

THE EVENTS IN THIS BOOK ARE REAL.

NAMES AND PLACES HAVE BEEN CHANGED
TO PROTECT THE LORIEN SIX,
WHO REMAIN IN HIDING.

TAKE THIS AS YOUR FIRST WARNING.

OTHER CIVILIZATIONS DO EXIST.

SOME OF THEM SEEK TO DESTROY YOU.

**I AM
NUMBER FOUR**
BOOK ONE OF THE LORIEN LEGACIES

**PITTACUS
LORE**

HARPER

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I Am Number Four

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prove distracting to a fifteen-year-old who has hidden on Earth for
ten years waiting to develop the Legacies, or powers, he will need
to rejoin the other five surviving Garde members and fight the
Mogadorians who destroyed their planet, Lorien.

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First Edition





THE DOOR STARTS SHAKING. IT'S A FLIMSY THING made of bamboo shoots held together with tattered lengths of twine. The shake is subtle and stops almost immediately. They lift their heads to listen, a fourteen-year-old boy and a fifty-year-old man, who everyone thinks is his father but who was born near a different jungle on a different planet hundreds of lightyears away. They are lying shirtless on opposite sides of the hut, a mosquito net over each cot. They hear a distant crash, like the sound of an animal breaking the branch of a tree, but in this case, it sounds like the entire tree has been broken.

“What was that?” the boy asks.

“Shh,” the man replies.

They hear the chirp of insects, nothing more. The man brings his legs over the side of the cot when the shake starts again. A longer, firmer shake, and another crash,

this time closer. The man gets to his feet and walks slowly to the door. Silence. The man takes a deep breath as he inches his hand to the latch. The boy sits up.

“No,” the man whispers, and in that instant the blade of a sword, long and gleaming, made of a shining white metal that is not found on Earth, comes through the door and sinks deeply into the man’s chest. It protrudes six inches out through his back, and is quickly pulled free. The man grunts. The boy gasps. The man takes a single breath, and utters one word: “Run.” He falls lifeless to the floor.

The boy leaps from the cot, bursts through the rear wall. He doesn’t bother with the door or a window; he literally runs through the wall, which breaks apart as if it’s paper, though it’s made of strong, hard African mahogany. He tears into the Congo night, leaps over trees, sprints at a speed somewhere around sixty miles per hour. His sight and hearing are beyond human. He dodges trees, rips through snarled vines, leaps small streams with a single step. Heavy footsteps are close behind him, getting closer every second. His pursuers also have gifts. And they have something with them. Something he has only heard hints of, something he never believed he would see on Earth.

The crashing nears. The boy hears a low, intense roar. He knows whatever is behind him is picking up speed. He sees a break in the jungle up ahead. When

he reaches it, he sees a huge ravine, three hundred feet across and three hundred feet down, with a river at the bottom. The river's bank is covered with huge boulders. Boulders that would break him apart if he fell on them. His only chance is to get across the ravine. He'll have a short running start, and one chance. One chance to save his own life. Even for him, or for any of the others on Earth like him, it's a near impossible leap. Going back, or going down, or trying to fight them means certain death. He has one shot.

There's a deafening roar behind him. They're twenty, thirty feet away. He takes five steps back and runs—and just before the ledge, he takes off and starts flying across the ravine. He's in the air three or four seconds. He screams, his arms outstretched in front of him, waiting for either safety or the end. He hits the ground and tumbles forward, stopping at the base of a mammoth tree. He smiles. He can't believe he made it, that he's going to survive. Not wanting them to see him, and knowing he needs to get farther away from them, he stands. He'll have to keep running.

He turns towards the jungle. As he does, a huge hand wraps itself around his throat. He is lifted off the ground. He struggles, kicks, tries to pull away, but knows it's futile, that it's over. He should have expected that they'd be on both sides, that once they found him, there would be no escape. The Mogadorian lifts him so

that he can see the boy's chest, see the amulet that is hanging around his neck, the amulet that only he and his kind can wear. He tears it off and puts it somewhere inside the long black cloak he is wearing, and when his hand emerges it is holding the gleaming white metal sword. The boy looks into the Mogadorian's deep, wide, emotionless black eyes, and he speaks.

“The Legacies live. They will find each other, and when they're ready, they're going to destroy you.”

The Mogadarian laughs, a nasty, mocking laugh. It raises the sword, the only weapon in the universe that can break the charm that until today protected the boy, and still protects the others. The blade ignites in a silver flame as it points to the sky, as if it's coming alive, sensing its mission and grimacing in anticipation. And as it falls, an arc of light speeding through the blackness of the jungle, the boy still believes that some part of him will survive, and some part of him will make it home. He closes his eyes just before the sword strikes. And then it is over.

CHAPTER ONE

IN THE BEGINNING THERE WERE NINE OF US. We left when we were young, almost too young to remember.

Almost.

I am told the ground shook, that the skies were full of light and explosions. We were in that two-week period of the year when both moons hang on opposite sides of the horizon. It was a time of celebration, and the explosions were at first mistaken for fireworks. They were not. It was warm, a soft wind blew in from off the water. I am always told the weather: it was warm. There was a soft wind. I've never understood why that matters.

What I remember most vividly is the way my grandmother looked that day. She was frantic, and sad. There were tears in her eyes. My grandfather stood just over her shoulder. I remember the way his glasses gathered

the light from the sky. There were hugs. There were words said by each of them. I don't remember what they were. Nothing haunts me more.

It took a year to get here. I was five when we arrived. We were to assimilate ourselves into the culture before returning to Lorien when it could again sustain life. The nine of us had to scatter, and go our own ways. For how long, nobody knew. We still don't. None of them know where I am, and I don't know where they are, or what they look like now. That is how we protect ourselves because of the charm that was placed upon us when we left, a charm guaranteeing that we can only be killed in the order of our numbers, so long as we stay apart. If we come together, then the charm is broken.

When one of us is found and killed, a circular scar wraps around the right ankle of those still alive. And residing on our left ankle, formed when the Loric charm was first cast, is a small scar identical to the amulet each of us wears. The circular scars are another part of the charm. A warning system so that we know where we stand with each other, and so that we know when they'll be coming for us next. The first scar came when I was nine years old. It woke me from my sleep, burning itself into my flesh. We were living in Arizona, in a small border town near Mexico. I woke screaming in the middle of the night, in agony, terrified as the scar seared itself into my flesh. It was the first sign

that the Mogadorians had finally found us on Earth, and the first sign that we were in danger. Until the scar showed up, I had almost convinced myself that my memories were wrong, that what Henri told me was wrong. I wanted to be a normal kid living a normal life, but I knew then, beyond any doubt or discussion, that I wasn't. We moved to Minnesota the next day.

The second scar came when I was twelve. I was in school, in Colorado, participating in a spelling bee. As soon as the pain started I knew what was happening, what had happened to Number Two. The pain was excruciating, but bearable this time. I would have stayed on the stage, but the heat lit my sock on fire. The teacher who was conducting the bee sprayed me with a fire extinguisher and rushed me to the hospital. The doctor in the ER found the first scar and called the police. When Henri showed, they threatened to arrest him for child abuse. But because he hadn't been anywhere near me when the second scar came, they had to let him go. We got in the car and drove away, this time to Maine. We left everything we had except for the Loric Chest that Henri brought along on every move. All twenty-one of them to date.

The third scar appeared an hour ago. I was sitting on a pontoon boat. The boat belonged to the parents of the most popular kid at my school, and unbeknownst to them, he was having a party on it. I had never been

invited to any of the parties at my school before. I had always, because I knew we might leave at any minute, kept to myself. But it had been quiet for two years. Henri hadn't seen anything in the news that might lead the Mogadorians to one of us, or might alert us to them. So I made a couple friends. And one of them introduced me to the kid who was having the party. Everyone met at a dock. There were three coolers, some music, girls I had admired from afar but never spoken to, even though I wanted to. We pulled out from the dock and went half a mile into the Gulf of Mexico. I was sitting on the edge of the pontoon with my feet in the water, talking to a cute, dark-haired, blue-eyed girl named Tara, when I felt it coming. The water around my leg started boiling, and my lower leg started glowing where the scar was imbedding itself. The third of the Lorien symbols, the third warning. Tara started screaming and people started crowding around me. I knew there was no way to explain it. And I knew we would have to leave immediately.

The stakes were higher now. They had found Number Three, wherever he or she was, and Number Three was dead. So I calmed Tara down and kissed her on the cheek and told her it was nice to meet her and that I hoped she had a long beautiful life. I dove off the side of the boat and started swimming, underwater the entire time, except for one breath about halfway there, as fast

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as I could until I reached the shore. I ran along the side of the highway, just inside of the tree line, moving at speeds as fast as any of the cars. When I got home, Henri was at the bank of scanners and monitors that he used to research news around the world, and police activity in our area. He knew without me saying a word, though he did lift my soaking pants to see the scars.



In the beginning we were a group of nine.

Three are gone, dead.

There are six of us left.

They are hunting us, and they won't stop until they've killed us all.

I am Number Four.

I know that I am next.

CHAPTER TWO

I STAND IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DRIVE AND STARE up at the house. It is light pink, almost like cake frosting, sitting ten feet above the ground on wooden stilts. A palm tree sways in the front. In the back of the house a pier extends twenty yards into the Gulf of Mexico. If the house were a mile to the south, the pier would be in the Atlantic Ocean.

Henri walks out of the house carrying the last of the boxes, some of which were never unpacked from our last move. He locks the door, then leaves the keys in the mail slot beside it. It is two o'clock in the morning. He is wearing khaki shorts and a black polo. He is very tan, with an unshaven face that seems downcast. He is also sad to be leaving. He tosses the final boxes into the back of the truck with the rest of our things.

“That’s it,” he says.

I nod. We stand and stare up at the house and listen

to the wind come through the palm fronds. I am holding a bag of celery in my hand.

"I'll miss this place," I say. "Even more than the others."

"Me too."

"Time for the burn?"

"Yes. You want to do it, or you want me to?"

"I'll do it."

Henri pulls out his wallet and drops it on the ground. I pull out mine and do the same. He walks to our truck and comes back with passports, birth certificates, social security cards, checkbooks, credit cards and bank cards, and drops them on the ground. All of the documents and materials related to our identities here, all of them forged and manufactured. I grab from the truck a small gas can we keep for emergencies. I pour the gas over the small pile. My current name is Daniel Jones. My story is that I grew up in California and moved here because of my dad's job as a computer programmer. Daniel Jones is about to disappear. I light a match and drop it, and the pile ignites. Another one of my lives, gone. As we always do, Henri and I stand and watch the fire. *Bye, Daniel*, I think, *it was nice knowing you*. When the fire burns down, Henri looks over at me.

"We gotta go."

"I know."

"These islands were never safe. They're too hard to

leave quickly, too hard to escape from. It was foolish of us to come here.”

