

ECLIPTICA

Book I • Dawnbreak

The Chronicles of Vesper

"The sky is always running late. I set it right."

— Master Halvar, last of the Clockmakers

Who's who

In Auren, on the Zenith Crown — the Order of Dawn ☀

- **Teo** — squire, an orphan of the Cloister of Auren.
- **Sera** — acolyte of the Zenith, Teo's childhood friend.
- **Edrin** — Sera's brother.
- **Aelis** — paladin-commander of the Order of Dawn.
- **Mother Ondine, Brother Calix, Captain Ormond** — people of the Cloister and the Order.

In Nocturna, above the Dew Sea — the Court of Night ☾

- **Nyra** — a dew witch; she makes lanterns.
- **Mira** — Nyra's sister.
- **Ilsa** — their mother, dead these four years.
- **Queen Morwen** — regent of the Court of Night.

On the Twilight Line — the ones in between 🌑

- **Orin** — a Pilgrim; chronicler of these pages.
- **Master Halvar** — the last Clockmaker, in his tower.
- **Bram** — the New Moon Gravedigger, in the Vale of Echoes.
- **Tick** — an old automaton with hiccups.

A note on the sky

For a thousand years, the Sun and the Moon were locked in an eclipse, held in place by the rings of the Celestial Astrolabe. There were no days and no nights. This book begins in the last hour of that world.

1 · The Last Twilight

Teo

In Auren, nobody said "good morning." There were no mornings.

People said "good hour," and the hour was always the same: a sky the color of dying embers, high and motionless over the plateau, where the Sun and the Moon touched in an eclipse no one alive had seen begin. The light was brown, and golden at the edges, as if the world were being seen through old honey. Shadows did not move. The statues of the Zenith Crown had cast the same shadows for a thousand years, and children learned to count time by the bells of the Cloister, because the sky taught them nothing.

Teo was seventeen and had never seen a shadow move.

"You're looking up again," said Sera, without raising her eyes from the mortar. "You'll break your neck before they knight you."

"Squire," he corrected. "Tomorrow they make me a sworn squire. Knight is three years off."

"Three years of *bells*," said Sera, and crushed another leaf of ash-sage with more force than it needed. "Nobody knows what a year is. The Clockmakers knew, and the Clockmakers are all dead."

"Not all of them."

"Enough of them that there isn't one left in Auren."

They were on the roof of the infirmary, which was the highest point in the Cloister two orphans could climb to without getting caught. Below them, the city spread down in steps of white marble to the edge of the plateau, where the Zenith Crown dropped sheer into the gray forests of Lumen. Beyond the forests, in the direction everyone called *west* out of habit rather than reason, lay the Twilight Line, and beyond the Line lay the lands of night, where the sky was a little darker and the people were, according to the sermons, a little worse.

Above it all, crossing the sky from one horizon to the other, were the rings.

From far away they looked as fine as hairs, but Teo knew, because Brother Calix had shown him in the books, that each one was wider than the city itself. They were made of bronze and light, and they turned so slowly that no one ever saw them turn. The Ancients had built them to hold up the sky. The Celestial Astrolabe, the books called it. In Auren they just called it *the Lines*, as if it were something that belonged in the sky the way clouds did, and no one looked at them, because no one looks at what never changes.

Teo looked.

"Do you think they'll stop one day?" he asked.

"The Lines?"

"Do you think anything's going to change?"

Sera set down the pestle. Her fingers were green to the knuckles, and there was a smudge of ash on her forehead she didn't know about. She was the person Teo had known longest in the world; they had arrived at the Cloister in the same orphans' cart at four years old, she biting anyone who touched her and he crying for a mother he could no longer remember. Sera had grown up to heal people. Teo had grown up to stand between people and whatever wanted to hurt them. That was what the oath meant, or that was what he wanted it to mean.

"I think," said Sera, very slowly, "that tomorrow you're going to swear to protect the light, and you ought to think about what that means before you kneel."

"It means protecting people."

"It means protecting *the light*. That's what the Commander said in the sermon. As if the light needed protecting. As if it were a person."

"It's a figure of speech."

"Everything's a figure of speech until it isn't."

She picked up the pestle again. Down in the courtyard, someone shouted her name. It was her brother. Edrin was fourteen and had the energy of a small dog that had been given wine; he climbed roofs with an ease Teo envied and Sera hated, because one day he was going to fall and she was going to have to set his bones.

"Mother Ondine wants the bandages!" Edrin shouted, already halfway up the drainpipe. "She says if we don't come down right now she's going to—" He reached the top, stood up on the ledge, and threw his arms wide to the brown sky. "Oh! You're both up here. Are you courting?"

"We're working," said Sera.

"We're talking about the light," said Teo.

"That's worse." Edrin sat down beside them, legs swinging over the drop, and Sera grabbed him by the belt without looking, with the hand that wasn't holding the pestle. "Tomorrow's the oath. Can I come watch?"

"It's for squires and family."

"I'm family. I'm Sera's family, and Sera's your family, so I'm your family by—" he made a vague gesture "—by mathematics."

"That's not how mathematics works," said Sera.

"It's how mine works."

Teo laughed. It was easy to laugh with Edrin. It was easy, on that roof, in the thousand-year stillness of the light, to believe the world was like this and always would be: Sera crushing herbs, Edrin swinging his legs, the bells counting a time that never passed. Later, when there was no roof anymore, and no Edrin, and no still sky, Teo would remember that afternoon that was not an afternoon as the last time the world had seemed simple to him. But he didn't know that yet. He still had a whole day of not knowing.

Commander Aelis arrived at the Cloister at the hour of the third bells, on horseback, without an escort, and the whole courtyard fell silent as if someone had shut a door.

She was not tall. The first time he saw her, Teo had expected a golden giantess like the ones in the tapestries, and had found a woman the size of Mother Ondine, with straw-colored hair cropped close and a scar across her chin like a second mouth held shut. But when Aelis dismounted, people stood up straighter. When she spoke, people leaned in to hear her. Teo had seen masters-at-arms and prelates and even the Hierarch himself, from a distance, in a procession; none of them had it. Whatever it was, Aelis had it the way other people have pale eyes: without effort and without apology.

"Squires," she said, and the twelve boys and girls who were to swear the next day lined up in the courtyard. Teo was at the end of the line, because he was the youngest. "At ease."

No one was at ease.

Aelis walked slowly along the line, looking at each of them. She said nothing to any of them. When she reached Teo, she stopped.

"You're the one who climbs the roofs."

Teo felt his face burn.

"Yes, Commander."

"Why?"

He could have lied. He could have said it was to practice his balance, or to help the acolyte with her herbs, or any other reasonable thing. Instead he told the truth, because Aelis had that thing in her eyes that made people tell the truth.

"To see the Lines, Commander."

A murmur down the line. Someone laughed under their breath. Aelis did not laugh.

"And what do you see, when you see them?"

"That they don't move," said Teo. "That nothing moves. And that—" He hesitated. "That it seems wrong to me, Commander. That the sky ought to move. I don't know why. It just seems that way."

Aelis was silent so long that Teo began to think he was going to be thrown out of the oath. Then she laid her hand on his shoulder. The glove was old leather and smelled of horse and iron.

"The Ancients wrote that there was a time when the sky moved," she said, not only to him but to the whole courtyard. "When the light was born on one side and died on the other, and was born again. They called it *day*. They called the time when it was dead *night*. The Clockmakers said that time was dangerous and that a still sky was a blessing." She squeezed his shoulder. "I never believed the Clockmakers. I believe the light is waiting. I believe that one day it will wake. And when it wakes, it will need people to serve it."

She took her hand away.

"Tomorrow you swear to serve it, squire. See whether you can wait with it."

She moved on. The line breathed. Teo did not breathe for a long time.

That night, which was not a night, he couldn't sleep.

The squires' dormitory was in the old wing of the Cloister, a long stone room with twelve cots and a high window facing the same sky as ever. The others slept; Garrick snored like a saw, and little Lis, who was to swear alongside Teo, talked in her sleep to someone called Bread. Teo lay on his back with his eyes open, watching the rectangle of brown sky in the window.

He thought about what Sera had said. *Protect the light*. He thought about what Aelis had said. *One day it will wake*. He tried to imagine a light that was born and died, and couldn't; the closest he could get was a candle, and a candle was not the sky. He tried to imagine the sky moving, and all he could see was the rings falling, which was a thought so stupid and so frightening that he sat bolt upright on the cot, his heart pounding.

The Lines were where they had always been. Of course they were.

He got up, barefoot, and went to the window. The city slept in white steps. Far off to the west, the Twilight Line was a slightly darker band on the horizon, where Auren's sky became the sky of the lands of night. Teo tried to imagine who lived there. The sermons said they were witches and the walking dead and wolves that talked. Brother Calix said they were people, poorer and sadder, who had gone to live at the edge because the center was full. Teo had never met anyone from the lands of night. He had never met anyone from anywhere except Auren.

He stood there a long time. At some point it seemed to him that one of the rings, the lowest, the one that passed right over the dome of the Temple of the Zenith, was trembling. A tremor that was almost nothing, like the surface of a glass of water when someone runs across the floor upstairs.

He blinked. The ring was still.

You're tired, he told himself. *You're scared of the oath and you're seeing things*.

He went back to his cot and at last fell asleep, and dreamed of an enormous candle, as big as the sky, that someone blew out.

The oath was sworn in the Meridian Hall, at the heart of the Temple of the Zenith, beneath the golden dome.

The hall was round and high, and the floor was a map: a circle of bronze set into the marble, with twelve spokes running out from the center, and on each spoke the name of a constellation in letters no one could read. In the center was a narrow shaft through which, by tradition, the light of the Zenith had once come down to touch the first knights of the Order. Now the shaft let through only the same brown light as always, a thin, dull column that fell on the altar like dust.

The twelve squires knelt around the shaft, each on a spoke. Teo was on the spoke the books called *the Herald*, which had fallen to him by lot and which seemed to him a good sign, though he didn't know why.

Behind them, in the galleries, were the families, the masters, the acolytes. Teo looked for Sera and found her in the third row of the east gallery, in an acolyte's white tunic, with Edrin beside her. Edrin wore an expression that was solemn and entirely fake. When he saw Teo looking, he pulled a face at him. Sera elbowed him.

Commander Aelis came in through the north arch with the sword of the Order in her hands. Not drawn; the sword was in its scabbard, and the scabbard was old gold, worn in the places where a thousand years of hands had held it. Behind her came the Hierarch, a very old man in a very heavy mantle, propped up by two deacons, and behind the Hierarch came the knights of the Order in two files, in golden armor, helmets under their arms.

Aelis stopped beside the shaft. The brown light fell on her shoulders.

"Squires of the Dawn," she said, and her voice filled the dome without effort. "You are here to swear to serve something none of you has ever seen. To protect a light that sleeps. To wait, in faith, for a day that perhaps none of you will live to see. It is the hardest oath there is: the oath to serve a promise."

A pause. Somewhere in the galleries, a child coughed.

"Repeat after me."

And they repeated.

I swear by the light that sleeps and by the light that is to wake.
I swear to stand between the shadow and the ones it means to take.
I swear to keep the shield as long as my arm can raise it high.
And when the dawn comes, I swear to stand and meet it with my eye.

Teo said the words with his voice shaking at the start and steady at the end. When he said *stand between the shadow and the ones it means to take*, he thought of Sera, and of Edrin, and of the infirmary roof, and the words stopped seeming like a figure of speech.

Aelis raised the sheathed sword over the shaft.

"Then rise, sworn squires of the—"

That was when the sky cracked.

It was not thunder. Teo had heard thunder in the dry storms that sometimes swept the plateau, and thunder was a sound that came from outside. This came from inside. It came from inside his bones, his teeth, the marble under his knees; a sound of metal breaking, so vast it couldn't fit in the air and had to pass through things instead. The golden dome rang like a bell. The column of brown light in the shaft shuddered, came apart into dust, and formed again.

Someone screamed in the galleries.

Aelis did not move. She stood with the sword raised over the shaft, her eyes closed, wearing an expression that took Teo a long time to understand, and when he understood it he wished he hadn't. It wasn't fear. It was joy.

Far above, through the narrow shaft, through the dome, through a thousand years of still sky, the Lines began to fall.

2 · The Sky Moves

Teo

When Teo came out of the Meridian Hall, the sky was raining light.

He didn't remember running. He remembered the crack, and Aelis with the sword raised and her eyes closed, and then he remembered the Temple stairs, the white steps full of people shoving, and himself shouting Sera's name without seeing her. He remembered reaching the forecourt and stopping, because everyone had stopped, because there was nothing anyone could do but look up.

The Lines were coming apart.

