

CHAPTER 1

AWAKE, RACHEL?" PATHIK appeared, as he had for the last three mornings, holding two steaming cups of a bitter beverage the Others called root brew. He handed one to Rachel and sat down next to her. He looked weary, but he had looked that way for the whole of their short acquaintance.

She was *barely* awake, huddled on a crudely carved log that served as a bench, as close to the camp's central fire as she could get. During the six-day hike from the Line to Pathik's base camp, Rachel had begun to believe she would never be warm again. Though it was far from luxurious, the central fire pit had become one of her favorite places in camp.

She wrapped both hands around the dented metal cup and blew on the hot liquid, wishing for some kalitea, sweetened with sugar, served up in one of Ms. Moore's fine china cups. The cup she held now looked like it had been around

for decades, yet it was one of the most modern things—at least of those still in one piece—that she had seen since she arrived Away. Everywhere she looked something mutely testified to the way time had just stopped here. The few buildings left standing were shells, with empty rooms and blown-out windows. There was no running water or heat. The lighting was provided by candles or oil. When the bombs went off all those years ago and Away was born, the activation of the Line cut off much more than a way back home for these people. It cut off any sort of access to technology. The forebears of the group that lived in this camp had had to figure out how to survive. Rachel was amazed they had managed it.

“Any change?” Rachel tried to read Pathik’s expression for news of his father, Malgam. He was the reason she had Crossed the Line; he’d fallen ill and the camp healer couldn’t help him. She’d helped Pathik bring medicine that the Others didn’t have.

“Indigo said his fever broke last night. He’s going to be okay, I think.” Pathik spoke quietly; most of the camp’s inhabitants were still sleeping.

Indigo was Pathik’s grandfather, Malgam’s father. Rachel had seen his face many times before she actually met him; Ms. Moore, the lady for whom Rachel’s mother, Vivian, worked, had had a framed digim of him on her mantel. But the man in the digim was much younger looking, and his hair had been a rich brown color. Somehow, Rachel had expected Indigo to look just like the digim, though it

had been taken many years ago. When she first saw him on the night they arrived in camp, she was shocked at how his brown hair was now all silvery gray.

His eyes were the same, though—an intense, bottomless blue. When Indigo had looked at her the evening they arrived in camp, when he had thanked her for bringing the antibiotics Malgam needed, she felt like his eyes saw *inside* her. His smile shone through the worry she could see in his face and made her feel like he approved of her somehow.

“Do you know where my father is?” she had asked. She hadn’t been able to help it, though she knew she should wait, knew that he needed to focus on his son.

“Your father?” He had tilted his head down at her, confused.

“She has a digim of Daniel.” Pathik had whispered the words so the rest of the group gathered around the fire that night couldn’t hear. “She showed it to me.” He lowered his voice even more. “She says he’s her father.”

Indigo’s eyes had widened then, but he hadn’t answered her question.

“We will talk,” he had said gently, “later.” He had rushed away then, to tend to his son, but something lingered in her, some sense that he was an ally. It was a comforting balm in the midst of the confusion of that night—her first night in the Others’ camp. She hadn’t spoken to him again since then. She’d been waiting, catching glimpses of him as he went to tend to Malgam, but there had been no opportunity to speak to him.

“Morning, Jab.” Pathik’s voice brought Rachel back to the present, back to the chilly morning air and the smoke tendrilling toward her face. She looked up and saw Jab, one of the Others who had been with Pathik when he made his trek to the Line in search of medicine. He was holding his own cup of root brew, shivering.

“Have a seat.” Pathik patted the log next to him. Jab glanced at Rachel and sat down.

“Morning,” said Jab. He stared straight ahead at the fire.