I nod. He is right, and I know it. But I’m still reluctant to leave. We came here because I wanted to, and for the first time, Henri let me choose where we were going. We’ve been here nine months, and it’s the longest we have stayed in any one place since leaving Lorient. I’ll miss the sun and the warmth. I’ll miss the gecko that watched from the wall each morning as I ate breakfast. Though there are literally millions of geckos in south Florida, I swear this one follows me to school and seems to be everywhere I am. I’ll miss the thunderstorms that seem to come from out of nowhere, the way everything is still and quiet in the early-morning hours before the terns arrive. I’ll miss the dolphins that sometimes feed when the sun sets. I’ll even miss the smell of sulfur from the rotting seaweed at the base of the shore, the way that it fills the house and penetrates our dreams while we sleep.

“Get rid of the celery and I’ll wait in the truck,” Henri says. “Then it’s time.”

I enter a thicket of trees off to the right of the truck. There are three Key deer already waiting. I dump the bag of celery out at their feet and crouch down and pet each of them in turn. They allow me to, having long gotten over their skittishness. One of them raises his head and looks at me. Dark, blank eyes staring back.

It almost feels as though he passes something to me. A shudder runs up my spine. He drops his head and continues eating.

“Good luck, little friends,” I say, and walk to the truck and climb into the passenger seat.

We watch the house grow smaller in the side mirrors until Henri pulls onto the main road and the house disappears. It’s a Saturday. I wonder what’s happening at the party without me. What they’re saying about the way that I left and what they’ll say on Monday when I’m not at school. I wish I could have said good-bye. I’ll never see anyone I knew here ever again. I’ll never speak to any of them. And they’ll never know what I am or why I left. After a few months, or maybe a few weeks, none of them will probably ever think of me again.

Before we get on the highway, Henri pulls over to gas up the truck. As he works the pump, I start looking through an atlas he keeps on the middle of the seat. We’ve had the atlas since we arrived on this planet. It has lines drawn to and from every place we’ve ever lived. At this point, there are lines crisscrossing all of the United States. We know we should get rid of it, but it’s really the only piece of our life together that we have. Normal people have photos and videos and journals; we have the atlas. Picking it up and looking through it, I can see Henri has drawn a new line from Florida to Ohio. When I think of Ohio, I think of cows

and corn and nice people. I know the license plate says THE HEART OF IT ALL. What “All” is, I don’t know, but I guess I’ll find out.

Henri gets back into the truck. He has bought a couple of sodas and a bag of chips. He pulls away and starts heading toward U.S. 1, which will take us north. He reaches for the atlas.

“Do you think there are people in Ohio?” I joke.

He chuckles. “I would imagine there are a few. And we might even get lucky and find cars and TV there, too.”

I nod. Maybe it won’t be as bad as I think.

“What do you think of the name ‘John Smith?’” I ask.

“Is that what you’ve settled on?”

“I think so,” I say. I’ve never been a John before, or a Smith.

“It doesn’t get any more common than that. I would say it’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Smith.”

I smile. “Yeah, I think I like ‘John Smith.’”

“I’ll create your forms when we stop.”

A mile later we are off the island and cruising across the bridge. The waters pass below us. They are calm and the moonlight is shimmering on the small waves, creating dapples of white in the crests. On the right is the ocean, on the left is the gulf; it is, in essence, the same water, but with two different names. I have the urge to cry, but I don’t. It’s not that

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I'm necessarily sad to leave Florida, but I'm tired of running. I'm tired of dreaming up a new name every six months. Tired of new houses, new schools. I wonder if it'll ever be possible for us to stop.

CHAPTER THREE

WE PULL OFF FOR FOOD AND GAS AND NEW PHONES. We go to a truck stop, where we eat meat loaf and macaroni and cheese, which is one of the few things Henri acknowledges as being superior to anything we had on Lorien. As we eat, he creates new documents on his laptop, using our new names. He'll print them when we arrive, and as far as anyone will know, we'll be who we say we are.

"You're sure about John Smith?" he says.

"Yeah."

"You were born in Tuscaloosa, Alabama."

I laugh. "How did you come up with that?"

He smiles and motions towards two women sitting a few booths away. Both of them are extremely hot. One of them is wearing a T-shirt that reads **WE DO IT BETTER IN TUSCALOOSA.**

"And that's where we're going next," he says.

“As weird as it may sound, I hope we stay in Ohio for a long time.”

“Really. You like the idea of Ohio?”

“I like the idea of making some friends, of going to the same school for more than a few months, of maybe actually having a life. I started to do it in Florida. It was sort of great, and for the first time since we’ve been on Earth, I felt almost normal. I want to find somewhere and stay somewhere.”

Henri looks thoughtful. “Have you looked at your scars today?”

“No, why?”

“Because this isn’t about you. This is about the survival of our race, which was almost entirely obliterated, and about keeping you alive. Every time one of us dies—every time one of *you*, the Garde, dies—our chances diminish. You’re Number Four; you’re next in line. You have an entire race of vicious murderers hunting you. We’re leaving at the first sign of trouble, and I’m not going to debate it with you.”

Henri drives the entire time. Between breaks and the creation of the new documents, it takes about thirty hours. I spend most of the time napping or playing video games. Because of my reflexes, I can master most of the games quickly. The longest it has taken me to beat any of them is about a day. I like the alien war and space games the best. I pretend I’m back on Lorien, fighting

Mogadorians, cutting them down, turning them to ash. Henri thinks it's weird and tries to discourage me from doing it. He says we need to live in the real world, where war and death are a reality, not pretend. As I finish my latest game, I look up. I'm tired of sitting in the truck. The clock on the dash reads 7:58. I yawn, wipe my eyes.

"How much farther?"

"We're almost there," Henri says.

It is dark out, but there is a pale glow to the west. We pass by farms with horses and cattle, then barren fields, and beyond those, it's trees as far as the eye can see. This is exactly what Henri wanted, a quiet place to go unnoticed. Once a week he scours the internet for six, seven, eight hours at a time to update a list of available homes around the country that fit his criteria: isolated, rural, immediate availability. He told me it took four tries—one call to South Dakota, one to New Mexico, one to Arkansas—until he had the rental where we're going to live now.

A few minutes later we see scattered lights that announce the town. We pass a sign that reads:

WELCOME TO PARADISE, OHIO

POPULATION 5,243

"Wow," I say. "This place is even smaller than where we stayed in Montana."

Henri is smiling. “Who do you think it’s paradise for?”
“Cows, maybe? Scarecrows?”

We pass by an old gas station, a car wash, a cemetery. Then the houses begin, clapboard houses spaced thirty or so feet apart. Halloween decorations hang in the windows of most of them. A sidewalk cuts through small yards leading to the front doors. A traffic circle sits in the center of town, and in the middle of it is a statue of a man on horseback holding a sword. Henri stops. We both look at it and laugh, though we’re laughing because we hope no one else with swords ever shows up here. He continues around the circle and once we’re through it, the dashboard GPS system tells us to make a turn. We begin heading west, out of town.

We drive for four miles before turning left onto a gravel road, then pass open cut fields that are probably full of corn in the summer, then through a dense forest for about a mile. And then we find it, tucked away in overgrown vegetation, a rusted silver mailbox with black lettering painted on the side of it that reads 17 OLD MILL RD.

“The closest house is two miles away,” he says, turning in. Weeds grow throughout the gravel drive, which is littered with potholes filled with tawny water. He comes to a stop and turns the truck off.

“Whose car is that?” I ask, nodding to the black SUV Henri has just parked behind.

“I’m assuming the real-estate agent’s.”

The house stands silhouetted by trees. In the dark there is an eerie look to it, like whoever last lived in it was scared away, or was driven away, or ran away. I get out of the truck. The engine ticks and I can feel the heat coming off of it. I grab my bag from the bed and stand there holding it.

“What do you think?” Henri asks.

The house is one story. Wooden clapboard. Most of the white paint has been chipped away. One of the front windows is broken. The roof is covered with black shingles that look warped and brittle. Three wooden stairs lead to a small porch covered with rickety chairs. The yard itself is long and shaggy. It’s been a very long time since the grass was last mowed.

“It looks like Paradise,” I say.

We walk up together. As we do, a well-dressed blond woman around Henri’s age comes out of the doorway. She’s wearing a business suit and is holding a clipboard and folder; a BlackBerry is clipped to the waist of her skirt. She smiles.

“Mr. Smith?”

“Yes,” says Henri.

“I’m Annie Hart, the agent from Paradise Realty. We spoke on the phone. I tried calling you earlier but your phone seemed to be turned off.”

“Yes, of course. The battery unfortunately died on the way here.”

“Ah, I just hate when that happens,” she says, and walks towards us and shakes Henri’s hand. She asks me my name and I tell her, though I am tempted, as I always am, to just say “Four.” As Henri signs the lease she asks me how old I am and tells me she has a daughter at the local high school about my age. She’s very warm, friendly, and clearly loves to chat. Henri hands the lease back and the three of us walk into the house.

Inside most of the furniture is covered with white sheets. Those that aren’t covered are coated with a thick layer of dust and dead insects. The screens in the windows look brittle to the touch, and the walls are covered with cheap plywood paneling. There are two bedrooms, a modest-sized kitchen with lime green linoleum, one bathroom. The living room is large and rectangular, situated at the front of the house. There’s a fireplace in the far corner. I walk through and toss my bag on the bed of the smaller room. There is a huge faded poster of a football player wearing a bright orange uniform. He’s in the middle of throwing a pass, and it looks like he’s about to get crushed by a massive man in a black and gold uniform. It says BERNIE KOSAR, QUARTERBACK, CLEVELAND BROWNS.

“Come say good-bye to Mrs. Hart,” Henri yells from the living room.

Mrs. Hart is standing at the door with Henri. She tells me I should look for her daughter at school, that

maybe we could be friends. I smile and say yes, that would be nice. After she leaves we immediately start unpacking the truck. Depending on how quickly we leave a place, we either travel very lightly—meaning the clothes on our back, Henri’s laptop and the intricately carved Loric Chest that goes everywhere with us—or we bring a few things—usually Henri’s extra computers and equipment, which he uses to set up a security perimeter and search the web for news and events that might be related to us. This time we have the Chest, the two high-powered computers, four TV monitors, and four cameras. We also have some clothes, though not many of the clothes we wore in Florida are appropriate for life in Ohio. Henri carries the Chest to his room, and we lug all of the equipment into the basement, where he’ll set it up so no visitors will see it. Once everything is inside, he starts placing the cameras and turning on the monitors.

“We won’t have the internet here until the morning. But if you want to go to school tomorrow, I can print all of your new documents for you.”

“If I stay will I have to help you clean this place and finish the setup?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll go to school,” I say.

“Then you better get a good night’s sleep.”

CHAPTER FOUR

ANOTHER NEW IDENTITY, ANOTHER NEW SCHOOL. I've lost track of how many there have been over the years. Fifteen? Twenty? Always a small town, a small school, always the same routine. New students draw attention. Sometimes I question our strategy of sticking to the small towns because it's hard, almost impossible, to go unnoticed. But I know Henri's rationale: it is impossible for *them* to go unnoticed as well.