The lowest ring, the one that passed over the dome, had broken in two, and the two halves were drifting away from each other, turning, immensely slow and immensely large, like slabs of ice on a river in thaw. Sparks fell from every broken end: thousands, millions, a curtain of golden fire coming down over the plateau in threads. The higher rings were still turning, but they were turning *fast*, turning in a way you could see, and seeing it was more frightening than the crack, because no one in Auren had ever seen the sky do anything fast.

And in the middle of the rings, where the Sun and the Moon had touched for a thousand years, the two of them were pulling apart.

Teo watched it happen. He watched the dark disc of the Moon, which had always covered nearly all of the Sun and left only a ring of fire around it, slide aside like a coin pushed with a finger. He watched the Sun come out from behind it. First an edge, a crescent of light so white it hurt; then half; then the whole disc, naked, alone in the sky for the first time in a thousand years.

The light fell on Auren.

It wasn't the brown light of always. It was white and gold and *heavy*, a light you felt on your skin like warm water, a light that changed the color of everything. The marble of the steps, which Teo had always taken for honey-colored, was white: pure, blinding white, with gray veins he had never seen. The acolytes' tunics were white. The sky around the Sun wasn't brown; it was a color Teo had no name for, deep and clear at once, a color he would later learn to call *blue*.

And the shadows moved.

The shadow of the statue of the First Knight, which had lain in the same spot in the forecourt for a thousand years, shrank and swung round like a clock hand. Teo's own shadow, at his feet, was suddenly sharp and black, hard-edged, and it began to slide, slowly, to one side. Teo looked at it and felt a fear so primitive it made his knees give. His own shadow was moving without him.

Around him, people were making sounds that weren't words. A woman was laughing and crying at the same time. An old man had fallen to his knees with his hands over his eyes. A child was stretching its arms

toward the Sun as if to catch it.

"Don't look!" someone shouted. It was Mother Ondine, at the top of the stairs, arms spread wide. "Don't look straight at it! It'll blind you!"

Teo looked away too late. There was a green and purple blot in the middle of his vision, the size of a fist, floating wherever he looked. He blinked, rubbed his eyes, and when he could see again, he saw the sparks reaching the ground.

They weren't sparks. Up close they were pieces: splinters of glowing bronze, fragments of something that shone from inside like glass with fire in it. Most were tiny as grains of sand and went out with a hiss when they touched the marble. Some were the size of a hand. One, the size of a door, fell on the roof of the covered market across the square and went through it as if it were paper, and a second later the market was in flames.

And then the real screaming started.

Later, much later, Teo tried to put that hour in order and couldn't. It was an hour made of pieces, like the sky.

He remembered running toward the burning market because there were people inside, and a knight in golden armor grabbing him by the arm and shoving him back. He remembered helping carry a man with burned legs to the Temple stairs, and his hands coming away sticky, and not wanting to know with what. He remembered seeing a loose horse, its mane on fire, galloping down the Avenue of Oaths like a torch with legs.

He remembered reaching the Cloister.

The Cloister was three streets from the Temple, on the slope. Teo ran there because it was the only idea he had, because Sera would be there or at the infirmary or on her way, because *stand between the shadow and the ones it means to take* was the only thing he knew how to do. He ran down Dyers' Street, where the new light set the hanging cloths blazing with colors no one had known they had, and turned the corner by the infirmary, and stopped.

The infirmary had lost half its roof.

A splinter of the ring had come down on it: a piece of bronze the size of a wagon, still red at the edges, buried in the east wing like an axe in a log. The tiles lay scattered across the courtyard, broken. The roof where Teo and Sera had sat the day before, where Edrin had sat swinging his legs, no longer existed. Smoke was pouring out of the windows of the east wing. There were people in the courtyard, acolytes dragging cots, Mother Ondine shouting orders, a novice throwing up against the wall.

And there was Sera.

She was on her knees among the tiles, her back to him, her white tunic dirty with ash and with something else. She was holding someone in her arms. Teo knew who it was before he saw, because there was only one person in the world Sera would hold like that, and when he came close and saw the bare feet, the

scraped knees of someone who climbed roofs, he knew he was right and wished he wasn't.

Edrin's eyes were open. He was looking at the new sky, at the blue nobody knew, with an expression of wonder, as if he had just seen the most beautiful thing in the world and wanted to tell someone about it. His tunic was burned down one side. There was no other mark on him, except that he was dead.

"He climbed up," said Sera, without turning. Her voice was very calm, and it was the calm that was frightening. "When the noise started. He climbed up on the roof to see. I told him—I was in the gallery and I told him not to go out and he ran out and climbed up to see, Teo, he climbed up to *see*..."

Teo knelt beside her. He didn't know what to do with his hands. He put one on Sera's shoulder and she didn't shake it off, and that was worse than if she had.

"I told him he'd fall one day," said Sera. "I told him a thousand times. That he'd fall and I'd have to set his bones." A horrible laugh, broken in half. "He didn't fall. He didn't fall, Teo. The sky fell on him."

They stayed there he never knew how long. The Sun was moving across the sky; Teo could see it move, slowly, climbing, and every time he looked, the shadow of the infirmary tower was somewhere different. Time was passing. For the first time in a thousand years, time was passing in a way you could see, and Edrin was no longer in it.

It was Aelis who found them.

She came on foot, with no horse and no sword, her armor dirty with soot. She had a cut on her forehead that was bleeding and that she didn't seem to notice. Two knights and an acolyte from the Temple followed her. She stopped at the courtyard gate and looked around, at the ruined roof, at the smoke, at the cots, and then she looked at Sera and the boy in her arms, and Teo saw something cross her face, a real grief, and was glad she had it.

Aelis knelt beside them. She reached out and closed Edrin's eyes with a gentleness Teo hadn't expected.

"What was his name?" she asked.

"Edrin," said Sera.

"Edrin." Aelis repeated the name as if she were putting it away somewhere safe. "He died looking at the light, acolyte. Many died today without seeing it. He saw it."

Sera didn't answer. Aelis didn't wait for an answer. She stood and lifted her eyes to the sky, and the light struck her face, and again Teo saw it, that joy, beneath the soot and the blood and the real grief, like an ember beneath the ash.

"It was not born," Aelis said softly, more to herself than to them. There were tears shining on her face, and Teo never knew whether they were for Edrin or for the Sun. "It woke up."

And then the Sun looked at them.

There was no other way to say it. Teo tried, afterward, many times, and always ended up with the same sentence. The Sun, up there, naked and white in the blue sky, *looked*. It had no eyes you could see; it didn't

change shape; but the light was suddenly heavier, more attentive, the way it is when you're in a room and feel someone come in behind you. Teo felt it on the back of his neck. He felt it in his hands. He felt it inside, in his chest, in the place where the heart beats, like a warm finger touching him. And he felt, with a certainty that came from nowhere, that the thing looking at him was hungry.

It lasted an instant. Then the light was only light again.

All around them, everyone had stopped. Mother Ondine had her hand on her chest. The novice who had been throwing up had sat down hard. Aelis's two knights had fallen to their knees. Aelis was standing with her arms slightly open, like someone receiving a blessing.

"Did you see?" she said to Teo, and her voice was shaking. "Did you feel it, squire?"

"I felt it," said Teo.

He didn't say what he'd felt. He didn't say *hunger*. He didn't know how you said that to someone who was weeping for joy.

The Shard fell at the end of the afternoon.

It wasn't afternoon, not yet; there were no words for it. The Sun had climbed very high and then begun to come down, and the light had grown more golden and longer, and the shadows had stretched until they reached across the streets. The Cloister bells had fallen silent, because nobody knew what hour it was, because for the first time the hours belonged to the sky and not to the bell. The fires were nearly all out. The dead lay in the Temple courtyard under sheets, waiting for someone who knew what to do with so many.

Teo was on the Crown, at the edge of the plateau. He wasn't quite sure how he'd got there. He had helped carry Edrin to the Temple, and he had left Sera with the acolytes who were praying for the dead, because she had asked to be alone with her brother and he hadn't known how to say no. Then he had walked. He had walked the streets, seeing the city in the new light: houses in colors no one had known, windows blazing with reflections, people sitting on their doorsteps looking at the sky the way you look at the sea. He had reached the edge of the plateau and sat on the low wall with his feet over the drop, where the forests of Lumen spread out below, and the forests were not gray.

They were green.

Teo had never seen green like that. He knew the green of Sera's sage, the dull green of the Cloister herbs. This was something else: a living green, almost liquid, stretching to the horizon, and above the treetops, far off, a golden haze rose from the trees as if they were breathing. Something in the forests was waking too.

He watched it for a long time. He thought of Edrin. He thought that Edrin would have liked to see the green. He thought that it wasn't fair, and then he thought that there was no one to tell that it wasn't fair, and he cried, at last, alone on the wall of the Crown, with his shadow very long behind him.

That was when he heard the whistle.

He looked up in time to see the last splinter fall. It was smaller than the others and brighter: not red like the bronze, but white and gold like the Sun itself, a streak of light coming down out of the sky almost straight,

right above him. Teo had no time to run. He had time to think *I'm going to die like Edrin*, and then the splinter struck the wall beside him, a hand's width from his fingers, and did not explode.

It stayed there, stuck in the stone, shining.

It was the size of a dagger. It was shaped like a faceted glass teardrop, and inside it, at its heart, there was light moving: spirals, rings, points turning slowly the way the Lines had turned in the sky before they fell. Teo looked at it, and it seemed to him that the light inside was looking at him too, the same way the Sun had looked, but without hunger. With curiosity.

He didn't think. Later they would ask him why, and he would say a great many things, but the truth was that he didn't think. He reached out and touched it.

The splinter didn't burn. It was warm, like a stone in the sun, and when Teo's fingers closed around it, it dissolved.

It didn't break. It dissolved into light, like sugar in water, and the light ran up his arm. Teo watched it go: a golden current under the skin, climbing his wrist, his elbow, his shoulder, and then he felt it reach his chest and stop, right in the place the Sun had touched, and there, in the middle of his chest, where the heart beats, he felt something catch fire.

It hurt. It hurt as nothing had ever hurt him before, a deep white pain, as if someone had set an ember between his ribs. Teo fell off the wall on the inner side, onto the stone floor of the Crown, and curled up with his hands on his chest, and screamed.

And then the pain passed, and something else remained.

What remained was warmth. A point of warmth in the center of his chest, small and steady, like a second heartbeat under the first. Teo pulled his tunic open with shaking hands and looked. Beneath the skin, in the middle of his breastbone, there was a light: a tiny golden star, the size of a fingernail, pulsing to the rhythm of his heart.

And Teo felt the sky.

He didn't see it; he felt it. He felt the Sun up there the way you feel the fire in a hearth with your eyes closed; he felt its direction, its weight. And he felt, on the other side of the world, far away, to the west, beyond the Twilight Line, something else: a cold, silver presence that had not yet risen but was rising, moving below the horizon like something enormous under water. And between the two he felt a current, a pull, a tide running from one to the other and back again, like the blood running out and back inside him.

Teo lay on the floor of the Crown with his hand on his chest, feeling the sky breathe, until the shadow of the battlements covered his face and the light turned red.

That was how Aelis found him for the second time that day: tunic open, a star in his chest, watching the Sun set for the first time in a thousand years.

She said nothing for a long time. Then she knelt beside him and laid two fingers on the light, carefully, the way you'd touch a relic.

"A Core," she said in a whisper. "The books of the Ancients speak of this. Of those who carry the sky in their chests. Weavers, they called them." She looked him in the eyes, and Teo saw himself reflected in hers, small and frightened and golden. "It chose you, squire. On the day it woke, it chose you."

Far below, on the eastern horizon, the Sun touched the green forests and began to sink into them. Teo would remember that long afterward, when an old clockmaker explained to him that the Sun had set on the side where it ought to rise, because the sky, after a thousand years standing still, had woken up backward. The sky around it turned orange, then red, then a wine color no one in Auren had ever seen. And on the other side, to the west, above the Twilight Line, something white began to rise.

3 · Hungry Moon

Nyra

In Nocturna, if you wanted to sell something, you had to make it shine.

It was the first rule of the Glass Market, and Nyra had learned it before she learned to read. The sky on the western side of Lumen was darker than Auren's: the thousand-year eclipse sat low, almost touching the eastern horizon, and the light that reached the Dew Sea was a brown so worn it looked purple. If you wanted to see anything, you had to bring the light with you. So Nocturna was a city of lanterns. There were blue glass lanterns hanging from the bridges, fish-oil lanterns in the windows, moonmoss lanterns in the shopfronts, which gave a cold green light and smelled like a cellar. And there were dew lanterns, which were Nyra's, and which were the best.

"Two for a copper," she told the fat man lingering in front of her stall. "Three for a copper and a fish. Four if the fish is fresh, and it isn't, so don't bother."

"How do you know it isn't fresh?"

"Because I can smell it from here."

The man sniffed, offended, and walked off. Behind her, Mira laughed.

"You're scaring off the customers again."

