, I've learned K," I say, grinning back. "That's strange. I thought we were going alphabetically."

"We were," Ky tells me. "But I think K is a good letter to know."

"What's my next letter, then?" I ask with mock innocence. "Could it be Y?"

"It could," Ky agrees. He's no longer smiling but his eyes are mischievous.

The whistle sounds behind and below us. Hearing it, I wonder how I could have ever thought that the birdcall I heard earlier sounded anything like the Officer's whistle. One sounds metallic and man-made and the other is high and clear and lovely.

I sigh and brush my hand across the dirt, returning the letters to the earth. Then I reach for a rock to make a cairn. Ky does the same. Together we build the tower piece by piece.

When I put the last rock on top of the pile, Ky puts his hand over mine. I do not pull it away. I do not want anything to fall and I like the feeling of his rough warm hand on top of mine with the cool smooth surface of the rocks underneath. Then I turn my hand slowly so that my palm is up and our fingers intertwine.

"I can never be Matched," he says, looking first at our hands and then into my eyes. "I'm an Aberration." He waits for my reaction.

"But you're not an Anomaly," I say, trying to make light of things, knowing immediately that it's a mistake; there's nothing light about this.

"Not yet, anyway," he says, but the humor in his voice sounds forced.

It is one thing to make a choice and it is another thing to never have the chance. I feel a sharp cold loneliness deep

within me. What would it be like to be alone? To know that you could never choose anything else?

That's when I realize that the statistics the Officials give us do not matter to me. I know there are many people who are happy and I am glad for them. But this is Ky. If he is the one person who falls by the wayside while the other ninety-nine are happy and fulfilled, that is not right with me anymore. I realize that I don't care about the Officer pacing below or the other hikers among the trees or really anything else at all, and that is when I realize how dangerous this truly is.

"But if you *were* Matched," I say softly, "what do you think she'd be like?"

"You," he says, almost before I've finished. "You."

We do not kiss. We do nothing but hold on and breathe, but still I know. I cannot go gently now. Not even for the sake of my parents, my family.

Not even for Xander.

CHAPTER 1

KY

I'm standing in a river. It's blue. Dark blue. Reflecting the color of the evening sky.

I don't move. The river does. It pushes against me and hisses through the grass at the water's edge. "Get out of there," the Officer says. He shines his flashlight on us from his position on the bank.

"You said to put the body in the water," I say, choosing to misunderstand the Officer.

"I didn't say you had to get in yourself," the Officer says. "Let go and get out. And bring his coat. He doesn't need it now."

I glance up at Vick, who helps me with the body. Vick doesn't step into the water. He's not from around here, but everyone in camp knows the rumors about the poisoned rivers in the Outer Provinces.

"It's all right," I tell Vick quietly. The Officers and Officials want us to be scared of this river—of all rivers—so that we never try to drink from them and never try to cross over.

"Don't you want a tissue sample?" I call out to the Officer on the bank while Vick hesitates. The icy water reaches my

knees, and the dead boy's head lolls back, his open eyes staring at the sky. The dead don't see but I do.

I see too many things. I always have. Words and pictures connect together in my mind in strange ways and I notice details wherever I am. Like now. Vick's no coward but fear films his face. The dead boy's sleeves are frayed with threads that catch the water where his arm dangles down. His thin ankles and bare feet glow pale in Vick's hands as Vick steps closer to the bank. The Officer already had us take the boots from the body. Now he swings them back and forth by the laces, a sweep of black keeping time. With his other hand he points the round beam of the flashlight right into my eyes.

I throw the coat to the Officer. He has to drop the boots to catch it. "You can let go," I tell Vick. "He's not heavy. I can take care of it."

But Vick steps in, too. Now the dead boy's legs are wet and his black plainclothes sodden. "It's not much of a Final Banquet," Vick calls out to the Officer. There's anger in Vick's voice. "Was that dinner last night something *he* chose? If it was, he deserves to be dead."

It's been so long since I've let myself feel anger that I don't *just* feel it. It covers my mouth and I swallow it down, the taste sharp and metal as though I'm gnawing through foilware. This boy died because the Officers judged wrong. They didn't give him enough water and now he's dead too soon.

We have to hide the body because we're not supposed to die in this holding camp. We're supposed to wait until they

send us out to the villages so the Enemy can take care of us there. It doesn't always work that way.

The Society wants us to be afraid of dying. But I'm not. I'm only afraid of dying wrong.

"This is how Aberrations end," the Officer tells us impatiently. He takes a step in our direction. "You know that. There's no last meal. There's no last words. Let go and get out."

This is how Aberrations end. Looking down I see that the water has gone black with the sky. I don't let go yet.