The school is three miles away from our house. Henri drives me in the morning. It's smaller than most of the others I've attended and is unimpressive looking, one story, long and low-slung. A mural of a pirate with a knife between his teeth covers the outside wall beside the front door.

"So you're a Pirate now?" Henri says beside me.

"It looks like it," I reply.

"You know the drill," he says.

“This ain’t my first rodeo.”

“Don’t show your intelligence. It’ll make them resent you.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.”

“Don’t stand out or draw too much attention.”

“Just a fly on the wall.”

“And don’t hurt anybody. You’re far stronger than they are.”

“I know.”

“Most importantly, always be ready. Ready to leave at a moment’s notice. What’s in your backpack?”

“Five days’ worth of dried fruit and nuts. Spare socks and thermal underwear. Rain jacket. A handheld GPS. A knife disguised as a pen.”

“On you at all times.” He takes a deep breath. “And keep an eye out for signs. Your Legacies are going to appear any day now. Hide them at all costs and call me immediately.”

“I know, Henri.”

“Any day, John,” he reiterates. “If your fingers start to disappear, or if you start to float, or shake violently, if you lose muscular control or begin to hear voices even when nobody is talking. Anything at all, you call.”

I pat my bag. “Got my phone right here.”

“I’ll be waiting here after school. Good luck in there, kiddo,” he says.

I smile at him. He is fifty years old, which means

he was forty when we arrived. Being his age made for a harder transition. He still speaks with a strong Loric accent that is often mistaken for French. It was a good alibi in the beginning, so he named himself Henri, and he has stuck with it ever since, just changing his last name to match mine.

“Off I go to rule the school,” I say.

“Be good.”

I walk towards the building. As is the case with most high schools, there are crowds of kids hanging around outside. They’re divided into their cliques, the jocks and the cheerleaders, the band kids carrying instruments, the brains in their glasses with their textbooks and BlackBerries, the stoners off to one side, oblivious to everyone else. One kid, gangly with thick glasses, stands alone. He’s wearing a black NASA T-shirt and jeans, and can’t weigh more than a hundred pounds. He has a handheld telescope and is scanning the sky, which is mostly obscured by clouds. I notice a girl taking pictures, moving easily from one group to the next. She’s shockingly beautiful with straight blond hair past her shoulders, ivory skin, high cheekbones, and soft blue eyes. Everyone seems to know her and says hello to her, and no one objects to her taking their picture.

She sees me, smiles and waves. I wonder why and turn to see if someone is behind me. There are, two

kids discussing math homework, but no one else. I turn back around. The girl walks towards me, smiling. I've never seen a girl so good-looking, much less spoken to one, and I've definitely never had one wave and smile as if we're friends. I'm immediately nervous, and start blushing. But I'm also suspicious, as I've been trained to be. As she nears me, she lifts the camera and starts snapping pictures. I raise my hands to block my face. She lowers the camera and smiles.

"Don't be shy."

"I'm not. Just trying to protect your lens. My face might break it."

She laughs. "With that scowl it might. Try smiling."

I smile, slightly. I'm so nervous I feel like I'm going to explode. I can feel my neck burning, my hands getting warm.

"That's not a real smile," she says, teasingly. "A smile involves showing your teeth."

I smile broadly and she takes pictures. I usually don't allow anyone to take my picture. If it ended up on the internet, or in a newspaper, it would make finding me much easier. The two times it happened, Henri was furious, got hold of the pictures, and destroyed them. If he knew I was doing this now, I'd be in huge trouble. I can't help it, though—this girl is so pretty and so charming. As she's taking my picture, a dog comes running up to me. It's a beagle with tan floppy ears, white

legs and chest, a slender black body. He's thin and dirty as if he's been living on his own. He rubs against my leg, whines, tries to get my attention. The girl thinks it's cute and has me kneel down so she can take a picture of me with the dog. As soon as she starts snapping shots, he backs away. Whenever she tries again, he moves farther away. She finally gives up and shoots a few more of me. The dog sits about thirty feet away watching us.

"Do you know that dog?" she asks.

"Never seen him before."

"He sure likes you. You're John, right?"

She holds out her hand.

"Yeah." I say. "How'd you know?"

"I'm Sarah Hart. My mother is your real-estate agent. She told me you'd probably be starting school today, and I should look out for you. You're the only new kid to show up today."

I laugh. "Yeah, I met your mom. She was nice."

"You gonna shake my hand?"

She's still holding her hand out. I smile and take it, and it is literally one of the best feelings I've ever had.

"Wow," she says.

"What?"

"Your hand feels hot. Really hot, like you have a fever or something."

"I don't think so."

She lets go.

“Maybe you’re just warm-blooded.”

“Yeah, maybe.”

A bell rings in the distance and Sarah tells me that it’s the warning bell. We have five minutes to get to class. We say good-bye and I watch her walk away. A moment later, something hits the back of my elbow. I turn and a group of football players, all wearing letterman jackets, sweep by me. One of them is glaring at me and I realize that he hit me with his backpack as he walked past. I doubt it was an accident and I start to follow them. I know I’m not going to do anything, even though I could. I just don’t like bullies. As I do, the kid in the NASA shirt walks next to me.

“I know you’re new, so I’ll fill you in,” he says.

“On what?” I ask.

“That’s Mark James. He’s a big deal around here. His dad is the town sheriff and he’s the star of the football team. He used to date Sarah, when she was a cheerleader, but she quit cheerleading and dumped him. He hasn’t gotten over it. I wouldn’t get involved if I were you.”

“Thanks.”

The kid hurries away. I make my way to the principal’s office so I can register for classes and get started. I turn and look back to see if the dog is still around. He is, sitting in the same spot, watching me.



The principal's name is Mr. Harris. He's fat and mostly bald, except for a few long hairs at the back and sides of his head. His belly reaches over his belt. His eyes are small and beady, set too close together. He grins at me from across the desk, and his smile seems to swallow his eyes.

"So you're a sophomore from Santa Fe?" he asks.

I nod, say yes even though we've never been to Santa Fe, or New Mexico, for that matter. A simple lie to keep from being traced.

"That explains the tan. What brings you to Ohio?"

"My dad's job."

Henri isn't my father, but I always say he is to allay suspicion. In truth he is my Keeper, or what would be better understood on Earth as my guardian. On Lorien there were two types of citizens, those who develop Legacies, or powers, which can be extremely varied, anything from invisibility to the ability to read minds, from being able to fly to using natural forces like fire, wind or lightning. Those with the Legacies are called the Garde, and those without are called Cêpan, or Keepers. I am a member of the Garde. Henri is a Cêpan. Every Garde is assigned a Cêpan at an early age. Cêpans help us understand our planet's history and develop our powers. The Cêpan and the Garde—one group to run the planet, the other group to defend it.

Mr. Harris nods. "And what does he do?"

“He’s a writer. He wanted to live in a small, quiet town to finish what he’s working on,” I say, which is our standard cover story.

Mr. Harris nods and squints his eyes. “You look like a strong young man. Are you planning on playing sports here?”

“I wish I could. I have asthma, sir,” I say, my usual excuse to avoid any situation that might betray my strength and speed.

“I’m sorry to hear that. We’re always looking for able athletes for the football team,” he says, and casts his eyes to the shelf on the wall, on top of which a football trophy sits engraved with last year’s date. “We won the Pioneer Conference,” he says, and beams with pride.

He reaches over and pulls two sheets of paper from a file cabinet beside his desk and hands them to me. The first is my student schedule with a few open slots. The second is a list of the available electives. I choose classes and fill them in, then hand everything back. He gives me a sort of orientation, talking for what seems like hours, going over every page of the student manual with painstaking detail. One bell rings, then another. When he finally finishes he asks if I have any questions. I say no.

“Excellent. There is a half hour left of second period, and you’ve chosen astronomy with Mrs. Burton. She’s

a great teacher, one of our very best. She won an award from the state once, signed by the governor himself.”

“That’s great,” I say.

After Mr. Harris struggles to free himself from his chair, we leave his office and walk down the hall. His shoes click upon the newly waxed floor. The air smells of fresh paint and cleaner. Lockers line the walls. Many are covered with banners supporting the football team. There can’t be more than twenty classrooms in the whole building. I count them as we pass.

“Here we are,” Mr. Harris says. He extends his hand. I shake it. “We’re happy to have you. I like to think of us as a close-knit family. I’m glad to welcome you to it.”

“Thank you,” I say.

Mr. Harris opens the door and sticks his head in the classroom. Only then do I realize that I’m a little nervous, that a somewhat dizzy feeling is creeping in. My right leg is shaking; there are butterflies in the pit of my stomach. I don’t understand why. Surely it’s not the prospect of walking into my first class. I’ve done it far too many times to still feel the effect of nerves. I take a deep breath and try to shake them away.

“Mrs. Burton, sorry to interrupt. Your new student is here.”

“Oh, great! Send him in,” she says in a high-pitched voice of enthusiasm.

Mr. Harris holds open the door and I walk through.

The classroom is perfectly square, filled with twenty-five people, give or take, sitting at rectangular desks about the size of kitchen tables, three students to each. All eyes are on me. I look back at them before looking at Mrs. Burton. She is somewhere around sixty, wearing a pink wool sweater and red plastic glasses attached to a chain around her neck. She smiles widely, her hair gray-ing and curly. My palms are sweaty and my face feels flushed. I hope it isn't red. Mr. Harris closes the door.

"And what is your name?" she asks.

In my unsettled mood I almost say "Daniel Jones" but catch myself. I take a deep breath and say, "John Smith."

"Great! And where are you from?"

"Fl—," I begin, but then catch myself again before the word fully forms. "Santa Fe."

"Class, let's give him a warm welcome."

Everybody claps. Mrs. Burton motions for me to sit in the open seat in the middle of the room between two other students. I am relieved she doesn't ask any more questions. She turns around to go to her desk and I begin walking down the aisle, straight towards Mark James, who is sitting at a table with Sarah Hart. As I pass, he sticks his foot out and trips me. I lose my balance but stay upright. Snickers filter throughout the room. Mrs. Burton whips around.

"What happened?" she asks.

I don't answer her, and instead glare at Mark. Every

school has one, a tough guy, a bully, whatever you want to call him, but never has one materialized this quickly. His hair is black, full of hair gel, carefully styled so it goes in all directions. He has meticulously trimmed sideburns, stubble on his face. Bushy eyebrows over a set of dark eyes. From his letterman jacket I see that he is a senior, and his name is written in gold cursive stitching above the year. Our eyes stay locked, and the class emits a taunting groan.

I look to my seat three desks away, then I look back at Mark. I could literally break him in half if I wanted to. I could throw him into the next county. If he tried to run away, and got into a car, I could outrun his car and put it in the top of a tree. But aside from that being an extreme overreaction, Henri's words echo in my mind: "Don't stand out or draw too much attention." I know that I should follow his advice and ignore what has just happened, as I always have in the past. That is what we're good at, blending into the environment and living within its shadows. But I feel slightly off, uneasy, and before I have a chance to think twice, the question is already asked.