"I'm selecting the customers." Nyra turned to her sister, who was sitting on a crate of old glass painting whelk shells with squid ink. She was ten, with their mother's black hair and the pale eyes of their father, whom neither of them had known, and a habit of asking questions that had no answers. "People who want good lanterns pay. People who want to haggle can go to the moss."

"The moss stinks."

"Exactly."

Dew lanterns were simple, if you knew how to make them, and almost no one did. A sphere of thin glass, blown until it was as fine as a leaf. A whole night on the balcony, mouth open to the sky, gathering the dew that condensed out of the mist off the Sea. And then the secret: the words. Nyra didn't know where the words came from. Her mother had taught them to her, and her grandmother had taught them to her mother, and they were words in a language no one spoke, said with the mouth almost closed over the glass, like telling a secret to a very small person. And the dew inside woke up. It lit with a white and blue light, cold as well water, that lasted for weeks.

Witchcraft, they called it in the sermons on the other side of the Line, or so the travelers said. In Nocturna they called it *craft*. There were dew crafts and mist crafts and bone crafts, and the women and men who had them were respected and a little feared, the way you respect and fear a good knife. Nyra had had the dew craft since she was twelve. She was eighteen now, and since fourteen she had sold lanterns to eat, and since

fourteen she had raised her sister alone, because their mother had died of a fever in a winter that was not a winter, in a world where the seasons were only names.

"Nyra," said Mira. "Do you think Mother can see us?"

Nyra was counting coppers. She didn't stop counting.

"I think Mother is dead, little one."

"But the dead go somewhere. The Gravedigger says they go to the Vale."

"The Gravedigger says a lot of things."

"He says in the Vale of Echoes the dead hang in the air like mist, and if someone says their name, they remember."

"The Gravedigger," said Nyra, putting the coppers away in her purse harder than she needed to, "is an old man who lives alone in a valley full of graves and talks to them. He's not who I'd ask for advice about life."

"I'm not asking for advice about life. I'm asking about death."

Nyra opened her mouth to answer and didn't, because the sky cracked.

In Nocturna, the sound arrived late.

First came the light. The low eclipse, far off over the eastern horizon, which had always been a dark coin with a ring of fire around it, *moved*. Nyra happened to be looking at it, because she was staring into nothing while she thought of an answer for Mira, and she saw the dark coin slide aside and let slip a fingernail of white light. She kept staring without understanding. And then the light reached the Dew Sea, the Glass Market, the whole of Nocturna, and Nyra understood that she had never seen light.

The Sea was green. Not black, as she had always thought: dark green and clear, and you could see the bottom, rocks and weed and shoals of silver fish fleeing in panic from the new brightness. The black glass towers of Nocturna, rising from the islands like spears, weren't black: they were a violet so deep it looked like velvet, and the light went through them and came out the other side in ribbons of color. All the lanterns, moss and oil and dew, went out — not because they had gone out, but because beside that light they could no longer be seen.

Only then did the sound arrive. A crack of metal that came from the east across the sea, rolling, enormous, and made every pane of glass in Nocturna shiver at once. The whole city rang like a wineglass.

Mira covered her ears. Nyra grabbed her and pulled her close, her back to the stall, and all around them the Glass Market shattered. Shop windows, lanterns, the ointment-sellers' jars, the seers' crystal balls: everything burst in a rain of glittering shards. Someone shouted that it was the end of the world. A fishmonger fell into the canal. Nyra stayed hunched over her sister with her eyes shut until the sound ended, and when it ended she opened her eyes and saw blood on her arm, a thin cut from a shard, and felt nothing.

"Nyra," said Mira, against her chest. "Nyra, look at the sky."

The Lines were falling. From Nocturna they looked low, in the east, and as they fell they looked like threads of fire running down a windowpane. But that wasn't what Mira was showing her. Mira was pointing at the eclipse, at the naked white Sun that had appeared from behind the Moon, and Nyra saw what her sister saw.

The Sun was going down.

It had appeared low, over the eastern horizon, and it wasn't climbing. It was sinking. Slowly, with every breath, it touched the distant waters a little more, like an ember being pressed into ash. The light was turning golden, then orange, and the shadows of Nocturna were stretching across the canals toward the west, long and black as fingers. Nyra had never seen a shadow move. She looked at her own, on the floor of the Market, full of shards, and watched it grow.

"It's going away," said Mira. "The light's going away."

It didn't last long. Nyra told it later, many times, and the length she gave it was always the same: the length of a long song. For one long song, Nocturna had light. And then the Sun sank below the eastern horizon, and the sky turned red, then purple, then a blue so deep it was almost black, and for the first time in a thousand years something the old books called *night* fell over the Dew Sea.

It was dark. It was darker than anything Nyra knew. The lanterns could be seen again, the few that hadn't broken, faint points of light in a world drowned in ink. And above the city, in the sky, the stars appeared.

Thousands. Millions. A river of cold light flung across the sky from one side to the other, and around it points and more points and more points, so many they couldn't fit in your eyes. In Nocturna people knew there were stars, because you could see half a dozen on nights when the mist was thin. No one knew they were like this. No one knew the sky was *full*.

The Glass Market was silent. People had stopped screaming. They all stood with their heads tipped back and their mouths open, and some were crying, and Nyra realized she was crying too and didn't know why.

And then the Moon rose.

It rose in the west, out of the Sea, and it was enormous.

It was not the dark coin of the eclipse. It was white, whole, round, bigger than anything Nyra had ever seen in the sky; it rose out of the waters as if the waters were pushing it up, and its light fell on Nocturna like milk, like spilled silver, and everything it touched became cold and sharp and blue. The glass towers shone from within. The canals turned into ribbons of mirror. People's faces went white as the faces of the dead.

And the Moon looked at them.

Nyra felt it the way you feel a cold hand on the back of your neck. The light grew heavier, more attentive, and turned, and Nyra knew — the way you know someone is behind you in a dark room — that the thing in the sky was watching them. Her and Mira and the fishmonger climbing dripping out of the canal and the whole city and every stone and every drop of water. And she knew something else, something that came from nowhere and raised every hair on her body: the thing looking at her was hungry.

It wasn't a hunger to eat. It was a hunger to *keep*. To grab and not let go. To draw every living thing to itself

and wrap it in cold until it lay still forever.

"Nyra," said Mira, in a tiny voice. "The water."

The Sea was rising.

You heard it before you saw it: a sucking sound, a gurgle, as if the whole world were drawing a deep breath. Then you saw it. The canals of Nocturna, which had always kept their water at the same level, the same distance from the stones of the quays, were filling. The water climbed the walls, slow and relentless, and spilled over the steps, and reached the bridges. In the harbor, the fishing boats lifted and began knocking into one another. Someone shouted that it was going to drown the city.

It didn't. It rose knee-high in the Glass Market and stopped, icy, full of shards and floating lanterns, and stayed there, as if it were waiting for something.

And then the dead came back.

Nyra saw the first one on the Weavers' Bridge.

It was a mist. That was what she thought at first: a thread of luminous mist rising from the icy water like steam from a pot. But the mist had a shape. It had shoulders. It had a head tilted to one side, and an arm that rose slowly as if to wave, and when the moonlight struck it, Nyra saw a face. An old woman. An old woman Nyra knew, because she used to sell thread on the Weavers' Bridge when Nyra was little and had died years ago, and now she was there, made of pale light, looking at the bridge where she had sold thread with the expression of someone searching for something she's lost.

Then more appeared.

They rose from the water all over the city. In the canals, in the harbor, in the flooded Market: threads of luminous mist that rose and took shape, people made of cold light, hundreds, thousands. Drowned fishermen with their nets still in their hands. Children. Soldiers from ancient wars whose names no one remembered. The dead of Nocturna, from every age, standing in the water in the moonlight, looking around with the empty, gentle eyes of someone who has just woken up in a stranger's house.

Around Nyra, people screamed, or fell to their knees, or ran toward the dead with open arms. A woman threw herself at a boy made of mist and her arms passed through him and she went on holding him anyway, crying, saying a name. An old man was talking to a woman of light as if picking up an interrupted conversation. No one knew what they were. No one knew whether they were ghosts or souls or dreams or a punishment.

Nyra knew. She didn't know how she knew; she knew it the way she knew the lantern words, from somewhere deep that wasn't memory.

Echoes, she thought. *What stays when someone goes. What couldn't go.*

"Mother," said Mira.

Nyra turned so fast the icy water splashed her face.

She was there. Three steps from them, in the middle of the flooded Market, among the wrecked stalls. A tall woman, black hair loose down her back, made of blue and white light like a dew lantern. Her head was tilted a little, the way it always was when she was listening to someone. Her hands were folded over her chest, the way they had been when she died, because it was Nyra who had folded them that way.

"Mother," Mira said again, and took a step.

Nyra grabbed her by the wrist.

"No."

"It's Mother, Nyra!"

"It isn't." Her voice came out rough. "It's— it's what's left of her. It isn't her. You don't know what it is."

The Echo of Ilsa turned her head. She looked at them. Her eyes were two points of light without pupils, and there was no recognition in them, but there was something else: a kind of pull, a longing with no object, like someone waking from a dream who knows they've lost something but can't remember what. She held out a hand of mist toward Mira.

Mira tugged at her wrist. Nyra held tighter.

And then the sky fell again.

It was the last splinter. Nyra saw it come from the east, very high, a streak of silver light that crossed the starry sky the way a needle crosses black cloth. It wasn't like the others, red and bronze-colored; it was white and blue like the Moon, and it was coming down in a straight line, and it was coming down over the Market.

It was coming down over Mira.

Nyra didn't think. Later, when the Queen asked her, she would say she didn't think, and it would be true. She let go of her sister's wrist and shoved her with both hands, as hard as she could, backward, into the water, and Mira sat down hard with a cry, and Nyra raised her hands up toward the falling needle of light, like someone trying to catch something thrown to them.

And she caught it.

It was cold. That was the first thing she felt: a cold so great it burned, that went through her palms and up her arms like icy water running in her veins. The splinter was the size of a dagger, a faceted crystal teardrop, and inside it light was turning: spirals and rings and points, like stars trapped in a jar. Nyra looked at it, and the light inside looked back at her.

Then the splinter dissolved, and the cold went into her chest.

Nyra fell to her knees in the icy water. She couldn't breathe. Something was growing between her ribs, something cold and sharp and white, as if someone had driven a piece of the Moon into the middle of her body, and it hurt, it hurt so much there was no room for anything else in the world. She heard Mira screaming her name from very far away. She heard the water. She heard, beneath everything, a sound she

had never heard before: a vast, slow murmur, like the sea breathing, like the sky drawing breath.

And then the pain stopped, and the cold remained. A point of cold in the middle of her chest, small and steady, beating in time with her heart like a second heart made of ice.

Nyra opened her eyes. She was on her knees in the water. The water around her, in a perfect circle an arm's length across, had frozen. There was frost on the shards of glass. There were ice flowers on the legs of the stalls. And the Echoes, all the Echoes in the Glass Market, had turned toward her, and were looking at her with their pupil-less eyes of light, in silence, the way you look at a lit lantern on a dark night.

Her mother among them.

"Nyra." Mira was beside her, soaked, shaking, her hands on her sister's face. "Nyra, you've got— you've got something in your chest, it's shining, Nyra..."

Nyra looked down. Through the torn cloth of her shirt, in the middle of her chest, there was a light: a tiny silver star, the size of a fingernail, pulsing in time with her heart.

And she felt the sky.

She felt the Moon up there the way you feel the cold of an open well beneath your feet: huge, deep, pulling. And she felt, very far away, in the east, beyond the Twilight Line, something warm and golden that had sunk below the horizon and lay down there, asleep, but not for long. And between the two she felt a current: a tide, coming and going, rising and falling, like the icy water at her knees that had risen to the Moon's call.

"I'm fine," she told Mira, and it was a lie, and they both knew it.

The Queen sent for them before the Moon reached the top of the sky.

Two guards of the Court came, in black cloaks and silver masks, wading through the icy water of the Market with moss lanterns in their hands. The Echoes drew away from them the way mist draws away from an open door. They stopped in front of Nyra, who was sitting on a crate with Mira wrapped in her shawl, and looked at the light in her chest, and one of them bowed. A real bow, deep, the kind Nyra had only seen given to the nobles of the Court when they crossed the bridges.

"Weaver," said the guard. The voice behind the mask was a woman's, and it shook a little. "Queen Morwen requests your presence at the Glass Palace."

"I'm not a weaver," said Nyra. "I'm a dew witch. I make lanterns."

The guard looked at the light in her chest.

"Not anymore, my lady," she said. "From tonight, not anymore."

Nyra stood up. She took Mira's hand. She looked around one last time: at the flooded, broken Glass Market, at the floating lanterns, at the city turned to silver and ink beneath a Moon that was hungry. At the dead, standing in the water, looking at her.