Citizens end with banquets. Last words. Stored tissue samples to give them a chance at immortality.

I can't do anything about the food or the sample but I do have words. They're always there rolling through my mind with the pictures and numbers.

So I whisper some that seem to fit the river and the death:

"For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place

The flood may bear me far,

I hope to see my Pilot face to face

When I have crossed the bar."

Vick looks at me, surprised.

"Let go," I tell him, and at the same time we do.

THE STORY OF THE PILOT



A man pushed a rock up the hill. When he reached the top, the stone rolled down to the bottom of the hill and he began again. In the village nearby, the people took note. "A judgment," they said. They never joined him or tried to help because they feared those who issued the punishment. He pushed. They watched.

Years later, a new generation noticed that the man and his stone were sinking into the hill, like the setting of the sun and moon. They could only see part of the rock and part of the man as he rolled the stone along to the top of the hill.

One of the children became curious. So, one day, the child walked up the hill. As she drew closer, she was surprised to see that the stone was carved with names and dates and places.

"What are all these words?" the child asked.

"The sorrows of the world," the man told her. "I pilot them up the hill over and over again."

"You are using them to wear out the hill," the child said, noticing the long deep groove worn where the stone had turned.

"I am making something," the man said. "When I am finished, it will be your turn to take my place."

The child was not afraid. "What are you making?"

"A river," the man said.

The child went back down the hill, puzzling at how one could make a river. But not long after, when the rains came and the flood flashed through the long trough and washed the man somewhere far away, the child saw that the man had been right, and she took her place pushing the stone and piloting the sorrows of the world.

This is how the Pilot came to be.

The Pilot is a man who pushed a stone and washed away in the water. It is a woman who crossed the river and looked to the sky. The Pilot is old and young and has eyes of every color and hair of every shade; lives in deserts, islands, forests, mountains, and plains.

The Pilot leads the Rising—the rebellion against the Society—and the Pilot never dies. When one Pilot's time has finished, another comes to lead.

And so it goes on, over and over like a stone rolling.

In a place past the edge of the Society's map, the Pilot will always live and move.

PART ONE
PILOT

CHAPTER 1

XANDER

E*very morning, the sun comes up and turns the earth red, and I think: This could be the day when everything changes. Maybe today the Society will fall. Then night comes again and we're all still waiting. But I know the Pilot's real.*

Three Officials walk up to the door of a little house at sunset. The house looks like all of the others on the street: two shutters on each of its three forward-facing windows, five steps up to the door, and one small, spiky bush planted to the right of the path.

The oldest of the Officials, a man with gray hair, raises his hand to knock.

One. Two. Three.

The Officials stand close enough to the glass that I can see the circle-shaped insignia sewn on the right pocket of the youngest Official's uniform. The circle is bright red and looks like a drop of blood.

I smile and he does, too. Because the Official: is me.

In the past, the Official Ceremony was a big occasion at City Hall. The Society held a formal dinner and you could bring your parents and your Match with you. But the Official

Ceremony isn't one of the three big ceremonies—Welcoming Day, the Match Banquet, and the Final Celebration—and so it's not what it used to be. The Society has started to cut corners where they can, and they assume Officials are loyal enough not to complain about their ceremony losing some of its trimmings.

I stood there with four others, all of us in new white uniforms. The head Official pinned the insignia on my pocket: the red circle representing the Medical Department. And then, with our voices echoing under the dome of the mostly empty Hall, we all committed to the Society and pledged to achieve our Society-designated potential. That was all. I didn't care that the ceremony wasn't anything special. Because I'm not *really* an Official. I mean, I am, but my true loyalty is to the Rising.

A girl wearing a violet dress hurries along the sidewalk behind us. I see her reflection in the window. She's got her head down like she's hoping we won't notice her. Her parents follow behind, all three of them heading toward the nearest air-train stop. It's the fifteenth, so the Match Banquet is tonight. It hasn't even been a year since I walked up the stairs of City Hall with Cassia. We're both far away from Oria now.

A woman opens the door of the house. She's holding her new baby, the one we're here to name. "Please come in," she tells us. "We've been expecting you." She looks tired, even on what should be one of the happiest days of her life. The Society doesn't talk about it much, but things are harder in

the Border Provinces. The resources seem to start in Central and then bleed outward. Everything here in Camas Province is kind of dirty and worn out.

After the door closes behind us, the mother holds out the baby for us to see. "Seven days old today," she tells us, but of course we already know. That's why we're here. Welcoming Day celebrations are always held a week after the baby's birth.

The baby's eyes are closed, but we know from our data that the color is deep blue. His hair: brown. We also know that he arrived on his due date and that under the tightly wrapped blanket he has ten fingers and ten toes. His initial tissue sample taken at the medical center looked excellent.