"Did you want something?"

Mark looks away and glances around the rest of the room, scoots his weight up the chair, then looks back at me.

"What are you talking about?" he asks.

“You stuck your foot out when I passed. And you bumped into me outside. I thought you might have wanted something.”

“What’s going on?” Mrs. Burton asks behind me. I look over my shoulder at her.

“Nothing,” I say. I turn back to Mark. “Well?”

His hands tighten around the desk but he remains silent. Our eyes stay locked until he sighs and looks away.

“That’s what I thought,” I say down at him, and continue walking. The other students aren’t sure how to respond and most of them are still staring when I take my seat between a redheaded girl with freckles and an overweight guy who looks at me with his mouth agape.

Mrs. Burton stands at the head of the class. She seems a little flustered, but then shrugs it off and describes why there are rings around Saturn, and how they’re made mostly of ice particles and dust. After a while I tune her out and look at the other students. A whole new group of people that I’ll yet again try to keep at a distance. It’s always a fine line, having just enough interaction with them to remain mysterious without becoming strange and thus sticking out. I’ve already done a horrible job of that today.

I take a deep breath and slowly exhale. I still have butterflies in my stomach, still the nagging shake in my leg. My hands feel warmer. Mark James sits three

tables in front of me. He turns once and looks at me, then whispers something into Sarah's ear. She turns around. She seems cool, but the fact that she used to date him and is sitting with him makes me wonder. She gives me a warm smile. I want to smile back but I'm frozen. Mark again tries to whisper to her but she shakes her head and pushes him away. My hearing is much better than human hearing if I focus it, but I'm so flustered by her smile that I don't. I wish I could have heard what was said.

I open and close my hands. My palms are sweaty and beginning to burn. Another deep breath. My vision is blurring. Five minutes pass, then ten. Mrs. Burton is still talking but I don't hear what she is saying. I squeeze my fists shut, then reopen them. When I do my breath catches in my throat. A slight glow is coming from my right palm. I look down at it, dumbfounded, amazed. After a few seconds the glow begins to brighten.

I close my fists. My initial fear is that something else has happened to one of the others. But what could happen? We can't be killed out of order. That is the way the charm works. But does that mean that some other harm can't befall them? Has somebody's right hand been cut off? I have no way of knowing. But if something had happened, I would have felt it in the scars on my ankles. And only then does it dawn on me. My first Legacy must be forming.

I pull my phone out of my bag, and send Henri a text that says CMEE, though I meant to type COME. I'm too dizzy to send anything else. I close my fists and place them in my lap. They're burning and shaking. I open my hands. My left palm is bright red, my right is still glowing. I glance at the clock on the wall and see that class is almost over. If I can get out of here I can find an empty room and call Henri and ask him what's going on. I start counting the seconds: sixty, fifty-nine, fifty-eight. It feels like something is going to explode in my hands. I focus on the counting. Forty, thirty-nine. They're tingling now, as though little needles are being stuck into my palms. Twenty-eight, twenty-seven. I open my eyes and stare ahead, focusing on Sarah with the hope that looking at her will distract me. Fifteen, fourteen. Seeing her makes it worse. The needles feel like nails now. Nails that have been put in a furnace and heated until they're glowing. Eight, seven.

The bell rings and in an instant I'm up and out of the room, rushing past the other students. I'm feeling dizzy, unsteady on my feet. I continue down the hall and have no idea where to go. I can feel someone following me. I pull my schedule from my back pocket and check my locker number. As luck would have it, my locker is just to my right. I stop at it and lean my head against the metal door. I shake my head, realizing

that in my rush to get out of the classroom I left behind my bag with my phone inside of it. And then someone pushes me.

“What’s up, tough guy?”

I stumble a few steps, look back. Mark is standing there, smiling at me.

“Something wrong?” he asks.

“No,” I reply.

My head is spinning. I feel like I’m going to pass out. And my hands are on fire. Whatever is happening couldn’t be happening at a worse time. He pushes me again.

“Not so tough without any teachers around, are you?”

I’m too unbalanced to stay standing, and I trip over my own feet and fall to the ground. Sarah steps in front of Mark.

“Leave him alone,” she says.

“This has nothing to do with you,” he says.

“Right. You see a new kid talking to me and you try immediately to start a fight with him. *This* is just one example of why we aren’t together anymore.”

I start to stand up. Sarah reaches down to help me, and as soon as she touches me, the pain in my hands flares up and it feels like lightning strikes through my head. I turn around and start rushing away, in the opposite direction from the astronomy class. I know

that everyone will think I'm a coward for running, but I feel like I'm about to pass out. I'll thank Sarah, and deal with Mark, later. Right now I just need to find a room with a lock on the door.

I get to the end of the hall, which intersects with the school's main entrance. I think back to Mr. Harris's orientation, which included where the various rooms were located in the school. If I remember correctly, the auditorium, band rooms, and art rooms are at the end of this hall. I run towards them as fast as I can in my current state. Behind me I can hear Mark yelling to me, and Sarah yelling at him. I open the first door I find, and shut it behind me. Thankfully there is a lock, which I click into place.

I'm in a dark room. Strips of negatives hang on drying lines. I collapse onto the floor. My head spins and my hands are burning. Since first seeing the light, I have kept my hands clenched into fists. I look down at them now and see my right hand is still glowing, pulsating. I start to panic.

I sit on the floor, sweat stinging my eyes. Both hands are in terrible pain. I knew to expect my Legacies, but I had no idea it would include this. I open my hands and my right palm is shining brightly, the light beginning to concentrate. My left is dimly flickering, the burning sensation almost unbearable. I wish Henri was here. I hope he's on his way.

I close my eyes and fold my arms across my body. I rock back and forth on the floor, everything inside of me in pain. I don't know how much time is passing. One minute? Ten minutes? The bell rings, signaling the start of the next period. I can hear people talking outside the door. The door shakes a couple times, but it's locked and nobody will be able to get in. I just keep rocking, eyes closed tightly. More knocks begin to fall on the door. Muffled voices that I can't understand. I open my eyes and can see that the glow from my hands has lit up the entire room. I squeeze my hands into fists to try and stop the light but it streams out between my fingers. Then the door really starts shaking. What will they think of the light in my hands? There is no hiding it. How will I explain it?

"John? Open the door—it's me," a voice says.

Relief floods through me. Henri's voice, the only voice in the whole world that I want to hear.

CHAPTER FIVE

I CRAWL TO THE DOOR AND UNLOCK IT. IT SWINGS open. Henri is covered in dirt, wearing gardening clothes as though he had been working outside on the house. I'm so happy to see him that I have the urge to jump up and wrap my arms around him, and I try to, but I'm too dizzy and I fall back onto the floor.

"Is everything okay in there?" asks Mr. Harris, who is standing behind Henri.

"Everything is fine. Just give us a minute, please," Henri says back.

"Do I need to call an ambulance?"

"No!"

The door shuts. Henri looks down at my hands. The light in the right one is shining brightly, though the left dimly flickers as though trying to gain confidence in itself. Henri smiles widely, his face shining like a beacon.

"Ahh, thank Lorien," he sighs, then pulls a pair of

leather gardening gloves from his back pocket. “What dumb luck that I’ve been working in the yard. Put these on.”

I do and they completely hide the light. Mr. Harris opens the door and sticks his head through. “Mr. Smith? Is everything okay?”

“Yes, everything is fine. Just give us thirty seconds,” Henri says, then looks back to me. “Your principal meddles.”

I take a deep breath and exhale. “I understand what is happening, but why this?”

“Your first Legacy.”

“I know that, but why the lights?”

“We’ll talk about it in the truck. Can you walk?”

“I think so.”

He helps me up. I am unsteady, still shaking. I grab hold of his forearm for support.

“I have to get my bag before we leave,” I say.

“Where is it?”

“I left it in the classroom.”

“What number?”

“Seventeen.”

“Let’s get you to the truck and I’ll go get it.”

I drape my right arm over his shoulders. He supports my weight by putting his left arm around my waist. Even though the second bell has rung I can still hear people in the hall.

“You need to walk as straight and as normal as you can.”

I take a deep breath. I try to gather any bit of strength I might have on reserve to tackle the long walk out of the school.

“Let’s do this,” I say.

I wipe the sweat from my forehead and follow Henri out of the darkroom. Mr. Harris is still in the hallway.

“Just a bad case of asthma,” Henri tells him, and walks past.

A crowd of twenty or so people are still in the hallway, and most of them are wearing cameras around their necks, waiting to get into the darkroom for photography class. Thankfully Sarah isn’t among them. I walk as steadily as I can, one foot in front of the other. The school’s exit is a hundred feet away. That is a lot of steps. People are whispering.

“What a freak.”

“Does he even go to school here?”

“I hope so, he’s cute.”

“What do you think he was doing in the darkroom to make his face so red?” I hear, and everyone laughs. Just like we can focus our hearing, we can close it off, which helps when you’re trying to concentrate amidst noise and confusion. So I shut out the noise and follow closely behind Henri. Each step feels like ten, but finally we reach the door. Henri holds it open for me

and I try to walk on my own to his truck, which is parked up front. For the last twenty steps I drape my arm around his shoulders again. He opens the truck door and I scoot in.

“You said seventeen?”

“Yes.”

“You should have kept it with you. It’s the little mistakes that lead to big mistakes. We can’t make any.”

“I know. I’m sorry.”

He shuts the door and walks back into the building. I hunch over in the seat and try to slow my breathing. I can still feel the sweat on my forehead. I sit up and flip down the sun visor so I can look into the mirror. My face is redder than I thought, my eyes a little watery. But through the pain and exhaustion, I smile. *Finally*, I think. After years of waiting, after years of my only defense against the Mogadorians being intellect and stealth, my first Legacy has arrived. Henri comes out of the school carrying my bag. He walks around the truck, opens the door, tosses my bag on the seat.

“Thank you,” I say.

“No problem.”

When we’re out of the lot I remove the gloves and take a closer look at my hands. The light in my right hand is beginning to concentrate itself into a beam like a flashlight, only brighter. The burning is beginning to lessen. My left hand still flickers dimly.

“You should keep those on until we’re home,” Henri says.

I put the gloves back on and look over at him. He is smiling proudly.

“Been a shit long wait,” he says.

“Huh?” I ask.

He looks over. “A shit long wait,” he says again. “For your Legacies.”

I laugh. Of all the things Henri has learned to master while on Earth, profanity is not one of them.

“A *damn* long wait,” I correct him.

“Yeah, that’s what I said.”

He turns down our road.

“So, what next? Does this mean I’ll be able to shoot lasers from my hands or what?”

He grins. “It’s nice to think so, but no.”

“Well, what am I going to do with light? When I’m getting chased am I going to turn and flash it in their eyes? Like that’s supposed to make them cower from me or something?”

“Patience,” he says. “You aren’t supposed to understand it yet. Let’s just get home.”

And then I remember something that nearly makes me jump out of my seat.