Her mother's Echo was in the same place, hands over her chest, head tilted. When Nyra passed, it turned to

follow her with its eyes, and Nyra didn't look back, because she knew that if she looked she wouldn't be able to go.

Up above, the Moon was rising. And Nyra felt it rise, in her chest, like a tide.

4 · Chronicle I

Orin

From the chronicles of the Pilgrim. Written on the Twilight Line, long afterward.

They asked me to tell this from the beginning, and the beginning is the part I'm worst at telling, because it's the part where I still understood nothing. But I'll try. A chronicler who only writes what he understands writes very thin books.

When the sky cracked, I was making soup.

I say this first because it's true, and because I like chronicles to begin with something true and small before they get to the big things. I was at home, on the Twilight Line, in a house of stone and earth with a turf roof and a door facing the middle of the world. I had a pot on the fire with barley and onion and a goat bone that had already done duty twice. I was stirring. And the sky cracked, and I dropped the spoon into the soup, and it was three days before I remembered it was in there.

I didn't run outside. That's true too. People who know me think I ran outside like everyone else, and I never corrected them, but now I'm writing, and a chronicler ought to correct at least his own lies. I didn't run. I stood by the fire with my hand held out for a spoon that was no longer there, and I didn't move, because I knew that sound.

I had heard it once before. Smaller, much smaller, almost nothing: a click of metal giving way, at the top of a tower, ten years ago. But it was the same sound. You don't forget a sound when it was the worst sound of your life.

Then I went out, and saw the Lines falling, and sat down on the ground at my door and stared like an idiot until the first splinter landed twenty paces away and set my turf roof on fire.

Let me explain the world, which is what a chronicler does when he doesn't want to explain himself.

On the Twilight Line, the sky is always halfway. Or it was. For those who've never been: Lumen is a long continent, lying east to west, and for a thousand years the eclipse sat in the same place in the sky, a little toward the east. Those who lived in the east, in Auren and the highlands, had it overhead and called that brown light *the everlasting day*. Those who lived in the west, in Nocturna and the islands, had it low on the horizon and lived in a purple light they called, with the bitter humor of poor places, *the everlasting night*. And in the middle, on a wide strip of land where the light was neither quite brown nor quite purple, lay the Line.

The Line belonged to no one. It was land you passed through, land for wanderers, land for people who didn't fit on either side. Goatherds. Miners of old bronze. Automaton-builders, who dug up parts left by the Ancients and made them walk again. Astronomers without an observatory. And us: the Pilgrims, as they

called us, because we walked. Most of us walked because we had nothing else to do. Some of us walked because we were running from something.

I was running from a tower.

Halvar's Tower stands in the middle of the Line, on a hill of gray stone, and it is the tallest thing between Auren and Nocturna. From outside it looks like a lighthouse someone forgot to finish: round, tapering, with a roof of green bronze and a scatter of windows in no order a stonemason would approve of. Inside, it's a clock.

I don't say that as a figure of speech. Inside, it's a clock. The walls are lined with gears from floor to ceiling, bronze wheels the size of millstones and others the size of coins, axles and belts and pendulums and escapements, everything connected to everything, all of it climbing in a spiral to the top of the tower, where there is a glass dome and, beneath the dome, a model of the sky. The Sun, the Moon, the rings. In miniature, in bronze and crystal, turning. Or still, depending on the year.

The Clockmakers built the tower a thousand years ago, when the Equinox began. They were an ancient Order, older than the Order of Dawn and the Court of Night put together, and they had a single task: to watch over the Celestial Astrolabe. The Ancients had built it to hold up the sky, to lock the Sun and the Moon against each other, to stop the time of the stars and give the world a thousand years of peace. And the Clockmakers had stayed to keep watch. To correct. To adjust, every time the sky fell a hair's breadth behind, the gears that, in some way I never fully understood, bound the tower to the rings above.

The sky is always running late, Halvar used to say. *I set it right*.

There were hundreds of them, in the beginning. When I came to the tower, at twelve, an orphan of goatherds and so thin the wind on the Line could push me over, there were three. Old Halvar, who was old even then. His sister, Brisa, who died in my second year. And a man called Tolen, who left in my fourth year saying he wasn't going to spend his life winding up a sky that didn't need him.

That left me. Halvar and me.

He taught me everything. The gears and their names. The reckonings of the rings, which were worked on wax tablets with numbers that had more places than I had fingers. The stars, which could be seen from the top of the tower on nights when the mist was thin. He taught me that the Equinox was neither a blessing nor a curse but a *decision*: that the Ancients had chosen to stop the sky because they were afraid of what happened when it moved, and that the choice had a price. Nothing died violently under the Equinox. But nothing grew, either. The forests were gray because there were no seasons. People were sad because there were no mornings. The world was preserved like a flower pressed in a book: whole, beautiful, dead.

"And can't it be changed?" I asked him once. I was seventeen, the age when you think everything can be changed.

"Everything can be changed," said Halvar. "The question is always what breaks when you change it."

I didn't like the answer. I thought it was an old man's answer. I thought I was cleverer than he was.

That was thirteen years ago. Ten years ago, I did something.

I won't tell it here. Not yet. A chronicler has the right to choose the order of things, and I choose to leave this one for later, for when I have more courage or less time. I'll say only this: I did something at the top of the tower, alone, on a night when Halvar was asleep, and I heard a click of metal giving way, and then I left. I walked out the door without taking anything. I started walking.

I walked for ten years.

Halvar never came looking for me. Or he looked and never found me, which comes to the same thing. I built my turf house on the far side of the Line, a long way from the tower, and made soup, and talked to the goatherds and the miners and the automaton-builders, and earned a reputation as a calm, sensible man, which is the reputation men usually earn when they're afraid to say what they think. Sometimes, on nights when the mist was thin, I'd climb to the top of a hill and look at the Lines up there, and count them, and try to tell whether they were faster or slower, and tell myself no, they were the same, the click ten years ago had been nothing.

It had not been nothing.

By the time my roof had finished burning, and I had finished putting it out with the soup and the well water and language that doesn't belong in chronicles, night had fallen for the first time on the Twilight Line.

It was strange. Everyone who lived through that night has a different way of saying what was strange about it; for me it was the silence. On the Line there is always wind, a warm wind that comes from the east and goes west, because the warm air on Auren's side is always escaping toward the cold side of Nocturna. That night the wind stopped. Everything went still. And then, slowly, it began to blow the other way.

I sat in my burned yard and watched the sky.

In the east, where the Sun had set — yes, in the east, and no one will ever get it out of my head that this was the first thing to tell me the sky had woken up wrong — there was still a very thin red line on the horizon, like a wound closing. In the west, the Moon was rising, full and white and enormous, and it was the most beautiful and most frightening thing I had ever seen. And between the two, above me, above the Line, the stars.

And the rings. What was left of them. Pieces of bronze turning loose in the sky, slowly, drifting apart like the remains of a ship that has gone down. And between the pieces, something I had never seen and that took me a long time to understand: a kind of river. A current of pale light, faint, almost invisible, that rose from the broken rings and ran across the sky, from one side to the other, from where the Sun had sunk to where the Moon was rising. And back. And out again. Like a tide.

I felt it pull.

I have no Core. I'm not a Weaver, never was; that came later, to others, and I stood by and watched. But I was raised in a tower that had been bound to the sky by a thousand years of gears, and I learned to feel the sky the way a smith learns to feel iron, by hand, by skin, without needing to look. And that night, sitting in

my burned yard, I felt the Tide pulling the world. Toward the Moon. Slowly, but with force, like a hand pulling a sheet.

And I felt something else. Something I didn't want to feel and felt anyway, deep down, beneath the Tide, the way you feel a thread of cold air coming in through a door you thought was shut.

An absence. A hunger that was neither the Sun's nor the Moon's. Something that was nowhere in the sky, because it was beyond the sky, and that, for the first time in a thousand years, could peer in.

I sat there until the Moon reached its height. Then I got up, fetched my staff and my bag, and started walking.

Toward the tower.

I write this long afterward, as I said. I know now what I didn't know that night. I know that on that same night, in Auren and in Nocturna, two youngsters I didn't yet know caught two pieces of star out of the sky and began carrying them in their chests. I know the Order of Dawn wept for joy and the Court of Night wept for something else. I know how many died in the Breaking, or at least I know the number that was given afterward, which is always smaller than the true one.

And I know whose fault it was. But that will keep for later.

For now there is only this, which is what a chronicler ought to leave at the end of a chapter: a man walking in the dark, on a new night, with a spoon forgotten in a pot of soup and an old door open behind him, on his way to the one place in the world he didn't want to go back to.

5 · The Purification

Teo

By the seventh day, Teo could count the days.

That was the strangest thing of all, stranger than the star in his chest: the world had come apart into pieces. There was a time when the Sun was in the sky and a time when it was not, and the two took turns without asking anyone's leave. The people of Auren walked around dazed. They slept when it was dark because the dark frightened them, and they woke when there was light because the light called to them, and in between they did not know what to do. The Cloister bells had started ringing again, but nobody paid them any mind; now there was something bigger telling the hours, and it did not need winding.

By the seventh day, Teo could also make the light come.

"Again," said Aelis.

They were in the Court of Arms, at the Temple, late in the afternoon. The Sun was low and red, sinking in the east, and the shadows of the columns lay across the whole courtyard like bars. Teo stood in the middle with his eyes closed and a sliver of crystal in his right hand.

The sliver was the size of a finger, flat and polished, and engraved with a figure: a boy in profile with his shield raised and a short spear. The Temple Engravers had made it the day before. They had spent the week picking the smallest splinters of the Breaking off the streets of Auren, the slivers that had not crumbled, that still held a thread of light inside, and engraving them with figures from the books of the Ancients. *Sigils*, the books called them. Each one was a door. A Weaver took up a sigil, drew the sky down through the Core, and the engraved figure stepped out through the door.

At least, that was what the books said. By the seventh day, Teo had managed to bring a figure out exactly four times, and each time it had lasted less than a clap of the hands.

"Don't think about the figure," said Aelis. She was circling him slowly, hands clasped behind her back, like a master-at-arms. "Think about the sky. The sigil is only the shape. What gives it a body is what you bring down from above."

Teo took a deep breath. He felt the star in his chest. He felt, through it, the Sun: low in the east, almost gone, but still warm, still heavy, still *there*. And he felt the Tide, the current that ebbed and flowed between the Sun and the Moon, the way he always felt it now, at every hour, the way you feel your own pulse when you lie still in the quiet. It was pulling toward the Sun. Only a little, but it was.

Channel, said the book. *Open your hand to the sky and let it fill you.*

Teo opened his hand to the sky.

The heat rose from his chest into his arm, into his hand, into the sliver. The sliver lit up. And out of the light, with a sound like humming glass, stepped a boy.

He was made of golden light, transparent at the edges, solid at the center. He was Teo's height and carried a round shield and a short spear, and he stood in the courtyard in profile, exactly as in the engraving. He looked around with eyes that had no color. He raised his shield.

And he did not vanish.

Teo counted. One clap. Two. Five. Ten. The boy of light was still there, shield raised, breathing, or doing something that looked like breathing, and Teo felt him the way he felt his own hand: a weight on the other end of a thread, something tied to him.

"Good," said Aelis, and it was the first time in seven days she had said that word. "Now make him walk."

Teo thought *walk*. The squire of light took a step.

He thought *stop*. It stopped.

He thought *turn*, and the squire turned, and looked at him, and Teo saw his own face made of light, younger, more serious, like a portrait someone had drawn of him from memory, and a shiver ran through him.

"The books call it a *projection*," said Aelis, stopping beside him. "It isn't a creature. It's the idea of a creature, with a body borrowed from the sky. It lasts as long as you have sky to give it, or until someone breaks it." She looked at the figure with an expression that was hard to read. "That was how the Ancients fought. The books say a strong Weaver could hold four at once, one for each point of the sky."

"Four," Teo repeated. The squire of light was already beginning to tremble at the edges. Teo could feel the heat in his chest sinking, like a hearth running out of wood.

"In time." Aelis clasped her hands behind her back again. "And notice something else. Can you feel the Tide?"

"Yes."

"Which way is it pulling?"

"Toward the Sun. A little."

"And what is your squire made of?"

Teo looked at the figure. Golden light. Sunlight.

"The Sun."

"Then he's stronger now than he would be if the Tide were pulling toward the Moon. The books call it *Resonance*: when the sky leans toward the side your sigil comes from, the sigil answers better." She paused. "And when the sky leans all the way, all the way to one side, to the very limit, the books say something happens that they call *Apogee*. The star touches the world. Directly."

"What does that mean?"

Aelis did not answer straight away. The squire of light finally came apart in a golden dust that fell onto the courtyard floor and went out.

"I don't know yet," she said. "The books don't say. But I intend to find out."

Teo went to see Sera at the infirmary after supper, as he did every night.