Rachel was glad Pathik sat between them, though she knew that would provide no protection if Jab decided to use his gift again, like he had the day she Crossed. She remembered the pain, that hot flash in her temple, coming from nowhere. She and Pathik had just arrived at the temporary camp where Jab and Kinec, Pathik’s trek companions, waited. Rachel had been shocked that she had actually Crossed, and was just beginning to realize that she might never be able to Cross back, that she might never see her mother again. But she hadn’t yet thought to *fear* the Others, despite all the net books she had read about them, each filled with a more spectacular horror story than the last. When Pathik told her that Jab had caused the pain she felt, she realized that she knew nothing of them, not really. For the first time she had felt afraid of what the Others—even Pathik—might be capable of doing.

Rachel felt the faintest pang of that same fear when she saw Jab approach the fire. She knew that there had been a council meeting the night before to decide what punish-

ment Jab would get for using his gift on her. It was forbidden for Others, at least the Others in Pathik's camp, to use their gifts without careful consideration.

"What's the verdict of the council?" Pathik didn't have to elaborate on his question; Jab knew what he meant.

"I'm to formally apologize." Jab kept his eyes on the campfire as he spoke. "To the camp and to her."

"That's all?" Pathik didn't sound pleased. "That's all they expect from you?"

Jab shrugged. "That and I'm to dredge all the common waste pots for the *entire* winter."

"Ha!" Pathik laughed. Emptying waste pots was drudgery. He was in charge of that chore for his household, so he knew it wasn't fun. But to have to do all the common pots, located throughout camp, for the entire winter? That would be a nightmare.

"Serves you right, Jab, and you know it."

Jab shrugged again. He leaned forward so he could see past Pathik, and waited until Rachel turned to look at him. "I do apologize," he said.

"Not good enough, Jab." Pathik's voice gained an edge.

Rachel knew that Pathik could tell whether Jab was sincere by using his gift; he could sense what others were feeling. *She* could tell without any gift at all that Jab didn't mean a word of his apology, but she didn't really care.

"It's fine," she said, turning away from Jab. She didn't want to prolong the interaction with him.

"Rachel." Pathik's voice was softer now. He waited for

her to look at him. When she did, he continued. “It’s not fine. He hurt you.” Pathik held her gaze for a moment, but then color infused his cheeks and he dropped his eyes. Rachel was glad he had looked down first; something in the look they exchanged had made her feel . . . *feelings*; feelings she didn’t want to think about right now. She hoped Pathik wasn’t aware of them; his gift might make that possible.

“A *formal* apology, Jab,” said Pathik. “As the council decreed.”

Jab groaned, but he stood up. He walked over and stood in front of Rachel, staring at her feet. She eyed him warily. He looked miserable.

“I am shamed by my actions.” Jab hesitated. He heaved a huge sigh.

“I regret . . .” Pathik prompted.

“I *know*,” hissed Jab, rolling his eyes. “I regret the harm I have caused. I apologize to you, Rachel Quillen. Will you name reparations?”

“Reparations?” Rachel crinkled her brow at Pathik. “What does that mean?”

“To provide compensation, to make amends, to—”

“Oh, I know what it means. What does it *mean*, though?” Rachel shook her head at Pathik’s grin. Sometimes he could be exasperating.

“It means what it sounds like. You can ask Jab to do something, or even to give you something of his, to try and make up for what he did.” Pathik grinned even wider at the look on Jab’s face.

Rachel didn't think any of it was funny. "Can't I just say 'apology accepted' and leave it at that?"

Pathik quickly grew serious. "That's what usually happens, although there is a traditional way to say it. I think actually naming reparations was something that was done long ago. At least I don't remember anybody naming reparations recent—"

"What's the traditional response?" Normally, Rachel would have been fascinated by the details of how society functioned Away. At least she would have when she was still safe on The Property, like she had been less than two weeks ago. Right now, all she wanted was to get Jab out of her sight.

"We say: 'I ask only that you remember this and do better,'" said Pathik.

Rachel looked up at Jab. She knew she should just say the phrase and have done with it, but he looked so wretched. She tilted her head up at him, watching him through narrowed eyes. After what he'd done to her, she wanted his misery to last just a little while longer.

"Pathik. Rachel." Nandy called their names quietly from a few yards away. "You're both to come."