“Does this mean we’ll finally open the Chest?”

He nods and smiles. “Very soon.”

“Hell, yes!” I say. The intricately carved wooden

Chest has haunted me my entire life. It's a brittle-looking box with the Loric symbol on its side that Henri has remained completely secretive about. He's never told me what's in it, and it's impossible to open, and I know, because I've tried more times than I can count, never with any luck. It's held shut with a padlock with no discernible slot for a key.

When we get home I can tell that Henri has been working. The three chairs from the front porch have been cleared away and all the windows are open. Inside, the sheets over the furniture have been removed, some of the surfaces wiped clean. I set my bag atop the table in the living room and open it. A wave of frustration passes over me.

"The son of a bitch," I say.

"What?"

"My phone is missing."

"Where is it?"

"I had a slight disagreement this morning with a kid named Mark James. He probably took it."

"John, you were in school for an hour and a half. How in the hell did you have a disagreement already? You know better."

"It's high school. I'm the new kid. It's easy."

Henri removes his phone from his pocket and dials my number. Then he snaps his phone shut.

"It's turned off," he says.

“Of course it is.”

He stares at me. “What happened?” he asks in that voice I recognize, the voice he uses when pondering another move.

“Nothing. Just a stupid argument. I probably dropped it on the floor when I put it into my bag,” I say, even though I know I didn’t. “I wasn’t in the best frame of mind. It’s probably waiting for me in lost and found.”

He looks around the house and sighs. “Did anyone see your hands?”

I look at him. His eyes are red, even more bloodshot than they were when he dropped me off. His hair is tousled and he has a slumped look as though he may collapse in exhaustion at any moment. He last slept in Florida, two days ago. I’m not sure how he is even still standing.

“Nobody did.”

“You were in school for an hour and a half. Your first Legacy developed, you were nearly in a fight, and you left your bag in a classroom. That’s not exactly blending in.”

“It was nothing. Certainly not a big enough deal to move to Idaho, or Kansas, or wherever the hell our next place is going to be.”

Henri narrows his eyes, pondering what he just witnessed and trying to decide whether it’s enough to justify leaving.

“Now is not the time to be careless,” he says.

“There are arguments in every single school every single day. I promise you, they aren’t going to track us because some bully messed with the new kid.”

“The new kid’s hands don’t light up in every school.”

I sigh. “Henri, you look like you’re about to die. Take a nap. We can decide after you’ve had some sleep.”

“We have a lot to talk about.”

“I’ve never seen you this tired before. Sleep a few hours. We’ll talk after.”

He nods. “A nap would probably do me some good.”



Henri goes into his bedroom and closes the door. I walk outside, pace around the yard for a bit. The sun is behind the trees with a cool wind blowing. The gloves are still on my hands. I take them off and tuck them into my back pocket. My hands are the same as before. Truth be told, only half of me is thrilled that my first Legacy has finally arrived after so many years of impatiently waiting. The other half of me is crushed. Our constant moving has worn me down, and now it’ll be impossible to blend in or to stay in one place for any period of time. It’ll be impossible to make friends or feel like I fit in. I’m sick of the fake names and the lies. I’m sick of always looking over my shoulder to see if I’m being followed.

I reach down and feel the three scars on my right

ankle. Three circles that represent the three dead. We are bound to each other by more than mere race. As I feel the scars I try to imagine who they were, whether they were boys or girls, where they were living, how old they were when they died. I try to remember the other kids on the ship with me and give each of them numbers. I think about what it would be like to meet them, hang out with them. What it might have been like if we were still on Lorien. What it might be like if the fate of our entire race wasn't dependent on the survival of so few of us. What it might be like if we weren't all facing death at the hands of our enemies.

It's terrifying to know that I'm next. But we've stayed ahead of them by moving, running. Even though I'm sick of the running I know it's the only reason we're still alive. If we stop, they will find us. And now that I'm next in line, they have undoubtedly stepped up the search. Surely they must know we are growing stronger, coming into our Legacies.

And then there is the other ankle and the scar to be found there, formed when the Loric charm was cast in those precious moments before leaving Lorien. It's the brand that binds us all together.

CHAPTER SIX

I WALK INSIDE AND LIE ON THE BARE MATTRESS in my room. The morning has worn me out and I let my eyes close. When I reopen them the sun is lifted over the tops of the trees. I walk out of the room. Henri is at the kitchen table with his laptop open and I know he's been scanning the news, as he always does, searching for information or stories that might tell us where the others are.

“Did you sleep?” I ask.

“Not much. We have internet now and I haven't checked the news since Florida. It was gnawing at me.”

“Anything to report?” I ask.

He shrugs. “A fourteen-year-old in Africa fell from a fourth-story window and walked away without a scratch. There is a fifteen-year-old in Bangladesh claiming to be the Messiah.”

I laugh. “I know the fifteen-year-old isn't us. Any

chance of the other?”

“Nah. Surviving a four-story drop is no great feat, and besides, if it was one of us they wouldn’t have been that careless in the first place,” he says, and winks.

I smile and sit across from him. He closes his computer and places his hands on the table. His watch reads 11:36. We’ve been in Ohio for slightly over half a day and already this much has happened. I hold my palms up. They’ve dimmed since the last time I looked.

“Do you know what you have?” he asks.

“Lights in my hands.”

He chuckles. “It’s called Lumen. You’ll be able to control the light in time.”

“I sure hope so, because our cover is blown if they don’t turn off soon. I still don’t see what the point is, though.”

“There’s more to Lumen than mere lights. I promise you.”

“What’s the rest?”

He walks into his bedroom and returns with a lighter in his hand.

“Do you remember much of your grandparents?” he asks. Our grandparents are the ones who raise us. We see little of our parents until we reach the age of twenty-five, when we have children of our own. The life expectancy for the Loric is around two hundred years, much longer than that of humans, and when children are born, between the parents’ ages of twenty-five

and thirty-five, the elders are the ones who raise them while the parents continue honing their Legacies.

“A little. Why?”

“Because your grandfather had the same gift.”

“I don’t remember his hands ever glowing,” I say.

Henri shrugs. “He might never have had reason to use it.”

“Wonderful,” I say. “Sounds like a great gift to have, one I’ll never use.”

He shakes his head. “Give me your hand.”

I give him the right one and he flicks the lighter on, then moves it to touch the tip of my finger with the flame. I jerk my hand away.

“What are you doing?”

“Trust me,” he says.

I give my hand back to him. He takes hold of it and flicks the lighter on again. He looks into my eyes. Then he smiles. I look down and see that he is holding the flame over the tip of my middle finger. I don’t feel a thing. Instinct causes me to jerk my hand free anyway. I rub my finger. It feels no different than it did before.

“Did you feel that?” he asks.

“No.”

“Give it back,” he says. “And tell me when you do feel something.”

He starts at my fingertip again, then moves the flame very slowly up the back of my hand. There is a slight

tickle where the flame touches the skin, nothing more. Only when the fire reaches my wrist do I begin to sense the burn. I pull my arm free.

“Ouch.”

“Lumen,” he says. “You’re going to become resistant to fire and heat. Your hands come naturally, but we’ll have to train the rest of your body.”

A smile spreads across my face. “Resistant to fire and heat,” I say. “So I’ll never be burned again?”

“Eventually, yes.”

“That’s awesome!”

“Not such a bad Legacy after all, huh?”

“Not bad at all,” I agree. “Now what about these lights? Are they ever going to turn off?”

“They will. Probably after a good night’s sleep, when your mind forgets they’re on,” he says. “But you’ll have to be careful not to get worked up for a while. An emotional imbalance will cause them to come right back on again, if you get overly nervous, or angry, or sad.”

“For how long?”

“Until you learn to control them.” He closes his eyes and rubs his face with his hands. “Anyway, I’m going to try to sleep again. We’ll talk about your training in a few hours.”

After he leaves I stay at the kitchen table, opening and closing my hands, taking deep breaths and trying to calm everything inside of me so the lights will dim.

Of course it doesn't work.

Everything in the house is still a mess aside from the few things Henri did while I was at school. I can tell that he is leaning towards leaving, but not to the point that he couldn't be persuaded to stay. Maybe if he wakes and finds the house clean and in order it'll tip him in the right direction.

I start with my room. I dust, wash the windows, sweep the floor. When everything is clean I throw sheets, pillows, and blankets on the bed, then hang and fold my clothes. The dresser is old and rickety, but I fill it and then place the few books I own on top of it. And just like that, a clean room, everything I own put away and in order.

I move to the kitchen, putting away dishes and wiping down the counters. It gives me something to do and takes my mind off of my hands, even though while cleaning I think about Mark James. For the first time in my life I stood up to somebody. I've always wanted to but never did because I wanted to heed Henri's advice to keep a low profile. I've always tried to delay another move for as long as I could. But today was different. There was something very satisfying about being pushed by somebody and responding by pushing back. And then there's the issue of my phone, which was stolen. Sure, we could easily get a new one, but where is the justice in that?

CHAPTER SEVEN

I WAKE BEFORE THE ALARM. THE HOUSE IS COOL and silent. I lift my hands from under the covers. They are normal, no lights, no glow. I lumber out of bed and into the living room. Henri is at the kitchen table reading the local paper and drinking coffee.

“Good morning,” he says. “How do you feel?”

“Like a million bucks,” I say.

I pour myself a bowl of cereal and sit across from him.

“What are you going to do today?” I ask.

“Errands mostly. We’re getting low on money. I’m thinking of putting in a transfer at the bank.”

Lorien is (or was, depending on how you look at it) a planet rich with natural resources. Some of those resources were precious gems and metals. When we left, each Cêpan was given a sack full of diamonds, emeralds and rubies to sell when we arrived on Earth.

Henri did, and then deposited the money into an overseas bank account. I don't know how much there is and I never ask. But I know it's enough to last us ten lifetimes, if not more. Henri makes withdrawals from it once a year, give or take.

"I don't know, though," he continues. "I don't want to stray too far in case something else happens today."

Not wanting to make a big deal of yesterday, I wave the notion away. "I'll be fine. Go get paid."

I look out the window. Dawn is breaking, casting a pale light over everything. The truck is covered with dew. It's been a while since we've been through a winter. I don't even own a jacket and have outgrown most of my sweaters.

"It looks cold out," I say. "Maybe we can go clothes shopping soon."

He nods. "I was thinking about that last night, which is why I need to go to the bank."

"Then go," I say. "Nothing is going to happen today."

I finish the bowl of cereal, drop the dirty dish into the sink, and jump into the shower. Ten minutes later I'm dressed in a pair of jeans and a black thermal shirt, the sleeves pulled to my elbows. I look in the mirror, and down at my hands. I feel calm. I need to stay that way.

On the way to school Henri hands me a pair of gloves.

"Make sure you keep these with you at all times. You never know."

I tuck them into my back pocket.

“I shouldn’t need them. I feel pretty good.”

At the school, buses are lined up in front. Henri pulls up to the side of the building.

“I don’t like you not having a phone,” he says. “Any number of things could go wrong.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll have it back soon.”