He found her on the roof. Not the old roof, which no longer existed; the masons had laid new beams and new tiles over the east wing, and propped a wooden ladder against the outside wall. Sera was sitting in the exact spot where Edrin used to sit, knees drawn up, chin on her knees, looking at the western sky, where the Moon was beginning to rise.

Teo climbed up and sat beside her. He said nothing. He had learned, over the last seven days, that with Sera it was best to say nothing until she said something.

"Did you see them yesterday?" she said at last.

"See what?"

"The shades." Sera was not looking at him. "That's what the Order calls them now. Moon shades."

Teo knew what she meant. Everyone knew. On the second night after the Breaking, when the Moon rose over Auren, the dead had risen.

Not all of them. Not the way the travelers coming from the west told it, saying that in Nocturna the dead had filled the streets like mist. In Auren there had been only a few, and only in the places where someone had died in the Breaking. Figures of pale light, standing among the rubble, looking around with empty eyes. In the burned market. On the Avenue of Oaths, where the horse with the burning mane had crushed a woman. On the Temple steps.

The Order had decided quickly what they were. *Shades*, the Hierarch had said from the pulpit, his voice trembling with age and certainty. *Impure remnants the Moon raises to torment us. The light cannot abide them.* And the next morning, when the Sun rose, the priests of the Zenith had gone out into the streets with sigils of light and unmade them. One by one. The pale figures had not resisted; they had come apart like mist in the sun, with a tiny sound, like a sigh.

"He was here," said Sera. "On the second night. Before the Hierarch spoke. He was here, Teo, where I'm sitting. Edrin. Made of light. Swinging his legs."

Teo felt something cold in his stomach.

"You saw him?"

"I saw him. He didn't know me. He looked at me the way he used to look at the sky: as if I were something beautiful he didn't understand." Her voice cracked in one place and she went on regardless. "I talked to him. I said his name. And he... he tilted his head, like this, the way he did when he was thinking up something stupid to say. As if he almost remembered."

"Sera..."

"The next morning the priests came." Now she looked at him. Her eyes were dry, and that was worse than if they had been wet. "I was down in the courtyard, folding bandages. I saw them climb the ladder. I ran. I

screamed at them to wait, that he was my brother, that he was only my brother. Brother Calix grabbed me. And they climbed up and raised their sigils and the Sun came through the slivers and Edrin..." She stopped. Breathed. "He made that sound. The sigh. And he was gone."

Teo did not know what to say. He thought of the squire of light in the Court of Arms, made of the same Sun that had unmade Edrin. He thought of the star in his chest.

"Where do they go?" Sera asked. "When they're unmade. Where do they go, Teo? The Hierarch says they go to nothing. That they were remnants, and remnants end. But if he was only a remnant, why did he tilt his head when I said his name?"

"I don't know," said Teo.

"The Commander knows. You spend your days with her. Ask her."

"She doesn't know everything, Sera."

"She thinks she does." Sera put her chin back on her knees. "That's what frightens me."

They sat in silence. The Moon was climbing in the west, white and full, and Teo felt it in his chest like a cold weight on the other side of a scale. He felt the Tide begin to turn, slowly, toward it.

The Purification was proclaimed on the tenth day, from the top of the Temple steps, by Aelis.

Teo was there, one step below her, in new squire's armor and a golden cloak they had given him that morning, which sat on his shoulders like a hand. The square was full. All of Auren was there, or seemed to be: thousands of faces turned upward, the morning light striking them full on, the new light that nobody feared anymore and everybody hungered for.

"Ten days ago," said Aelis, and she did not need to raise her voice, "the sky woke. Ten days ago the light we waited a thousand years for opened its eyes. Some of you lost people that day. So did I." She paused, and Teo knew she was thinking of the knights who had died in the burning market. "But I tell you that none of them died in vain. They died at dawn. They died seeing."

A murmur through the square. Some people were weeping.

"And do you know what we have seen since? We have seen the light *attacked*." Her voice hardened. "Every night, the Moon rises from the west and pulls the sky to its side. Every night it raises our dead to torment us. The travelers who come from the lands of night say that in Nocturna the Court of Night is celebrating. That it drinks the light of the dead. That it is preparing."

Teo felt a tightness in his chest, and it was not the star.

"The books of the Ancients are clear. The sky is a tide, and the tide goes to whoever pulls hardest. If we let the Night pull, the light we waited a thousand years for will sink again." Aelis drew the sword of the Order, the first time Teo had seen it out of its scabbard, and the blade caught the Sun and filled the square with a flash. "So I say this: we will not wait for the Night to come to us. We will go to the Night. We will carry the light to the Twilight Line and beyond it. We will purify."

The square erupted. Shouts, applause, Aelis's name, the Sun's name, the word *Purification* repeated a thousand times like a bell. Teo stood on his step in his golden cloak, unable to move.

Aelis turned to him. She put her hand on his shoulder, as on the first day.

"And we take with us," she told the square, "the first Weaver of the Dawn. Chosen by the Sun itself on the day it woke."

And the square shouted his name.

Teo searched for Sera in the crowd. He found her at the back, by the well, in her white acolyte's tunic, not shouting. She was looking at him. She did not pull a face at all.

They set out three days later. Five hundred knights, two thousand spears, wagons, priests, Engravers with boxes of new sigils. And Teo, on horseback, beside Aelis, at the head of them all.

They came down from the Crown through the green forests, which were no longer only green. In thirteen days the Sun had done things nobody expected. There were flowers. White and yellow and red flowers, on the verges, on the branches, opening in the morning and closing at night like hands. There were birds that sang at sunrise, a racket that woke the whole camp before the bugles. There were green fruits swelling on the trees. The world was growing, you could see it grow, and Teo, riding through the middle of it, could not stop thinking that it was beautiful.

On the sixth day of the march they reached the Twilight Line.

There was no wall, no marker, no border. The forest simply ended, and a land of low hills and gray stone began, of thin grass and thorny scrub, where the wind always blew. Before the Breaking, the scouts said, the light there had always been halfway: neither brown nor purple. Now, with the Sun and the Moon taking turns, the Line had become the strangest place of all: when it was day in Auren, it was day on the Line, but a paler day, as if the Sun grew tired on its way there. And when it was night, it was a brighter night, as if the Moon were shy of coming in.

The first village on the Line was called Ashford. It had twenty houses of stone and turf, a well, a herd of goats, and a windmill that had turned backward since the Breaking, because the wind had changed direction.

The scouts came back late in the afternoon with news. The village was inhabited. Pilgrims, mostly, shepherds and miners. And two families who had arrived from the west after the Breaking, fleeing the sea that had risen in Nocturna. People of the Night.

Aelis listened to the scouts in silence. Then she called for her captains.

Teo was there. He was always there; he was the Weaver, and the Weaver stood beside the Commander. He heard her give the orders in the same calm voice she used to teach him sigils.

"The village has taken in people of the Night. That makes it a nest. Give them until sunset to hand over the fugitives. If they don't, purify it."

"And the Pilgrims?" asked one of the captains, a gray-haired man named Ormond. "Commander, they're

shepherds. It isn't their fault that..."

"They chose to give shelter to the shadow," said Aelis. "Everyone chooses which side they stand on, captain. Today is the day of choosing."

Teo opened his mouth. Closed it. Opened it again.

"Commander. What if they don't know? What if they don't know what..."

Aelis looked at him, and for an instant Teo saw something in her eyes, a doubt, a weariness, a person beneath the certainty. Then it passed.

"Then they'll learn today," she said. "Get some rest, Weaver. Tomorrow we need you."

The Pilgrims handed over no one.

The Sun set in the east, red, and Teo was on the hilltop beside Aelis when the knights rode down into Ashford with torches and sigils of light. He watched the first houses catch fire: the turf on the roofs burned fast, with a white, sweet smoke. He watched the goats scatter in every direction. He watched people run out of the houses, men and women in gray cloaks, and knights ride after them.

And he saw the child.

She was small, five or six years old, and she was alone, standing in the middle of the village's main street between two burning houses. She was not crying. She stood still, eyes very wide, watching a knight gallop up the street with his torch raised, a knight who did not see her, or saw her and did not care. The child wore a gray Pilgrim's cloak and, under the cloak, a dark blue Nocturnan dress.

Teo did not think. Later, he would realize it was the third time in only a few days that he had done something without thinking, and that every important thing in his life had happened that way. But in that moment he realized nothing. He snatched a sigil from his belt, the squire, and drew down the sky.

The Sun had set. The Tide had turned toward the Moon. The heat in his chest was weak, an ember nearly out, and Teo drew on it anyway, drew everything that was there, until it hurt, until he felt the star burning as if it would crack, and the squire of light stepped out of the sigil far below, in the middle of the street, between the child and the horse.

The horse reared. The knight fell. The torch rolled across the street and guttered out in a puddle. The squire of light stood with its shield raised, and it lasted exactly as long as it took the child to turn and run into the smoke, and then it came apart in golden dust, and Teo fell to his knees on the hilltop with his hands on his chest.

He heard Aelis kneel beside him.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes." He was not. The star throbbed like a wound. "I'm sorry, Commander. I... the knight was going to..."

"I saw." Her hand on his shoulder. And then, to Teo's astonishment, she smiled: a proud smile, tired, almost

tender. "You projected at more than two hundred paces, with the Tide against you, with the Sun down. You protected a child." She squeezed his shoulder. "That is what a squire of the Dawn does, Weaver. He stands between the shadow and those it wants to take."

Teo looked at her. He opened his mouth to say *the child was of the Night*. To say *I protected her from us*.

He did not say it. He closed his mouth, and nodded, and Aelis stood and turned back to the burning village, her face lit by the fire.

Below, Ashford burned. Above, the Moon was rising in the west, white and full, and Teo felt it in his chest, cold, enormous, pulling the Tide toward itself. And for the first time since the Breaking, feeling that pull, he was not afraid of it.

He was afraid of something else. Of himself, on his knees on a hilltop, in a golden cloak, having said nothing.

6 · Shadows in the Dew

Nyra

The Glass Palace had no doors. It had curtains.

It was the first thing Nyra noticed, on the night of the Breaking, when the silver-masked guards led her across the flooded bridges to the highest island in Nocturna. The palace rose from the sea like a fistful of violet glass spears bound together, and every opening, every arch, every window, was closed not with wood but with curtains of heavy black silk that parted at a gesture and fell shut again behind whoever passed. There were no lanterns inside. The light came in through the glass itself, filtered to the color of plums, and the whole palace seemed to lie at the bottom of a lake.

By the twentieth day, Nyra knew why there were no doors.

"Because doors close," said Queen Morwen. "And we close nothing, little witch. We hide. It's different."

They were in the Hall of Tides, at the heart of the palace, so high up that the glass walls showed the whole sea below. The floor was a mirror of shallow water, a hand's depth of seawater, still and dark, where the Moon was reflected when it rose. Morwen stood in the middle of the water, barefoot, in a black dress down to her ankles, her silver hair gathered in a low knot. She did not get wet. The water drew back from her feet as if it were afraid to touch her.

Nyra stood at the edge of the water, in boots, soaked to the knees, with a sliver of crystal in her hand and a growing urge to throw it at the Queen's face.

"Again," said Morwen.

The sliver was engraved with an owl. The Court's artisans had made it the week before, from a splinter of the Breaking picked up in the Glass Market, and the owl faced forward, wings half open, with round eyes that Nyra found irritatingly like the Queen's.

Nyra closed her eyes. She felt the cold in her chest. She felt, through it, the Moon: still below the horizon in the west, but rising, pulling, enormous. She felt the Tide, that endless current ebbing and flowing between the Moon and the Sun, which now, at the start of the night, was beginning to lean her way.

She did not *channel*. She hated that word; it was a book word. She did what she did with the dew lanterns: she put her lips to the sliver, almost closed, and told it a secret. Not in words. In cold.

The sliver lit up, white and blue. And out of the light, with a sound of wings, came the owl.

It was the size of a dog, made of pale light and mist, with feathers that frayed at the tips like smoke. It landed on her shoulder. It weighed nothing, and it weighed everything: Nyra felt it the way she felt her own fingers, a weight on the other end of a thread. The owl turned its head toward her with those round eyes, and for an instant Nyra saw through them her own face from the side, very pale, with a silver star shining through her shirt.

"Good," said Morwen. She did not smile. The Queen seldom smiled, and when she did she showed her teeth, and her teeth were the reason she seldom smiled. "Now make it fly."

Fly, thought Nyra. The owl spread its wings and rose, silent, and circled the Hall of Tides just under the glass ceiling, and Nyra saw the hall from above, the dark water, the Queen standing in the middle of it, and herself at the edge, tiny.

"The owl sees what you don't," said Morwen. "It passes over what you can't pass. That is the first thing a Weaver of the Night learns: the shortest way between two points is seldom a straight line." She raised a hand, and the owl, to Nyra's annoyance, came to rest on the Queen's wrist as if it were hers. "And notice: can you feel the Tide?"