Pathik looked to be sure Rachel was coming and hurried to Nandy. When she saw the look on Pathik's face, Nandy immediately reassured him.

"All is well—Malgam's not worse. In fact, he was the one who sent for you."

"I couldn't tell," said Pathik. He hadn't tried to scan

Nandy for emotion; as all the Others did, he avoided using his gift on people he knew, unless he was practicing and had permission. But even without trying, he had felt something from her; her emotions were big lately, because Malgam had been so close to dying. Without focusing on her, he hadn't been able to tell if it was joy or anguish.

"I imagine he wants to have a look at this one." Nandy nodded at Rachel and smiled.

Rachel smiled back. She liked Nandy, had liked her right away, late that first night in camp. Nandy was close to Rachel's mother's age, though she didn't look like Vivian at all. Her hair was cut short and jagged, and her pale gray eyes were more frankly appraising than Vivian's. There was something about her that reminded Rachel of Vivian though, some maternal, protective quality. That first night, Nandy had been the one who finally told the rest of the camp that Rachel *had* to get some sleep. She had shushed all their urgent questions with a wave of her hand, and dismissed them.

It also didn't hurt that Nandy's name didn't mean anything.

Jab's name referred to his gift. Pathik's name too. But as far as Rachel could tell, Nandy just meant . . . *Nandy*. Which meant that Nandy probably didn't have a gift. No special power. Nothing for Rachel to fear. So it was easier to trust her.

The Others named their children after the gifts they developed, if they developed any. Pathik had explained to Rachel that not all the Others developed gifts, so they kept

their common names—the names they were given at birth. Nandy was a common name, and because she had never developed a gift, Nandy kept it as an adult. Even Indigo had never shown any signs of a special talent from what Rachel understood, and he had kept his common name, which was chosen because of the unusual color of his eyes.

Rachel thought most of the Others did develop something, even if it was nothing much. Kinec—the other boy who had been with Pathik and Jab when they made the trek to the Line—was named for his ability to move objects. He could make a fully loaded pack hop along the ground like a clumsy frog.

He had shown Rachel on the last night they spent together on their journey to Pathik's camp, just before they all wrapped up in the thermal blankets Ms. Moore had sent with them. The Others were taught not to show their gifts, but Pathik had said they could make an exception. And so, Kinec had placed his pack on the ground near the small campfire. He had stared at the pack intently, for so long that Rachel thought maybe nothing was going to happen. But then, the pack had lurched forward a few inches. Then it had actually leaped, not high, just half a foot off the ground, but it *left the ground*. It did that three times before Kinec grunted and collapsed.

“That’s all I’ve got right now,” he had said, beads of perspiration glittering on his brow.

Rachel was pretty sure Pathik had let Kinec show her his gift to make her feel better, to let her know that not all gifts

were about causing physical pain. But when she remembered that pack, jerking forward like a clumsy bullfrog brought back from the dead, somehow she wasn't comforted.

"Now remember, he's still not strong." Nandy stopped at the door of the largest building in camp, a one-story brick structure that was still in pretty good repair. Rachel had imagined many former uses for that building in the last few days: a beauty salon, or a flower shop that might have sold orchids like the ones Ms. Moore grew—the ones she had been learning to grow too, before she Crossed. She had settled on a bakery, probably because she had been hungry most of the last two weeks and it was appealing to make mental lists of all the different kinds of desserts the shop might have offered.

There were a couple of other, smaller buildings near the bakery building, remnants of a town that must have stood there years ago. Before the Line was activated. They were constructed of some sort of gray blocks. She had slept in one of them since she had arrived in camp, in a cramped room with another girl around her age, who said as little as possible to her. There was still pavement visible in front of one of the buildings, a sidewalk from a lost time, crumpled and cracked. It reminded Rachel of one of the stranger sights she had seen on their trek from the Line to the camp.

They had been making their way through some dense underbrush, the boys hacking away at vines and bushes in order to clear a path. Jab had grumbled, and Pathik had said, "The road is coming up. It'll get easier for a while."