He sighs and shakes his head. “Don’t do anything stupid. I’ll be right here at the end of the day.”

“I won’t,” I say, and get out of the truck. He pulls away.

Inside, the halls are bustling with activity, students loitering at lockers, talking, laughing. A few look at me and whisper. I don’t know whether it’s because of the confrontation or because of the darkroom. It’s likely that they are whispering about both. It is a small school, and in small schools there is little that isn’t readily known by everyone else.

When I reach the main entrance, I turn right and find my locker. It’s empty. I have fifteen minutes before sophomore composition begins. I walk by the classroom just to make sure I know where it is and then head to the office. The secretary smiles when I enter.

“Hi,” I say. “I lost my phone yesterday and I was wondering if anyone turned it in to lost and found?”

She shakes her head. “No, I’m afraid no phone’s been turned in.”

“Thank you,” I say.

Out in the hallway I don't see Mark anywhere. I pick a direction and begin walking. People still stare and whisper, but that doesn't bother me. I see him fifty feet ahead of me. All at once the thrill of adrenaline kicks in. I look down at my hands. They're normal. I'm worried about them turning on, and that worry might just be the thing that does it.

Mark's leaning against a locker with his arms crossed, in the middle of a group, five guys and two girls, all of them talking and laughing. Sarah is sitting on a windowsill about fifteen feet away. She looks radiant again today with her blond hair pulled into a ponytail, wearing a skirt and a gray sweater. She's reading a book, but looks up as I walk towards them.

I stop just outside of the group, stare at Mark, and wait. He notices me after about five seconds.

“What do you want?” he asks.

“You know what I want.”

Our eyes stay locked. The crowd around us swells to ten people, then twenty. Sarah stands and walks to the edge of the crowd. Mark is wearing his letterman jacket, and his black hair is carefully styled to look like he rolled straight out of bed and into his clothes.

He pushes away from the locker and walks towards me. When he is inches away he stops. Our chests nearly touch and the spicy scent of his cologne fills my

nostrils. He is probably six one, a couple inches taller than I am. We have the same build. Little does he know that what is inside of me is not what is inside of him. I am quicker than he is and far stronger. The thought brings a confident grin to my face.

“You think you can stay in school a little longer today? Or are you going to run off again like a little bitch?”

Snickers spread through the crowd.

“I guess we’ll see, won’t we?”

“Yeah, I guess we will,” he says, and moves even closer.

“I want my phone back,” I say.

“I don’t have your phone.”

I shake my head at him. “There are two people who saw you take it,” I lie.

By the way his brows crinkle I know I have guessed correctly.

“Yeah, and what if it was me? What are you going to do?”

There are probably thirty people around us now. I have no doubt that the entire school will know what has happened within ten minutes of the start of first period.

“You’ve been warned,” I say. “You have till the end of the day.”

I turn and leave.

“Or what?” he yells behind me. I don’t acknowledge it. Let him dwell on the answer. My fists have been clenched and I realize I had mistaken adrenaline for nerves. Why was I so nervous? The unpredictability? The fact that this is the first time I’ve confronted somebody? The possibility of my hands glowing? Probably all three.

I go to the bathroom, enter an empty stall, and latch the door behind me. I open my hands. A slight glow in the right one. I close my eyes and sigh, focus on breathing slowly. A minute later the glow is still there. I shake my head. I didn’t think the Legacy would be that sensitive. I stay in the stall. A thin layer of sweat covers my forehead; both of my hands are warm, but thankfully the left is still normal. People filter in and out of the bathroom and I stay in the stall, waiting. The light stays on. Finally the first-period bell rings and the bathroom is empty.

I shake my head in disgust and accept the inevitable. I don’t have my phone and Henri is on his way to the bank. I’m alone with my own stupidity and I have no one to blame but myself. I pull the gloves from my back pocket and slip them on. Leather gardening gloves. I couldn’t look more foolish if I were wearing clown shoes with yellow pants. So much for blending in. I realize I have to stop with Mark. He wins. He can keep my phone; Henri and I will get a new one tonight.

I leave the bathroom and walk the empty hallway to my classroom. Everybody stares at me when I enter, then at the gloves. There is no point trying to hide them. I look like a fool. I am an alien, I have extraordinary powers, with more to come, and I can do things that no human would dream of, but I still look like a fool.



I sit in the center of the room. Nobody says anything to me and I'm too flustered to hear what the teacher says. When the bell rings I gather my things, drop them into my bag, and pull the straps over my shoulder. I'm still wearing the gloves. When I exit the room I lift the cuff of the right one and peek at my palm. It's still glowing.

I walk the hall at a steady pace. Slow breathing. I try to clear my mind but it isn't working. When I enter the classroom Mark is sitting in the same spot as the day before, Sarah beside him. He sneers at me. Trying to act cool, he doesn't notice the gloves.

"What's up, runner? I heard the cross-country team is looking for new members."

"Don't be such a dick," Sarah says to him. I look at her as I pass, into her blue eyes that make me feel shy and self-conscious, that make my cheeks warm. The seat I sat in the day before is occupied, so I head to the very back. The class fills and the kid from yesterday, the one who warned me about Mark, sits next to

me. He's wearing another black T-shirt with a NASA logo in the center, army pants, and a pair of Nike tennis shoes. He has disheveled, sandy blond hair, and his hazel eyes are magnified by his glasses. He pulls out a notepad filled with diagrams of constellations and planets. He looks at me and doesn't try to hide the fact that he is staring.

"How goes it?" I ask.

He shrugs. "Why are you wearing gloves?"

I open my mouth to answer, but Mrs. Burton starts the class. During most of it the guy beside me draws pictures that seem to be his interpretation of what Martians look like. Small bodies; big heads, hands, and eyes. The same stereotypical representations that are usually shown in movies. At the bottom of every drawing he writes his name in small letters: SAM GOODE. He notices me watching, and I look away.

As Mrs. Burton lectures on Saturn's sixty-one moons, I look at the back of Mark's head. He's hunched over his desk, writing. Then he sits up and passes a note to Sarah. She flicks it back at him without reading it. It makes me smile. Mrs. Burton turns off the lights and starts a video. The rotating planets being projected on the screen at the front of the class make me think of Lorien. It is one of the eighteen life-sustaining planets in the universe. Earth is another. Mogadore, unfortunately, is another.

Lorien. I close my eyes and allow myself to remember. An old planet, a hundred times older than Earth. Every problem that Earth now has—pollution, overpopulation, global warming, food shortages—Lorien also had. At one point, twenty-five thousand years ago, the planet began to die. This was long before the ability to travel through the universe, and the people of Lorien had to do something in order to survive. Slowly but surely they made a commitment to ensure that the planet would forever remain self-sustaining by changing their way of life, doing away with everything harmful—guns and bombs, poisonous chemicals, pollutants—and over time the damage began to reverse itself. With the benefit of evolution, over thousands of years, certain citizens—the Garde—developed powers in order to protect the planet, and to help it. It was as though Lorien rewarded my ancestors for their foresight, for their respect.

Mrs. Burton flicks the lights on. I open my eyes and look at the clock. Class is almost over. I feel calm again, and had completely forgotten about my hands. I take a deep breath and flip open the cuff of the right glove. The light is off! I smile and remove both gloves. Back to normal. I have six periods left in the day. I have to remain at peace through all of them.



The first half of the day passes without incident. I remain calm, and likewise have no further encounters

with Mark. At lunch I fill my tray with the basics, then find an empty table at the back of the room. When I'm halfway through a slice of pizza, Sam Goode, the kid from astronomy class, sits across from me.

"Are you really fighting Mark after school?" he asks.

I shake my head. "No."

"That's what people are saying."

"They're wrong."

He shrugs, keeps eating. A minute later he asks, "Where'd your gloves go?"

"I took them off. My hands aren't cold anymore."

He opens his mouth to respond but a giant meatball that I'm sure is aimed for me comes out of nowhere and hits him in the back of the head. His hair and shoulders are covered with bits of meat and spaghetti sauce. Some of it has splattered onto me. While I start cleaning myself off a second meatball flies through the air and hits me square on the cheek. *Oohs* filter through the cafeteria.

I stand and wipe the side of my face with a napkin, anger coursing through me. In that instant I don't care about my hands. They can shine as brightly as the sun, and Henri and I can leave this afternoon if that's what it comes to. But there isn't a chance in hell I'm letting this slide. It was over after this morning . . . but not now.

"Don't," Sam says. "If you fight then they'll never leave you alone."

I start walking. A hush falls over the cafeteria. A hundred sets of eyes focus on me. My face twists into a scowl. Seven people are sitting at Mark James's table, all guys. All seven of them stand as I approach.

"You got a problem?" one of them asks me. He is big, built like an offensive lineman. Patches of reddish hair grow on his cheeks and chin as though he's trying to grow a beard. It makes his face look dirty. Like the rest of them he's wearing a letterman jacket. He crosses his arms and stands in my way.

"This doesn't concern you," I say.

"You'll have to go through me to get to him."

"I will if you don't get out of my way."

"I don't think you can," he says.

I bring my knee straight up into his crotch. His breath catches in his throat, and he doubles over. The whole lunchroom gasps.

"I warned you," I say, and I step over him and walk straight for Mark. Just as I reach him I'm grabbed from behind. I turn with my hands clenched into fists, ready to swing, but at the last second I realize it's the lunchroom attendant.

"That'll be enough, boys."

"Look what he just did to Kevin, Mr. Johnson," Mark says. Kevin is still on the ground holding himself. His face is beet red. "Send him to the principal!"

"Shut up, James. All four of you are going. Don't

think I didn't see you throw those meatballs," he says, and looks at Kevin still on the floor. "Get up."

Sam appears from nowhere. He has tried to wipe the mess from his hair and shoulders. The big pieces are gone, but the sauce has only smeared. I'm not sure why he's here. I look down at my hands, ready to flee at the first hint of light, but to my surprise they're off. Was it because of the urgency of the situation, allowing me to approach without preemptive nerves? I don't know.

Kevin stands and looks at me. He is shaky, still having trouble breathing. He grips the shoulder of the guy beside him for support.

"You'll get yours," he says.

"I doubt it," I say. I'm still scowling, still covered in food. To hell with wiping it away.

The four of us walk to the principal's office. Mr. Harris is sitting behind his desk eating a microwavable lunch, a napkin tucked into the neck of his shirt.

"Sorry to interrupt. We just had a slight disruption during lunch. I'm sure these boys will be happy to explain," the lunchroom attendant says.

Mr. Harris sighs, pulls the napkin from his shirt, and throws it in the trash. He pushes his lunch to the side of his desk with the back of his hand.

"Thank you, Mr. Johnson."

Mr. Johnson leaves, closing the office door behind him, and the four of us sit.

“So who wants to start?” the principal asks, irritation in his voice.

I stay silent. The muscles in Mr. Harris’s jaw are flexed. I look down at my hands. Still off. I place them palms down on my jeans just in case. After ten seconds of silence, Mark starts. “Somebody hit him with a meatball. He thinks it was me, so he kneed Kevin in the balls.”