"Yes."

"Which way is it leaning?"

"Toward the Moon. A little."

"And what is your owl made of?"

Nyra sighed.

"The Moon. I get it. When the Tide leans toward the Moon, my things get stronger. The books call it Resonance. You've told me three times."

"And I'll tell you thirty." Morwen let the owl come apart on her wrist, in a dust of frost that fell into the water without making a ripple. "Because on the other side of the Line someone is learning exactly the same thing, with the Tide pulling the other way. And one day, little witch, you'll be standing in front of that person, and whoever understands the Tide better will go home."

Mira was waiting for her in their rooms, as she did every night, sitting on the windowsill with her feet dangling over the sea.

"Get down from there."

"I'm watching the Echoes."

"Get down or you'll fall."

"I won't fall." Mira did not move. "Look, Nyra. There are more tonight."

Nyra went to the window, unwillingly, and looked.

The rooms the Court had given them were in one of the palace's low towers, facing the harbor. Below, Nocturna spread out in islands and bridges and canals, and the Moon had just risen in the west, enormous, and a milky light fell over everything. And in the canals, as every night since the Breaking, the dead.

Twenty days on, the city had grown used to them in the terrible way people grow used to anything. The Echoes rose from the water when the Moon rose, and stood in the canals, on the bridges, on the doorsteps of the houses where they had lived, looking around with those pupilless eyes. They did not speak. They

harm no one. Sometimes they followed someone with their eyes, as if they half recognized them. When the Moon set, they sank back into the water and vanished until the next night.

People talked to them. They left flowers for them on the quays. There was a widow on the Weavers' Bridge who sat every night beside her husband's Echo and told him about her day, and he tilted his head as if he were listening.

And there was the Court.

"Look, there," said Mira, and pointed.

On the Lighthouse Bridge, which joined the palace to the harbor, stood a man in a black cloak and a silver mask. A noble of the Court, by the cloak. And in front of him, leaning against the bridge rail, an Echo: an old fisherman of pale light, with a net of mist in his hands. The noble held out his hand toward him. He did not touch him; there was no need. Nyra saw, even from that distance, a thread of light leave the Echo's chest and stretch to the noble's hand, like smoke sucked up a chimney. The Echo shivered. Shrank. The net of mist came apart. And then the whole Echo came apart, like a lantern going out, and the thread of light passed into the noble's hand, and the noble straightened and seemed, suddenly, larger.

"They're eating them," said Mira.

"I know."

"Why?"

Nyra did not answer right away. She knew why. The Queen had explained it in the first week, in the tone you use to explain to a child that fire burns.

An Echo is what remains of a soul that couldn't go. It has strength. Old strength, still strength. And we need strength, little witch, because on the other side of the Line there's an Order of knights who weep for joy every time the Sun rises, and who have already begun to march. Devour, the Court called it. The nobles who had a Core, the few Weavers the Breaking had made in Nocturna, were learning to draw the Echoes into their projections and grow stronger. The ones without a Core were learning other things, slower and uglier.

"Because they're afraid," Nyra said at last. "And people who are afraid eat everything they find."

"Are you going to eat them too?"

Nyra looked at her sister. Mira looked back, very serious, with the pale eyes of a father neither of them had known.

"No," said Nyra.

"The Queen will order you to."

"The Queen can order whatever she likes."

"Nyra." Mira stood up on the windowsill, and Nyra grabbed her around the waist by instinct. "What if they eat Mother?"

Nyra had no answer for that. She pulled her sister in, down to the floor, away from the window, and held

her, and Mira let herself be held, which was rare, and the two of them sat there on the cold glass floor, in the moonlight, saying nothing, while below in the canals the nobles of the Court hunted the dead.

The Queen gave the order, just as Mira had said.

It was on the twenty-fourth day. Morwen took her to the Hall of Tides, as always, but this time she was not alone. There was an Echo in the shallow water.

It was a young woman of pale light, with long hair. She had a lost expression, as they all did, and she stood in the middle of the hall, in the mirror of water, looking at the glass ceiling as if searching for the sky through it. Nyra did not know her. She was someone. She had been someone.

"She drowned in the harbor forty years ago," said Morwen. "The guards brought her in tonight. She has no living family. No one will weep for her."

"That isn't true," said Nyra. "She wept for someone. That's why she stayed."

Morwen looked at her. For the first time in twenty-four days, the Queen seemed surprised.

"That's one way of thinking."

"It's the only way of thinking." Nyra did not know where the courage came from; it came from somewhere cold in her chest, near the star. "She stayed because she couldn't go. Because something held her here. A person, a promise, a debt, I don't know. And Your Majesty wants me to eat her."

"I want you to grow stronger." Morwen took a step through the water, which drew back from her feet. "There's an Order marching on the Line, little witch. Our scouts saw them yesterday. Five hundred knights and two thousand spears, and at their head a commander who weeps when she sees the Sun and a boy with a golden star in his chest. Yesterday they burned a village of Pilgrims for giving shelter to two of our families. Children, Nyra. Shepherds. They burned them singing."

Nyra felt her stomach clench.

"In ten days they'll hold the whole Line," Morwen went on. "In twenty, if no one stops them, they'll be on the shores of the Dew Sea. And they'll come here, to this city, to this tower, to your sister. And when they come, I need Weavers who know how to fight." She stopped a step away from her. The Queen was tall, much taller than Nyra, and her eyes were gray like the water of the harbor before the Breaking. "I'm not asking you to like it, little witch. I'm asking you to survive."

Nyra looked at the Echo of the drowned woman. The Echo was looking at the ceiling.

"No," she said.

The silence in the Hall of Tides was so great that you could hear the water stir.

"No?" Morwen repeated, very quietly.

"No." Nyra was trembling, and she hated trembling, and she went on anyway. "I make lanterns, Majesty. I make them out of dew, which is water nobody wants, that falls out of the air and gets lost. I catch it and give

it light. That's what I know how to do. I don't know how to put things out."

"Then you'll die when the Order comes."

"Maybe." Nyra swallowed. "But I'll die being me."

Morwen looked at her for a long time. The Moon had risen high enough to come in through the glass ceiling, and it fell on the water of the hall and on the Queen's black dress and on her face, and Nyra saw, for an instant, something she had not expected: weariness. A very old weariness, centuries old, like dust on a statue.

"Your mother told me something like that," said the Queen. "Many years ago. When I offered her a place at Court."

Nyra went cold.

"You knew my mother?"

"I've known everyone worth knowing, little witch. I'm three hundred years old." Morwen turned her back and walked back to the middle of the water. She made a gesture to the Echo of the drowned woman, and the Echo, slowly, sank into the shallow water and disappeared. "Go to bed. Tomorrow we start something else."

Mira was not in their rooms.

Nyra knew it before she drew back the curtain. She felt it, the way you feel a draft of cold air in a shut-up house: the window open, the sill empty. She ran in. The room was dark. Mira's bed was made. On the pillow lay the conch shell she had been painting on the day of the Breaking, finished: a woman's face with black hair, in squid ink, very badly done and very like.

Beside it, on a scrap of cloth, in the crooked hand of someone who had only recently learned to write: *Gone to the Market to get Mother before they eat her. Back before the Moon sets.*

Nyra did not call the guards. She did not call anyone. She went out through the window, the way Mira had, and climbed down the tower's glass wall clinging to the lead seams, with the sea pounding below, and only when she reached the Lighthouse Bridge did she realize she was doing exactly what she always shouted at Mira not to do.

Nocturna at night, after the Breaking, was a city of two halves: the living, who shut themselves up at home with their lanterns lit, and the dead, who filled the streets. Nyra ran across the bridges among the Echoes. They turned their heads to follow her, slowly, the way sunflowers follow the Sun, and she felt them looking at the star in her chest. She ran across the Weavers' Bridge, where the widow was telling her dead husband about her day. She ran through the Blowers' Quarter. She reached the Glass Market.

The Market was still flooded. The water had dropped a little in the days after the Breaking, but it had never gone back to its old level: it came up to the ankles, freezing, full of shards and dead lanterns. The stalls were still broken. And in the middle of the Market, among the stalls, stood her mother's Echo, in the same place as always, hands over her chest.

Mira was beside her, standing in the water, talking.

And around them, in a wide circle, stood three nobles of the Court in black cloaks and silver masks.

"...and Nyra makes the lanterns better than you used to," Mira was telling the Echo, in a very calm voice, like someone telling a story to a sick person. "It doesn't go black at the bottom anymore. She found out it was the glass. And I learned to paint shells, look, I made you one, I left it at home, but it looks like you, only the nose came out crooked..."

One of the nobles stepped forward.

"Get out of there, girl."

Mira did not move. She put herself in front of the Echo, arms spread wide, feet in the freezing water.

"No."

"It's only an Echo. It isn't your mother. Get out of the way or you'll get it too."

The noble held out his hand. Nyra saw the thread of light begin to leave the chest of her mother's Echo, a thread as pale as smoke, stretching toward his fingers.

And something in Nyra's chest burst.

She did not take up a sigil. She had none with her; she had left the owl in her room. She did not need one. She raised her empty hand toward the noble and drew down the Moon, drew it as she had never drawn anything, until the silver star burned in her chest like ice inside a wound, and the water of the Glass Market *answered*.

It froze. All of it. At a stroke, from one end of the Market to the other, with a sound like a thousand panes of glass cracking. The three nobles were trapped up to their ankles in a floor of blue ice, and the one with his hand outstretched screamed as the ice climbed his arm to the elbow, and the thread of light snapped and sprang back into the Echo's chest like an elastic band.

Silence.

Nyra stood at the entrance to the Market, hand raised, trembling, with frost in her hair. The star in her chest shone so brightly it lit her face from below. The three nobles stared at her from behind their masks.

"No one eats my mother," said Nyra. Her voice came out strange, deep, as if from the bottom of a well. "No one eats any Echo where I am. Tell the Queen."

They did not need to tell her. The Queen already knew.

She was waiting on the Lighthouse Bridge when Nyra came back leading Mira by the hand. Alone, without guards, in her black dress, with the Moon behind her. She did not look angry. She looked like something else that Nyra could not name at first, and only later, much later, understood was interest.

"You froze the entire Glass Market," said Morwen. "Without a sigil. With the Tide only halfway."

"They were going to eat my mother."

"I know." The Queen looked at Mira, who was hiding behind her sister, and then at Nyra again. "The scouts came back an hour ago, little witch. The Order of Dawn is three days from Highstone, the last village on the Line before our lands. Three more days and they'll be on the shore of the Sea."

Nyra squeezed Mira's hand.

"We have no army to stop them," Morwen went on. "We have half a dozen Weavers, half of them more interested in fattening themselves on Echoes than in learning to fight. We have a city of glass that breaks when someone sneezes." She paused. "But we have something they don't know we have. We have the oldest law in the world."

"What law?"

Morwen looked up. Nyra followed her gaze. High above, above the Moon, above the stars, was a point of light Nyra had never noticed: small, fixed, white-gold, very high in the sky, not moving the way the stars moved. As if it were fastened to something.

"When the Ancients built the Astrolabe," said the Queen, "they also built a place for Weavers to fight without destroying the world. Up there, in orbit, where projections can burst without burning forests or sinking cities. They called it the Celestial Circle. And they wrote a law: that no war between Weavers would be fought on the ground, so long as there was a Circle."

"And the Order respects that law?"

"The Order adores old laws. It was because of an old law that they waited a thousand years for the Sun." The Queen's teeth gleamed in the dark. "I'm going to invoke it. I'm going to challenge their commander to the Circle. Champion against champion. If we win, the Order goes back behind the Line. If we lose..."

"If we lose?"

"If we lose, we open the bridges to them." Morwen said it without changing her expression. "That's the law."

Nyra felt the cold in her chest growing.

"And who's the champion?"

The Queen looked at her. She said nothing. There was no need.

High above, the white-gold point of light shone, motionless, over everything, waiting.

7 · The Celestial Circle

Teo

The challenge came on a wing of mist.

Teo was awake when it happened, because he hardly slept anymore. The Order's camp was pitched on the hills of Highstone, the last village on the Line before the lands of night, and Highstone was empty: the Pilgrims had fled two days earlier, when they heard about Ashford. Teo was sitting at the entrance of his tent, watching the Moon go down in the west, feeling the Tide turn slowly toward the Sun that had not yet risen, when a white owl landed on the Commander's standard.

It was not an owl. It was made of pale light and mist, and its feathers frayed at the tips like smoke. It perched there, at the top of the pole, looking down at the camp with two round, empty eyes, and the knights on watch shouted and raised their spears, and the owl did not move. It opened its beak. And it spoke in a woman's voice, deep and calm, that carried through the whole camp as if it were inside every tent at once.

"Aelis of the Dawn. This is Morwen, Queen of the Court of Night, regent of Nocturna and the islands of the Dew Sea."