“Road?” Rachel saw nothing but brush and trees and wilderness everywhere she looked.

“There it is.” Kinec pointed off to the left.

Rachel turned to look. She saw no road. What she did see was a corridor of strangely tamed landscape. There were some smaller saplings, and some bushes at intervals, but for a long stretch, as far as she could see, the wild forest was reduced to low scrub.

They headed for the easier terrain and once there, Rachel could see why it was so different from the rest of the forest. There were places—where a sapling had pushed up from the earth, or erosion had worn away enough topsoil—where she could see chunks of concrete. On one large chunk there was even a strip of faded, barely perceptible yellow paint.

They were walking on top of what had been, many years before, a highway.

NANDY RAPPED HER knuckles on the metal door. It was intact, if a bit rusted. On it were the two blue circles Rachel saw everywhere in camp; they were painted on all the doors, and she had seen them on tree trunks at the camp’s perimeter. When she’d asked Pathik about them he’d shrugged.

“They mark our camp.” He had said no more.

There was no glass in the windows of the building; that must have shattered long ago. Someone had covered some of the smaller openings with wood. A piece of sheet metal

covered the largest window—the one Rachel pictured filled with displays of pastries and cakes.

Nandy rapped again, and the door opened a crack, then wider. A man stood just inside. He had wavy black hair that reached his shoulders and he looked tired. Rachel was beginning to think that she would never see another person who *didn't* look tired.

“This her?” The man inspected Rachel. She stared back at him. She was growing weary of being evaluated by everyone she met in camp.

Nandy shot the man a look that Rachel couldn't decipher. “Let's go,” she said.

Rachel patted her jacket pocket; the letters were there. She had had one each for Pathik, Malgam, and Indigo, from Ms. Moore. She had given them all to Pathik on the trek to camp, but he'd kept only his, saying that she should be the one to give Indigo and Malgam theirs. She hadn't known when the time would be right to give them out, so she had been carrying them around with her. She had already read the letter Ms. Moore had written for her, and the one her mom had written too. They were both brief; there hadn't been much time to waste before she Crossed. Ms. Moore's said to be careful, and to trust only Indigo, his family, and her own instincts. Her mom's said how much she loved Rachel, and told her to be strong. It also mentioned some maps that Vivian had slipped into Rachel's bag. Rachel had reread them both many times already.

Inside the building, the man who had opened the door

held a glass jar filled with some sort of oil, with a burning wick wired to the top. The flame cast a smoky yellow circle around the four of them, but the rest of the room was indistinct, cloaked in shadows. Pathik took Rachel's hand in his, to help guide her along. He had done this often on their trek to camp, but not once since they had arrived. Rachel had sort of missed it.

"Malgam's in a mood," said the man as he led them down a corridor off the main room.

"When has he ever *not* been in a mood?" Pathik sounded irritated.

"I'll take him moody and breathing over sweet and dead, anytime." Nandy's tone was light, but she shot a reproving look at Pathik.

The man knocked twice on the door at the end of the corridor. They could hear footsteps as someone walked toward the door.

"I'll leave you to it," said the man. He quickly disappeared back down the corridor.

Rachel was eager to see Indigo again. There were so many things she wanted to tell him: how much Ms. Moore had loved him, how much she thought Ms. Moore regretted not running Away with him all those years ago, how happy she had been when she discovered that he and her son were still alive. She wanted to ask him why he had stayed Away when Ms. Moore didn't meet him as they had planned, why he had never come back to see why she didn't. But most of all, she wanted to ask him about her

father, Daniel. Pathik had refused to tell her anything. She had even asked the girl who shared her sleeping quarters, but she had just stared blankly at the digim of Daniel when Rachel showed it to her.

It was dark in the corridor without the wavy-haired man's light, and the way he had rushed off made her a little nervous. She wondered why he wanted to get away so quickly.

The footsteps they had heard approach the door stopped on the other side of it. Rachel could feel that someone was right there, separated from her and Pathik and Nandy by just inches, but there was no sound.

And then the doorknob started to turn.