“Watch your language,” Mr. Harris says, and then turns to Kevin. “You okay?”

Kevin, whose face is still red, nods.

“So who threw the meatball?” Mr. Harris asks me.

I say nothing, still seething, irritated at the whole scene. I take a deep breath to try to calm myself.

“I don’t know,” I say. My anger has reached new levels. I don’t want to have to deal with Mark through Mr. Harris, and would rather take care of the situation myself, away from the principal’s office.

Sam looks at me in surprise. Mr. Harris throws his hands up in frustration. “Well then, why in the hell are you boys here?”

“That’s a good question,” says Mark. “We were simply eating our lunch.”

Sam speaks. “Mark threw it. I saw him and so did Mr. Johnson.”

I look over at Sam. I know he didn’t see it because his back was turned the first time, and the second time

he was busy cleaning himself off. But I'm impressed at him saying so, for his taking my side knowing it will put him in danger with Mark and his friends. Mark scowls at him.

"Come on, Mr. Harris," Mark pleads. "I have the interview with the *Gazette* tomorrow, and the game on Friday. I don't have time to worry about crap like this. I'm being accused of something I didn't do. It's hard to stay focused with this shit going on."

"Watch your mouth!" Mr. Harris yells.

"It's true."

"I believe you," the principal says, and sighs very heavily. He looks at Kevin, who's still struggling to catch his breath. "Do you need to go to the nurse?"

"I'll be fine," Kevin says.

Mr. Harris nods. "You two forget about the lunch-room incident, and Mark, get your mind straight. We've been trying to get this article for a while now. They might even put us on the front page. Imagine that, the front page of the *Gazette*," he says, and smiles.

"Thank you," Mark says. "I'm excited about it."

"Good. Now, you two can leave."

They go, and Mr. Harris gives a hard look at Sam. Sam holds his gaze.

"Tell me, Sam. And I want the truth. Did you see Mark throw the meatball?"

Sam's eyes narrow. He doesn't look away.

“Yes.”

The principal shakes his head. “I don’t believe you, Sam. And because of that, here is what we are going to do.” He looks at me. “So a meatball was thrown—”

“Two,” Sam interjects.

“What?!” Mr. Harris asks, again glowering at Sam.

“There were two meatballs thrown, not one.”

Mr. Harris slams his fist on the desk. “Who cares how many there were! John, you assaulted Kevin. An eye for an eye. We’ll let it go at that. Do you understand me?”

His face is red and I know it’s pointless to argue.

“Yep,” I say.

“I don’t want to see you two in here again,” he says. “You’re both dismissed.”

We leave his office.

“Why didn’t you tell him about your phone?” Sam asks.

“Because he doesn’t care. He just wanted to go back to his lunch,” I say. “And be careful,” I tell him. “You’ll be on Mark’s radar now.”



I have home economics after lunch—not because I necessarily care about cooking, but because it was either that or choir. And while I have many strengths and powers that are considered exceptional on Earth, singing is not one of them. So I walk into home ec and take

a seat. It is a small room, and just before the bell rings Sarah walks in and sits beside me.

“Hi,” she says.

“Hi.”

Blood rushes to my face and my shoulders stiffen. I grab a pencil and begin to twirl it in my right hand while my left bends back the corners of my notepad. My heart is pounding. Please don't let my hands be glowing. I peek at my palm and breathe a sigh of relief that it's still normal. *Stay calm*, I think. *She's just a girl*.

Sarah is looking at me. Everything inside of me feels as though it is turning to mush. She may be the most beautiful girl I have ever seen.

“I'm sorry Mark is being a jerk to you,” she says.

I shrug. “It's not your fault.”

“You guys aren't really going to fight, are you?”

“I don't want to,” I say.

She nods. “He can be a real dick. He always tries to show he's boss.”

“It's a sign of insecurity,” I say.

“He's not insecure. Just a dick.”

Sure he is. But I don't want to argue with Sarah. Besides, she speaks with such certainty that I almost doubt myself.

She looks at the spots of spaghetti sauce that have dried on my shirt, then reaches over and pulls a hardened piece from my hair.

“Thanks,” I say.

She sighs. “I’m sorry that happened.” She looks me in the eye. “We’re not together, you know?”

“No?”

She shakes her head. I’m intrigued that she felt the need to make that clear to me. After ten minutes of instruction on how to make pancakes—none of which I actually hear—the teacher, Mrs. Benshoff, pairs Sarah and me together. We enter a door at the back of the room that leads to the kitchen, which is about three times the size of the actual classroom. It contains ten different kitchen units, complete with refrigerators, cabinets, sinks, ovens. Sarah walks into one, grabs an apron from a drawer, and puts it on.

“Will you tie this for me?” she asks.

I pull too much on the bow and have to tie it again. I can feel the contours of her lower back beneath my fingers. When hers is tied I put mine on and start to tie it myself.

“Here, silly,” she says, and then takes the straps and does it for me.

“Thanks.”

I try cracking the first egg but do it too hard, and none of the egg actually makes it into the bowl. Sarah laughs. She places a new egg in my hand and takes my hand in hers and shows me how to crack it on the rim of the bowl. She leaves her hand on mine for a second

longer than is necessary. She looks at me and smiles.

“Like that.”

She mixes the batter and strands of hair fall into her face while she works. I desperately want to reach over and tuck the loose strands behind her ear, but I don't. Mrs. Benshoff comes into our kitchen to check our progress. So far so good, which is all thanks to Sarah, since I have no idea what I'm doing.

“How do you like Ohio so far?” Sarah asks.

“It's okay. I could have used a better first day of school.”

She smiles. “What happened, anyway? I was worried about you.”

“Would you believe it if I told you I was an alien?”

“Shut up,” she says playfully. “What really happened?”

I laugh. “I have really bad asthma. For some reason I had an attack yesterday,” I say, and feel regret at having to lie. I don't want her to see weakness within me, especially weakness that is untrue.

“Well, I'm glad you feel better.”

We make four pancakes. Sarah stacks all of them onto one plate. She dumps an absurd amount of maple syrup over them and hands me a fork. I look at the other students. Most are eating off of two plates. I reach over and cut a bite.

“Not bad,” I say while chewing.

I'm not hungry in the least, but I help her eat all of them. We alternate bites until the plate is empty. I have a stomachache when we finish. After, she cleans the dishes and I dry them. When the bell rings, we walk out of the room together.

"You know, you're not so bad for a sophomore," she says, and nudges me. "I don't care what they say."

"Thanks, and you're not so bad yourself for a— whatever you are."

"I'm a junior."

We walk in silence for a few steps.

"You're not really going to fight Mark at the end of the day, are you?"

"I need my phone back. Besides, look at me," I say, and motion to my shirt.

She shrugs. I stop at my locker. She takes note of the number.

"Well, you shouldn't," she says.

"I don't want to."

She rolls her eyes. "Boys and their fights. Anyway, I'll see you tomorrow."

"Have a good rest of the day," I say.



After my ninth-period class, American history, I take slow steps to my locker. I think of just leaving the school quietly, without looking for Mark. But then I realize I will forever be labeled a coward.

I get to my locker and empty my bag of the books I don't need. Then I just stand there and feel the nervousness that begins to course through me. My hands are still normal. I think of throwing the gloves on as a precaution, but I don't. I take a deep breath and close the locker door.

"Hi," I hear, the voice startling me. It's Sarah. She glances behind her, and looks back at me. "I have something for you."

"It's not more pancakes, is it? I still feel like I'm about to burst."

She laughs nervously.

"It's not pancakes. But if I give it to you, you have to promise me you won't fight."

"Okay," I say.

She looks behind her again and quickly reaches into the front pocket of her bag. She pulls out my phone and gives it to me.

"How did you get this?"

She shrugs.

"Does Mark know?"

"Nope. So are you still going to be a tough guy?" she asks.

"I guess not."

"Good."

"Thank you," I say. I can't believe she went to such lengths to help me—she barely knows me. But I'm not complaining.

I A M N U M B E R F O U R

“You’re welcome,” she says, then turns and rushes down the hall. I watch her the whole way, unable to stop smiling. When I head out, Mark James and eight of his friends meet me in the lobby.

“Well, well, well,” Mark says. “Actually made it through the day, huh?”

“Sure did. And look what I found,” I say, holding my phone up for him to see. His jaw drops. I pass by him, head down the hall and walk out of the building.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HENRI IS PARKED EXACTLY WHERE HE SAID HE would be. I jump in the truck, still smiling.

“Good day?” he asks.

“Not bad. Got my phone back.”

“No fighting?”

“Nothing major.”

He looks at me suspiciously. “Do I even want to know what that means?”

“Probably not.”

“Did your hands come on at all?”

“No,” I lie. “How was your day?”

He follows the driveway around the school. “It was good. I drove an hour and a half to Columbus after dropping you off.”

“Why Columbus?”

“Big banks there. I didn’t want to draw suspicion by requesting a transfer for an amount of money larger

than what is collectively contained within the entire town.”

I nod. “Smart thinking.”

He pulls onto the road.

“So are you going to tell me her name?”

“Huh?” I ask.

“There has to be a reason for that ridiculous smile of yours. The most obvious reason is a girl.”

“How’d you know?”

“John, my friend, back on Lorien this ol’ Cêpan was quite the ladies’ man.”

“Get out of here,” I say. “There is no such thing as a ladies’ man on Lorien.”

He nods approvingly. “You’ve been paying attention.”

The Loric are a monogamous people. When we fall in love, it’s for life. Marriage comes around the age of twenty-five, give or take, and has nothing to do with law. It’s based more on promise and commitment than anything else. Henri was married for twenty years before he left with me. Ten years have passed but I know he still misses his wife every single day.

“So who is she?” he asks.

“Her name is Sarah Hart. She’s the daughter of the real-estate agent you got the house from. She’s in two of my classes. She’s a junior.”

He nods. “Pretty?”

“Absolutely. And smart.”

“Yeah,” he draws out slowly. “I’ve been expecting this for a long time now. Just keep in mind that we might have to leave at a moment’s notice.”

“I know,” I say, and the rest of the trip home is made in silence.



When I get home, the Loric Chest is sitting on the kitchen table. It’s the size of a microwave oven, almost perfectly square, a foot and a half by a foot and a half. Excitement shoots through me. I walk up to it and grab the lock in my hand.

“I think I’m more excited about learning how this is unlocked than about what’s actually in it,” I say.

“Really? Well, I can show you how it’s unlocked and then we can just relock it and forget about what’s inside.”

I smile at him. “Let’s not be rash. Come on. What’s inside?”

“It’s your Inheritance.”

“What do you mean, my Inheritance?”

“It’s what’s given to each Garde at birth to be used by his or her Keeper when the Garde is coming into his or her Legacy.”

I nod with exhilaration. “So what’s in it?”

“Your Inheritance.”

His coy response frustrates me. I pick up the lock and try to force it open as I’ve always tried doing. Of

course it doesn't budge.