"Are you all ready to begin?" Official Brewer asks. As the senior Official in our Committee, he's in charge. His voice has exactly the right balance of benevolence and authority. He's done this hundreds of times. I've wondered before if Official Brewer could be the Pilot. He certainly looks the part. And he's very organized and efficient.

Of course, the Pilot could be anyone.

The parents nod.

"According to the data, we're missing an older sibling," the second in command, Official Lei, says in her gentle voice. "Did you want him to be present for the ceremony?"

"He was tired after dinner," the mother says, sounding apologetic. "He could barely keep his eyes open. I put him to bed early."

"That's fine, of course," Official Lei says. Since the little boy is just over two years old—nearly perfect spacing between siblings—he's not required to be in attendance. This isn't something he'd likely remember anyway.

"What name have you chosen?" Official Brewer moves closer to the port in the foyer.

"Ory," the mother says.

Official Brewer taps the name into the port and the mother shifts the baby a little. "Ory," Official Brewer repeats. "And for his middle name?"

"Burton," the father says. "A family name."

Official Lei smiles. "That's a lovely name."

"Come and see how it looks," Official Brewer says. The parents come closer to the port to see the baby's name: ORY BURTON FARNSWORTH. Underneath the letters runs the bar code the Society has assigned for the baby. If he leads an ideal life, the Society plans to use the same bar code to mark his tissue preservation sample at his Final Celebration.

But the Society won't last that long.

"I'll submit it now," Official Brewer says, "if there are no changes or corrections you want to make."

The mother and father move closer to check the name one last time. The mother smiles and holds the baby near the portscreen, as if the baby can read his own name.

Official Brewer looks at me. "Official Carrow," he says, "it's time for the tablet."

My turn. "We have to give the tablet in front of the port,"

I remind the parents. The mother shifts Ory even higher so that the baby's head and face are clearly visible for the portscreen to record.

I've always liked the look of the little disease-proofing tablets we give at the Welcoming Day ceremonies. These tablets are round and made up of what looks like three tiny pie wedges: one-third blue, one-third green, and one-third red. Though the contents of this tablet are entirely different from the three tablets the baby will carry later, the use of the same colors represents the life he will have in the Society. The disease-proofing tablet looks childish and colorful. They always remind me of the paint palettes on our screens back in First School.

The Society gives the tablet to all babies to keep them safe from illness and infection. The disease-proofing tablet is easy for babies to take. It dissolves instantly. It's all much more humane than the inoculations previous societies used to give, where they put a needle right into a baby's skin. Even the Rising plans to keep giving the disease-proofing tablets when they come to power, but with a few modifications.

The baby stirs when I unwrap the tablet. "Would you mind opening his mouth for me?" I ask the baby's mother.

When she tries to open his mouth, the baby turns his head, looking for food and trying to suck. We all laugh, and while his mouth is open I drop the tablet inside. It dissolves completely on his tongue. Now we have to wait for him to swallow, which he does: right on cue.

"Ory Burton Farnsworth," Official Brewer says, "we welcome you to the Society."

"Thank you," the parents say in unison.

The substitution has gone perfectly, as usual.

Official Lei glances at me and smiles. Her long sweep of black hair slides over her shoulder. Sometimes I wonder if she's part of the rebellion, too, and knows what I'm doing—replacing the disease-proofing tablets with the ones the Rising gave to me. Almost every child born in the Provinces within the past two years has had one of the Rising immunizations instead of the Society's. Other Rising workers like me have been making the switch.

Thanks to the Rising, this baby won't only be immune to most illnesses. He'll also be immune to the red tablet, so the Society can't take his memories. Someone did this for me when I was a baby. They did the same for Ky. And, probably, for Cassia.

Years ago, the Rising infiltrated the dispensaries where the Society makes the disease-proofing tablets. So, in addition to the tablets made according to the Society's formula, there are others made for the Rising. Our tablets include everything the Society uses, plus the immunity to the red tablet, plus something more.

When we were born, the Rising didn't have enough resources to make new tablets for everyone. They had to choose only some of us, based on who they thought might turn out to be useful to them later. Now they finally have enough for everyone.

The Rising is for everyone.

And they—we—are not going to fail.

Since the sidewalk is narrow, I walk behind Official Brewer and Official Lei on our way back to the air car. Another family with a daughter wearing Banquet attire hurries down the street. They're late, and the mother is not happy. "I told you *again* and *again*—" she says to the father, and then she catches sight of us and stops cold.

"Hello," I say as we pass them. "Congratulations."

"When do you next see *your* Match?" Official Lei asks me.

"I don't know," I say. "The Society hasn't scheduled our next port-to-port communication."