Aelis came out of her tent. She was in shirt and breeches, without armor, sword in hand. Teo had never seen her like that, with nothing golden on her; she seemed smaller, and more dangerous.

"I invoke the Law of the Circle," said the owl. "The law of the Ancients, written before your Order and before my Court. That no war of Weavers shall be fought on the ground while the Celestial Circle exists. I challenge you: champion against champion, in the Circle, when the Sun stands at the middle of the sky. If my champion wins, your Order goes back behind the Line and never crosses it again. If yours wins, the bridges of Nocturna open to you."

A murmur ran through the whole camp. Teo felt his heart beating against his ribs.

Aelis was silent for a long time. The owl waited, motionless at the top of the pole.

"The Law of the Circle," the Commander said at last, slowly, as if savoring the words. "I thought no one in the Night remembered it."

"In the Night we remember everything," said the owl. "It's what we do."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then you break the oldest law in the world, commander. And everyone on the Line and in your own lands will know that the Order of Dawn, which waited a thousand years for a promise, does not keep its own."

Aelis smiled. It was the same smile Teo had seen on her in the Meridian Hall, when the sky cracked.

"I accept," she said.

They argued for an hour in the Commander's tent. Teo was not inside. He was at the entrance, on guard, and he heard everything.

He heard Captain Ormond say it was a trap. He heard a priest of the Zenith say the Law of the Circle was a legend and the Circle did not exist. He heard Aelis say it did exist, that the books were clear, that the Meridian Pillar had woken on the night of the Breaking and the scouts had seen it, a column of light rising from the middle of the Line into the sky, a morning's march away. He heard someone ask who would go, and he heard the silence that followed.

And then he heard Aelis say his name.

"He's a boy," said Ormond. "Commander, with all respect, he's seventeen and he took his oath twenty days ago."

"He's the only Weaver we have." Aelis's voice was calm. "The books say the Pillar only carries those who have the sky in their chest. I can't go. You can't go. No one in this tent can go. Only him."

"And if he loses?"

"He won't lose." A pause. "The Sun chose him, captain. On the day it woke, it chose him. I don't believe it chose him to lose."

Teo leaned his head against the tent pole and closed his eyes. He felt the star beating in his chest. He felt the Sun, down below, beneath the western horizon, about to rise. And he thought, without meaning to, of the child in Ashford, in a dark blue dress under a gray cloak, running into the smoke.

If I win, he thought, the bridges of Nocturna open.

He did not want to think about the rest.

The Meridian Pillar stood in the middle of nowhere.

They set out at dawn, Teo and Aelis and an escort of twenty knights, and rode along the Line all morning. The landscape was the same as ever: low hills, gray stone, thin grass, wind. And then, rounding a hill, they saw it.

It was a column of light. It rose from the ground, from a circle of ancient stones, gray standing stones as tall as three men, worn by the wind until they looked like fingers, and it rose straight up, without straying a hand's breadth, into the sky. *Beyond* the sky. Teo followed it with his eyes and it kept going, thinner and thinner, piercing the blue of the morning, until it became a thread, and the thread ended in a point. A point of white and golden light, very high, not moving.

"Up there," said Aelis.

Teo did not answer. He was looking at the light of the column. It was white and gold and silver all at once, and it was neither warm nor cold, and when Teo came closer he felt it in his chest: the star answered it, throbbed, pulled, the way a dog pulls at its leash when it catches the scent of home.

They dismounted at the edge of the stone circle. The knights stayed back. Aelis walked with him as far as the first standing stone.

"The books say the Circle has its own rules," she said, and she spoke quickly, as if she had a great deal to say and little time. "That up there, projections can only exist on four rays, four lanes, one for each point of the sky. That each Weaver has their Core in plain sight, on a stone beside them, and whoever exhausts the other's Core wins. That the Tide up there is the same as down here, only stronger." She stopped. "And that no one dies in the Circle. Whoever loses is returned to the Pillar."

"The books say," Teo repeated.

"The books are all we have." Aelis put her hands on his shoulders. Her eyes were very bright. "Teo. Listen to me. The Sun chose you. When you're up there, closer to it than anyone has ever been, it will see you. Don't shame it."

Teo nodded. He took up the sigil pouch, which the Engravers had filled the day before with everything they had: the squire, the spark, the lancer, the acolyte, the warden, the herald, the knight. Sunbeams and blessings. Thirty slivers of crystal, each one a door.

And he stepped into the light.

There was no ascent. There was an instant of white, total, with no up or down or sound, and Teo felt his body come apart and put itself back together like a projection, and thought *so this is what they feel*, and then his feet touched stone.

He was standing on a platform.

It was round and enormous, larger than the Temple square, made of a dark, smooth stone that looked like black glass, engraved with concentric circles of symbols that glowed faintly. From the center ran four lanes of light, four rays, that crossed the platform from one side to the other and ended in four engraved circles on each side, two groups of four, facing each other. Teo stood behind one of those groups. Beside him, at waist height, was a stone pedestal, and above the pedestal floated a golden crystal the size of a head, pulsing in time with his heart.

My Core, he thought. *In plain sight*.

And then he raised his eyes and saw where he was, and forgot everything.

Below, enormous, filling half the world, was Vesper.

It was round. Teo knew that, because the books said so, but knowing and seeing were as different as reading the word *fire* and putting your hand in it. It was an immense ball, blue and green and brown, wrapped in a thin layer of bluish light like a halo, and it had clouds, *clouds*, white, drifting slowly over the continents. Teo could see Lumen: a long stretch of land, green on one side, gray in the middle, dark on the other. He could see the Dew Sea. He could see, very small, a golden spark that must have been the dome of the Temple of the Zenith catching the Sun. And he could see the border between day and night, a soft curved line that crossed the planet, light on one side, shadow on the other.

And around Vesper, tilted, spanning the black sky from one side to the other, was a ring. Not the Lines, which were broken and scattered; something else, older, a broad band of glittering dust that circled the world like a bracelet. And above, and everywhere, the stars: not the faint stars you could see from the hills of the Line, but millions, sharp, of every color, in a sky so black it seemed to have no bottom.

And the Sun.

The Sun was there, to the right, enormous, white, with no blue around it to soften it. Teo could not look at it. But he felt it, closer than ever, heavier than ever, a heat that filled his chest through the star until it hurt. And he felt, on the other side, to the left, the Moon: pale and cold, smaller, nearly full, watching.

And between the two, the Tide. Up here it was not just a feeling. You could see it. It was a river of faint light that crossed the black sky between the Sun and the Moon and flowed over the platform, and Teo could see it sway, back and forth, like water in a tank someone was rocking.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" said a voice. "Makes you want to throw up."

Teo lowered his eyes.

On the far side of the platform, behind the other four circles, was another pedestal with another crystal, a silver one. And beside the crystal, arms folded, stood a girl.

She was older than him, a little. She had black hair tied in a thick braid, a dark blue cloak of worn cloth, and fisherman's boots. She was thin and pale and had the face of someone who did not like to be looked at. And in the middle of her chest, through a gray shirt, shone a silver star.

"Is it you?" she said. "The boy who cries when he sees the Sun?"

"That's the Commander," said Teo, before he could stop himself.

The girl raised an eyebrow. For a moment she looked almost amused.

"And you don't cry?"

"No."

"Shame. It would've helped me." She unfolded her arms. She had a pouch at her waist, like his. "My name's Nyra. I make lanterns."

"Teo. I'm a squire."

"I know. You burned a Pilgrim village."

The accusation caught him like a punch. Teo opened his mouth. Closed it.

"I didn't burn anything."

"You were there."

"I was." He did not know why he was telling the truth. Up here, with the whole world at his feet and the Sun burning in his chest, lying seemed impossible. "I was there and I did nothing. Almost nothing."

Nyra looked at him for a long moment. Teo could not tell what she was thinking. Then she shrugged, as if

brushing off a fly.

"Well. Now you're going to do something." She put her hand into her pouch. "Let's get this over with before I really do throw up."

The Circle knew the rules better than they did.

Teo understood it from the very first instant, when he felt the Ritual arrive. It was not a decision; it was a tide. The Circle pulled at him, the way a current pulls at a swimmer, and he knew, without anyone telling him, that he had to choose: open his hand to the sky and let the light fill his chest, or reach for the pouch and let the sigils come to his fingers. *Channel* or *Study*. That was what the books called it. Up here, it was as natural as breathing or not breathing.

Teo channeled. The heat rose through his chest and filled the golden crystal beside him, which shone brighter.

On the other side, Nyra did the same. The silver crystal shone.

And Teo felt that the first move was his. He did not know why; the Circle knew. He reached into the pouch and pulled out the first sliver his fingers found: the squire. He raised it. He drew down the Sun.

It was so easy he almost shouted.

Down on Vesper, every projection cost him like lifting a stone. Up here, close to the Sun, it was like opening a window. The squire of light stepped out of the sliver and crossed the air and landed on the first circle of the second ray, shield raised, sharper and more solid than Teo had ever seen it, and stood there, breathing, looking across the platform with Teo's face made of light.

And the Tide moved. Teo saw it: the river of light in the sky tilted a hair's breadth toward the Sun, as if the squire, in being born, had pulled it.

On the other side, Nyra smiled for the first time. It was not a friendly smile.

"So that's how it works," she said. "Everything we do pulls the sky."

She took a sliver from her pouch. She put her lips to it, almost closed, like someone telling a secret. And out of the sliver came a rat.

It was small, the size of a cat, made of shadow and mist, with eyes that were two points of silver light. It ran through the air and landed on the first circle of the third ray, on her side, and crouched, and suddenly Teo could no longer see it properly: the rat's outline wavered, blurred, like something seen through water.

And the river of light in the sky swung back to the middle.

For a long time, Teo thought of nothing else.

Later, when he tried to tell someone what the first duel in the Circle had been like, he found he could not tell it as a battle. It was something else. It was like a conversation in a language you learn as you speak it. Every

time the Ritual came, he chose: light in his chest or sigils in his hands. Every time he had light, he spent it: a squire, a spark, a blessing. And everything he did was a sentence, and Nyra answered with another.

He put the Wandering Spark on the fourth ray, a little boy of fire who did not even wait to draw breath: he leapt forward and crossed the platform and struck Nyra's silver crystal, which shuddered and lost a thread of its glow. Teo felt the blow land as if he had struck it himself, and felt a fierce joy that shamed him.

Nyra answered with an owl. An owl of mist, white, that rose and passed *over* his squire as if the squire did not exist, and struck the golden crystal beside Teo. It hurt. Not in his body: in his chest, in the star, like a needle of ice. Teo staggered.

"Flying," Nyra said from the other side. "Didn't you know you could go over the top?"

"I do now," said Teo, through his teeth.

He put a golden lancer on the third ray, in front of her rat, and felt the Tide leaning toward the Sun, and the lancer, as it was born, gained a glow around itself, a film of light like a soap bubble. *Shield*, Teo thought, without knowing how he knew. *Resonance*.

Nyra put down a witch. She was a small, thin woman made of blue light, with a shawl of mist, and Teo realized, with a strange twist in his stomach, that she looked like Nyra. The witch opened her hands toward Teo's squire, across the ray, and the squire *froze*: it was covered in a crust of white ice, motionless, shield raised, like a statue.

"Freeze," said Nyra. "Didn't you know?"

"No."

"Nobody taught you that either?"

"Nobody's taught me much of anything." Teo looked at her across the platform. "The Commander read books. I did what she read."

Nyra fell silent. The witch of blue light, on her side, tilted her head exactly the way her mistress did.

"I was taught by a three-hundred-year-old vampire who wants to make me eat the dead," she said at last. "I don't know if that's better."

And Teo laughed. He did not mean to; it just came out. A short, nervous, absurd laugh, up there, above the world, in the middle of a war. And on the other side, for one very brief instant, the corners of Nyra's mouth trembled.

Then the Ritual came again, and her face closed once more, and she reached into her pouch.

Teo watched her draw a sigil. He saw the engraved figure before she raised it: a wolf, muzzle in the air, howling. And he saw her look at the third ray on her side, where, moments before, the shadow rat had fallen beneath the golden lancer and come apart. Where the rat had fallen something was hovering: a small pale mist, the size of a hand, trembling in the air.

An Echo. The Echo of a projection.

Nyra put the wolf on top of it.

And the wolf ate it.

Teo watched the pale mist vanish into the jaws of the wolf of light, and watched the wolf grow, taller, broader, its teeth longer, and howl, and the howl crossed the platform and made the golden crystal beside him shudder.

"That's..." Teo began.

"It isn't a soul." Nyra said it quickly, with an anger Teo did not understand. "It's what's left of a projection. It's leftover sky. It isn't anyone. *It isn't anyone*, do you hear me?"

"I didn't say anything."

"But you thought it."

The wolf advanced. And high above, in the black sky, the river of light of the Tide began to tilt, slowly, toward the Moon.