"You can't open it without me, and I can't open it without you," Henri says.

"Well, how do we open it? There isn't a keyhole."

"By will."

"Oh, come on, Henri. Quit being secretive."

He takes the lock from me. "The lock only opens when we're together, and only after your first Legacy appears."

He walks to the front door and sticks his head out, then he closes and locks it. He walks back. "Press your palm against the side of the lock," he says, and I do.

"It's warm," I say.

"Good. That means you're ready."

"Now what?"

He presses his palm against the other side of the lock and interlocks his fingers with mine. A second passes. The lock snaps open.

"Amazing!" I say.

"It's protected by a Loric charm, just like you are. It can't be broken. You could run over it with a steamroller and it wouldn't even be dented. Only the two of us can open it together. Unless I die; then you can open it yourself."

"Well," I say, "I hope that doesn't happen."

I try to lift the top of the box, but Henri reaches over and stops me.

“Not yet,” he says. “There are things in here you aren’t ready to see. Go sit on the couch.”

“Henri, come on.”

“Just trust me,” he says.

I shake my head and sit down. He opens the box and removes a rock that is probably six inches long, two inches thick. He relocks the box, then brings the rock over to me. It is perfectly smooth and oblong, clear on the outside but cloudy in the center.

“What is it?” I ask.

“A Loric crystal.”

“What’s it for?”

“Hold it,” he says, handing it to me. The second my hands come into contact with it both lights snap on in my palms. They are even brighter than the day before. The rock begins to warm. I hold it up to look more closely at it. The cloudy mass in the center is swirling, turning in on itself like a wave. I can also feel the pendant around my neck heating up. I’m thrilled by all this new development. My whole life has been spent impatiently waiting for my powers to arrive. Sure, there were times when I hoped they never would, mainly so we could finally settle somewhere and live a normal life; but for now—holding a crystal that contains what looks like a ball of smoke in its center, and knowing my hands are resistant to heat and fire, and that more Legacies are on the way that will then be followed

by my major power (the power that will allow me to fight)—well, it’s all pretty cool and exciting. I can’t wipe the smile from my face.

“What is happening to it?”

“It’s tied to your Legacy. Your touch activates it. If you weren’t developing Lumen, then the crystal itself would light up the way your hands are. Instead it’s the other way around.”

I stare at the crystal, watching the smoke circle and glow.

“Shall we start?” Henri asks.

I nod my head rapidly. “Hell, yes.”



The day has turned cold. The house is silent aside from the occasional gust of wind rattling the windows. I lie on my back on top of the wooden coffee table. My hands dangle over the sides. At some point Henri will build a fire beneath them both. My breathing is slow and steady, as Henri has instructed.

“You have to keep your eyes closed,” he says. “Just listen to the wind. There might be a slight burning in your arms when I drag the crystal up them. Ignore it as best as you can.”

I listen to the wind blow through the trees outside. I can somehow feel them sway and bend.

Henri begins with my right hand. He presses the crystal against the back of it, then pushes it up my

wrist and onto my forearm. There is a burn as he has predicted, but not enough of one to make me pull my arm free.

“Let your mind drift, John. Go where you need to go.”

I don't know what he's talking about, but I try to clear my mind and breathe slowly. All at once I feel myself drift away. From somewhere I can feel the sun's warmth upon my face, and a wind far warmer than what is blowing beyond our walls. When I open my eyes I'm no longer in Ohio.

I'm above a vast expanse of treetops, nothing but jungle as far as I can see. Blue sky, the sun beating down, a sun almost double the size of Earth's. A warm, soft wind blows through my hair. Down below, rivers forge deep ravines that cut through the greenery. I am floating above one of them. Animals of all shapes and sizes—some long and slender, some with short arms and stout bodies, some with hair and some with dark-colored skin that looks rough to the touch—are drinking from the cool waters at the river's bank. There is a bend in the horizon line far off in the distance, and I know that I am on Lorien. It's a planet ten times smaller than Earth, and it's possible to see the curve of its surface when looking from far enough away.

Somehow I'm able to fly. I rush up and twist in the air, then torpedo down and speed along the river's surface. The animals lift their heads and watch with

curiosity, but not with fear. Lorien in its prime, covered with growth, inhabited by animals. In a way, it looks like what I imagine Earth looked like millions of years ago, when the land ruled the lives of its creatures, before humans arrived and started ruling the land. Lorien in its prime; I know that it no longer looks like this today. I must be living a memory. Surely it isn't my own?

And then the day skips ahead to darkness. Off in the distance a great display of fireworks begins, rising high in the sky and exploding into shapes of animals and trees with the dark sky and the moons and a million stars serving as a brilliant backdrop.

"I can feel their desperation," I hear from somewhere. I turn and look around me. There is nobody there. "They know where one of the others is, but the charm still holds. They can't touch her until they've killed you first. But they continue to track her."

I fly up high, then dip low, seeking the source of the voice. Where is it coming from?

"Now is when we have to be most cautious. Now is when we have to stay ahead of them."

I push forward towards the fireworks. The voice unnerves me. Perhaps the loud booms will drown it out.

"They had hoped to kill us all well before your Legacies developed. But we've kept hidden. We have to stay calm. The first three panicked. The first three are dead. We have to stay smart and cautious. When we panic is

when mistakes are made. They know it will only get harder for them the more developed the rest of you are, and when you are all fully developed, the war will be waged. We will hit back and seek our revenge, and they know it.”

I see the bombs fall from miles above Lorien’s surface. Explosions shake the ground and the air, screams carry on the wind, bursts of fire sweep across the land and the trees. The forest burns. There must be a thousand different aircraft, all dropping from high in the sky to land on Lorien. Mogadorian soldiers pour out, carrying guns and grenades that hold powers far greater than what is used in warfare here. They are taller than we are, and still look similar except in the face. They have no pupils and their irises are a deep magenta color, some of them black. Dark, heavy circles rim their eyes and there’s a pallor to their skin—an almost discolored, bruised quality to it. Their teeth glint between lips that never seem to close, teeth that look filed, coming to an unnatural point.

The beasts of Mogadore come off the planes close behind, the same cold look in their eyes. Some of them are as big as houses, razor teeth showing, roaring so loud that it hurts my ears.

“We got careless, John. That is how we were defeated so easily,” he says. I know now that the voice I’m hearing is Henri’s. But he is nowhere to be seen, and I can’t

take my eyes off the killing and the destruction below me to look for him. People are running everywhere, fighting back. As many Mogadorians as Loric are being killed. But the Loric are losing the battle against the beasts, which are killing our people by the dozens: breathing fire, gnashing teeth, viciously swinging arms and tails. Time is speeding along, going much faster than normal. How much has passed? An hour? Two?

The Garde lead the fight, their Legacies on full display. Some are flying, some able to run so fast that they become a blur, and some disappear entirely. Lasers shoot from hands, bodies become engulfed in flames, storm clouds are brewed coupled with harsh winds above those able to control the weather. But they are still losing. They are outnumbered five hundred to one. Their powers are not enough.

“Our guard had dropped. The Mogadorians had planned well, picking that exact moment when they knew we were at our most vulnerable, when the planet’s Elders were gone. Pittacus Lore, the greatest of them, their leader, had assembled them before the attack. Nobody knows what happened to them, or where they went, or if they are even still alive. Perhaps the Mogadorians took them out first, and once the Elders were out of the way, that is when they attacked. All we really know is that there was a column of shimmering white light that shot into the sky as far as

anyone could see on the day the Elders assembled. It lasted the entire day, then vanished. We, as a people, should have recognized it as a sign that something was amiss, but we didn't. We have no one to blame but ourselves for what happened. We were lucky to get anyone off the planet, much less nine young Garde who might someday continue the fight, and keep our race alive."

Off in the distance a ship shoots high and fast into the air, a blue stream following behind it. I watch it from my vantage point in the sky until it disappears. There is something familiar about it. And then it dawns on me: I am in that ship, and Henri is, too. It's the ship carrying us to Earth. The Loric must have known they were beaten. Why else would they send us away?

Useless slaughter. That is how it all looks to me. I land on the ground and walk through a ball of fire. Rage sweeps through me. Men and women are dying, Garde and Cêpan, along with defenseless children. How can this be tolerated? How can the hearts of the Mogadorians be so hardened as to do all this? And why was I spared?

I lunge at a nearby soldier but go straight through him and fall down. Everything I am witnessing has already happened. I'm a spectator of our own demise and there's nothing I can do.

I turn around and face a beast that must be forty feet tall, broad shouldered, with red eyes and horns twenty feet in length. Drool falls from its long, sharp teeth. It lets out a roar, and then lunges.

It passes through me but takes out dozens of Loric around me. Just like that, every one of them gone. And the beast keeps going, taking out more Loric.

Through the scene of destruction I hear a scratching noise, something separate from the carnage on Lorien. I am drifting away, or drifting back. Two hands press down upon my shoulders. My eyes snap open and I'm back in our home in Ohio. My arms are dangling over the coffee table. Inches below them are two cauldrons of fire, and both of my hands and wrists are completely submerged in the flames. I don't feel the effects at all. Henri stands over me. The scratching I heard a minute ago is coming from the front porch.

"What is that?" I whisper, sitting up.

"I don't know," he says.

We are both silent, straining to listen. Three more scratches at the door. Henri looks down at me.

"There's somebody out there," he says.

I look at the clock on the wall. Nearly an hour has passed. I'm sweating, out of breath, unsettled by the scenes of slaughter I just witnessed. For the first time in my life I truly understand what happened on Lorien. Before tonight the events were just part of another

story, not all that different from the many I have read in books. But now I have seen the blood, the tears, the dead. I have seen the destruction. It's a part of who I am.

Outside, darkness has set in. Three more scratches at the door, a low groan. We both jump. I immediately think of the low groans I heard coming from the beasts.

Henri rushes into the kitchen and grabs a knife from the drawer beside the sink. "Get behind the couch."

"What, why?"

"Because I said so."

"You think that little knife is going to take down a Mogadorian?"

"If I hit them straight in the heart it will. Now get down."

I scramble off the coffee table and crouch behind the sofa. The two cauldrons of fire are still going, faint visions of Lorien still moving through my mind. An impatient growl comes from the other side of the front door. There is no mistaking that somebody, or something, is out there. My heart races.

"Keep down," Henri says.

I lift my head so that I can peer over the back of the couch. All that blood, I think. Surely they knew they were outmatched. But they fought to the end anyway, dying to save each other, dying to save Lorien. Henri grips the knife tightly. He slowly reaches for the brass knob. Anger sweeps through me. I hope it *is* one of

them. Let a Mogadorian come through that door. He'll meet his match.

There's no way I'm staying behind this couch. I reach over and grab one of the cauldrons, thrust my hand into it and pull out a burning piece of wood with a pointed end. It's cool to the touch, but the fire burns on, sweeping over and around my hand. I hold the piece of wood like a dagger. *Let them come*, I think. *There will be no more running*. Henri looks over at me, takes a deep breath and rips the front door open.