Official Lei is a little older than I am: at least twenty-one, because she's celebrated her Marriage Contract. As long as I've known her, her spouse has been out in the Army stationed somewhere at the edge of the Borders. I can't ask her when he's due back. That kind of information is classified. I don't think even Official Lei knows when he'll return.

The Society doesn't like us to get too specific when we talk about our work assignments with others. Cassia's aware that I'm an Official, but she doesn't know exactly what I do. There are Officials in all different departments in the Society.

The Society trains many kinds of workers at the medical center. Everyone knows about the medics because they can diagnose and help people. There are also surgics who operate, pharmics who make medicines, nurses who assist, and physics

like me. Our job is to oversee aspects of the medical field—for example, administrating medical centers. Or, if we become Officials, we're often asked to serve on Committees, which is what I do. We take care of the distribution of tablets to infants and assist in collecting tissue at Final Banquets. According to the Society, this assignment is one of the most important ones an Official can have.

"What color did she choose?" Official Lei asks as we approach the air car.

For a second, I don't know what she means, and then I realize she's asking about Cassia's dress. "She chose green," I say. "She looked beautiful."

Someone cries out and the three of us turn in unison. It's the baby's father, running toward us as fast as he can. "I can't wake my older son," he calls out. "I went in to see if he was still asleep and—something is wrong."

"Contact the medics on the port," Official Brewer calls back, and the three of us move as fast as we can to the house. We go inside without knocking and hurry to the back where the bedrooms always are. Official Lei puts her hand on the wall to steady herself before Official Brewer opens the bedroom door. "You all right?" I ask her. She nods.

"Hello?" Official Brewer says.

The mother looks up at us, her face ashen. She still holds the baby. The older child lying on the bed doesn't move at all.

He rests on his side, his back to us. He's breathing, but it's slow, and his plainclothes hang a little loose around his

neck. His skin color looks all right. There's a small red mark in between his shoulder blades and I feel a rush of pity and exultation.

This is it.

The Rising said it would look like this.

I have to keep myself from glancing at the others in the room. *Who else knows?* Is anyone here part of the Rising? Have they seen the information I've seen about how the rebellion will proceed?

Though the incubation period may vary, once the disease is manifest, the patient deteriorates quickly. Slurred speech is followed by a descent into an almost comatose state. The most telltale sign of the live Plague virus is one or more small red marks on the back of the patient. Once the Plague has made significant inroads into the general populace, and can no longer be concealed by the Society, the Rising will begin.

"What is it?" the mother asks. "Is he ill?"

Again, the three of us move at the same time. Official Lei reaches for the boy's wrist to take his pulse. Official Brewer turns to the woman. I try to block her view of her child lying still on the bed. Until I *know* the Rising is on the move, I have to proceed as usual.

"He's breathing," Official Brewer says.

"His pulse is fine," Official Lei says.

"The medics will be here soon," I tell the mother.

"Can't you do something for him?" she asks. "Medicine, treatment . . ."

"I'm sorry," Official Brewer says. "We need to get to the medical center before we can do anything more."

"But he's stable," I tell her. *Don't worry*, I want to add. *The Rising has a cure*. I hope she can hear the sound of hope in my voice since I can't tell her outright *how* I know it's all going to work out.

This is it. The beginning of the Rising.

Once the Rising comes to power, we'll all be able to choose. Who knows what might happen then? When I kissed Cassia back in the Borough she caught her breath in what I think was surprise. Not at the kiss: she knew that was coming. I think she was surprised by how it felt.

As soon as I can, I want to tell her again, in person: *Cassia, I'm in love with you and I want you. So, what will it take for you to feel the same? A whole new world?*

Because that's what we're going to have.

The mother edges a tiny bit closer to her child. "It's just," she says, and her voice catches, "that he's so *still*."

CHAPTER 2

CASSIA

Ky said he'd meet me tonight, by the lake.

When I see him next, I'll kiss him first.

He'll pull me so close that the poems I keep underneath my shirt, near my heart, will rustle, a sound so soft that only the two of us will hear. And the music of his heartbeat, his breathing, the cadence and timbre of his voice, will set me to singing.

He will tell me where he has been.

I will tell him where I want to go.

I stretch out my arms to make sure that nothing shows underneath the cuffs of my shirt. The red silk of the dress I'm wearing slips neatly under the unflattering lines of my plainclothes. It's one of the Hundred Dresses, possibly stolen, that came up in a trade. It was worth the price I paid—a poem—to have such a piece of color to hold up to the light and pull over my head, to feel so bright.

I sort for the Society here in their capital of Central, but I have a job to do for the Rising, and I trade with the Archivists. On the outside, I'm a Society girl wearing plainclothes. But underneath, I have silk and paper against my skin.