8 · Enemy

Nyra

Nyra had been sick twice before the boy showed up, and she had no intention of telling anyone.

The first time was the moment she arrived. The light of the Pillar dropped her on the dark platform the way a wave drops wreckage on the sand, and she opened her eyes and saw the world down below, round and blue and enormous, turning slowly in the middle of nothing, and her stomach decided it had not been made for this. She knelt at the edge of the platform and threw up into the void, and watched the vomit float away among the stars, and that made her throw up again.

Then she wiped her mouth on her sleeve, stood, folded her arms and decided she was going to hate this place with all her strength. It was easier than being afraid of it.

She hated it for a long time. She hated the black, bottomless sky, and the raw Sun that burned the right side of her face, and the pale Moon on the left that tugged at her chest like a fishhook. She hated the silver crystal floating beside her, which beat in time with her heart as though it had every right to. She hated the world below for being so beautiful, because it had no right to be beautiful, not after everything.

And then the boy appeared on the far side of the platform, staggering as she had staggered, and raised his eyes to Vesper with the face of someone who has seen a god, and Nyra decided to hate him instead, which was easier still.

It lasted until he laughed.

Now her wolf was advancing along the first ray, and the boy was looking at her as if she had eaten a child, and Nyra was angry without quite knowing at whom.

It isn't anyone, she had told him. *It's leftover sky*. And it was true, or at least it was what the Queen had told her, and what she herself had felt when her wolf touched the rat's Echo: there was nothing inside. No longing, no name, no pull. Only still light, like water in a glass. It was not like the drowned woman in the Hall of Tides. It was not like her mother.

So why had it tasted so bad?

The wolf reached the end of the ray, where the boy's golden lancer stood waiting, and leapt. The lancer raised his lance. The film of light around him, that soap-bubble shield, burst when the wolf struck it, and the wolf fell back, and the lancer stayed on his feet, unharmed.

"Shield," said the boy on the other side. "Didn't you know?"

Nyra looked at him. His face was serious, but his eyes were not. His eyes held something she recognized, because it was what Mira had in hers whenever she handed one of Nyra's own sayings back to her: a small, almost embarrassed gleam, the look of someone who has scored a point and isn't sure whether celebrating is

allowed.

"Now I do," said Nyra. And she couldn't help it: her mouth twisted.

The Circle did not forgive. Nyra understood that quickly.

Each time the Ritual came round she had to choose, and every choice was a wager. If she drew the Moon into her chest she had more strength to spend, but her hands were empty; if she drew sigils she had plenty of doors and little light to open them with. The boy seemed to prefer light. He drew the Sun almost every time, and his golden crystal grew brighter and brighter, and he spent it all straight away, like someone who has never learned to save. Nyra, who had grown up counting coppers, saved.

And the Tide would not keep still.

Up above, the river of light came and went. When the boy set down a golden projection, the river leaned toward the Sun, and Nyra felt the cold in her chest grow weaker, more distant, like a voice moving away. When she set down one of her own, the river swung back toward the Moon, and the cold returned, and her projections grew sharper, more solid, more dangerous. The owl she set down while the Tide leaned toward the Moon was twice the size of the first, and when it flew over the golden warriors and struck the boy's crystal, he fell to his knees.

Nyra watched him fall. Watched him put his hand to his chest, to the golden star, and wince. And she felt something she had not expected: not satisfaction. A kind of twinge, beside her own star, as if the blow had hurt her too.

I'm tired, she told herself. I'm imagining things.

The boy got up. He put his hand in his pouch. He took out a shard and looked at it for a moment before raising it, and Nyra saw the figure engraved there: a man with a trumpet lifted, rays spreading from his head like a crown. The boy drew the Sun. And out of the sigil came a golden herald, who settled on the second ray and lifted the trumpet to his lips and did not blow it. He stayed like that, trumpet raised, waiting.

"What does that one do?" asked Nyra.

The boy hesitated.

"I'm not really sure." And it seemed to be true. "The Commander says it waits for the Apogee. That when the Sun touches the world, he blows the trumpet and mine grow stronger."

Nyra looked up. The river of light was leaning toward the Sun. Not by much; two hair's breadths, three. But it was leaning.

And Nyra understood, all at once, what the Queen had been telling her for twenty days and what she, out of stubbornness, had refused to hear. *Whoever understands the Tide best will go home.* It wasn't a matter of strength. It wasn't a matter of who had more sigils or more light in their chest. It was a matter of which way the sky was leaning, and of who pushed it to their side at the right moment.

If the Tide reached the Sun, the herald would blow his trumpet. And Nyra didn't know what would happen

next, but she was certain it would not be good for her.

She had to push the Tide toward the Moon. She had to push it *fast*.

That was when the duel stopped being a conversation and became a race.

Nyra set down something of the Moon; the river turned. The boy set down something of the Sun; the river turned back. She froze one of his warriors; he burned one of her shadows with a ray of light. Both crystals lost their brightness blow by blow, like candles burning down. And the river of light in the sky came and went faster and faster, farther and farther, swinging between the Moon and the Sun like a pendulum that someone keeps giving bigger and bigger shoves.

And the platform began to respond.

Nyra felt it first through her feet. The dark stone, which had been cold and still when she arrived, began to vibrate. A low, continuous hum, like a swarm inside a wall. The symbols carved into the concentric circles lit and went dark in waves, keeping time with the river of light. The rays, the four lanes along which the projections ran, had begun to change color: gold when the Tide leaned toward the Sun, silver when it leaned toward the Moon.

And the star in Nyra's chest was doing something it had never done before. It was pulling. Not toward the Moon; sideways. Forward. Toward the other side of the platform, where the boy stood beside his golden crystal with his hand on his chest.

Nyra looked at him and realized he was feeling the same thing.

He was looking at her with a strange expression. It wasn't anger, or fear. It was the expression of someone who hears their name called in a crowd and can't tell where the voice is coming from.

"Do you feel that?" he asked, loudly, over the hum.

"No," Nyra lied.

"My star's pulling toward you."

"Well, mine isn't."

"Nyra." It was the first time he had said her name. "I think something's wrong."

She opened her mouth to tell him that the only thing wrong was him being there, and didn't, because the river of light reached the Moon.

It didn't get all the way. It got close. Three hair's breadths, four, nearly at the limit, and Nyra felt the Moon suddenly turn *enormous*, filling her chest with cold until her teeth ached. She felt it look down at the platform with that hunger to keep, and felt it reach out with something, a finger, a hand, a ray of pale light coming down from the black sky toward the Circle.

And she felt the boy, on the other side, doing exactly the opposite.

He had a sigil in his hand. He had raised it. He was drawing the Sun with all the strength he had left, his

face twisted, his golden star shining through his shirt like a coal someone had blown on, to push the river back. To stop the Moon's Apogee. To reach his own.

Nyra should have backed off. She should have left the Tide where it was, four hair's breadths from the Moon, and waited for the next Ritual. It was what the Queen would have done; it was what the copper-counter inside her was screaming at her to do.

Instead she looked at the boy across the platform, drawing the Sun with everything he had, and thought of the knights singing as they burned Ashford. She thought of the bridges of Nocturna opening. She thought of Mira, sitting on the windowsill, watching the dead.

And she pulled too.

She pulled the Moon with everything. With the cold, with the anger, with the fear, with every night of twenty days spent watching nobles eat Echoes and every dew lantern she had ever made. She pulled until she felt the silver star crack in her chest like ice under a foot.

And on the other side the boy pulled the Sun with the same strength, in the same instant, outside any Ritual, outside any rule.

Up above, the river of light of the Tide stopped in the middle of the sky, stretched between the two bodies like a rope pulled from both ends.

And the rope snapped.

9 · The Overload

Teo

The world went white, then gold, then silver, then nothing.

Teo remembered the rope snapping. He remembered the sound: not a crack, like the Breaking, but a chord, one enormous, pure note, as if someone had struck every string of a harp the size of the sky at once. He remembered seeing the Sun and the Moon, one on either side, *reach out*, as if each had flung an arm of light toward the platform, and the two arms arriving at the Circle in the same instant, and the Circle not holding.

The symbols carved in the stone lit up all at once. The four rays burst into columns of golden fire and silver ice. Their projections, the lancer and the herald and the wolf and the witch, came apart like sand in the wind. The herald blew his trumpet at last, a brazen note that was lost in the chord. And the golden crystal beside Teo split from top to bottom.

Then the floor was gone.

He fell. He didn't know where. He fell through the light of the Pillar, which was no longer white and calm but a storm of colors whirling like water down a drain, and he felt his body come apart and put itself back together, come apart and put itself back together, badly, in jolts, like a projection made by a tired Weaver. He heard someone screaming and realized it was him. He heard someone else screaming and realized it was her.

And then he hit the ground, and the ground was stone and real, and everything went dark.

He woke up cold, with a girl watching him over a rock.

He was lying on his back on a slope of gray gravel. The sky above him was the color of plums, darkening, with the first stars kindling in the west. Everything hurt. His head hurt, his back, his left leg, which was twisted in a way he preferred not to look at. And his chest hurt, the star, with a deep, slow throb, like an old wound on a rainy day.

The girl was three paces away, leaning against a rock, her right arm pressed tight to her body and the sleeve of her cloak dark with blood. She had one hand held out toward him. In her palm was a silver glow and a thin layer of frost.

"If you move," said Nyra, "I'll freeze your face."

Teo didn't move. He couldn't have, anyway.

"Where are we?"

"I don't know."

"Did you win?"

"*I don't know.*" Her voice rose half a tone. "I don't know where we are, I don't know who won, I don't know what happened up there, I don't know why my star was pulling toward you and I don't know why we fell *together.*" She breathed. "I know my arm hurts and that you're a knight of the Dawn and that you're on the ground."

"Squire."

"Correct me again and I'll freeze that too."

Teo let out something between a laugh and a groan. He closed his eyes. He felt for the sky through his star, out of habit, the way you pat your pocket for your keys. The Sun had set, in the east; it was down there, weak, far away. The Moon had not yet risen. And the Tide...

His eyes snapped open.

"The Tide's stopped."

Nyra frowned. Teo watched her do what he had done, close her eyes, feel. Watched her face change.

"It hasn't stopped," she said slowly. "It's... in the middle. Exactly in the middle. As if someone had forced it there."

"What happened up there was an Apogee. Two. At the same time."

"That's not possible."

"It happened."

They fell silent. In the distance, a cold wind whistled through the rocks. Teo turned his head, with effort, toward where the Meridian Pillar ought to be, and looked for the column of light rising into the sky.

It wasn't there.

There was something on the horizon, far, very far away: a faint, flickering thread that came and went like a candle in a drafty room. It was all that was left.

"We broke the Pillar," said Teo.

Nyra followed his gaze. She said nothing for a long time. When she spoke, the frost in her hand had melted.

"Nobody knows who won. Your commander. My Queen. They're waiting there, at the Meridian, and the Pillar's gone out, and neither of us came back."

"They'll think we're dead."

"They'll think we *lost*. Both of us." She closed her eyes. "And if nobody won, the law says nothing. And your commander keeps marching."

Teo thought of Aelis, standing by the menhirs, looking at the extinguished light. He thought about what she would do. He knew exactly what she would do.

"We have to go back," he said.

"You can't even stand up."

"I can." He tried. His left leg folded like a reed and he fell sideways onto the gravel and saw nothing but white for a moment. When he could see again, Nyra was kneeling beside him with an exasperated look.

"Let me see that."

"Are you going to freeze me?"

"If you don't shut up, yes." She put her good hand on his ankle, over the boot. Teo yelled. "It's not broken. Sprained. Badly." She took her hand away. Looked at her palm, where the silver glow was kindling again, faintly. "I can put some cold on it. It'll help the swelling."

"Why would you do that?"

Nyra shrugged with her good shoulder.

"Because I can't drag you on my own and I don't want to spend the night out here with a cripple moaning."

She put her hand on his ankle again. The cold went in through his skin, a clean, deep cold like well water, and the pain drew back, not far, but far enough.

"Thank you," said Teo.

"Don't thank me. You're still my enemy."

"I know."

"Good." She stood up. "Come on, then, enemy. Before it gets properly dark."

They were in a field of craters.

Teo realized it when they managed to climb to the top of the slope, him limping, leaning on a stick Nyra had torn from a dry bush, and her ahead, arm pressed to her chest. The landscape stretched as far as the eye could see: the gray hills of the Twilight Line, but pitted, as if someone had pelted them with rocks the size of houses. There were craters everywhere. Some were small, the size of a well. Others were enormous, lakes of shadow rimmed with melted, glassy rock. At the bottom of some of them, something glowed.

"The rings," said Teo. "The pieces of the rings fell here."

"In the Breaking."

"In the Breaking."

Nyra looked at the craters with a face Teo couldn't read.

"In Nocturna they fell into the sea," she said. "Nobody saw where." A pause. "One fell into my hands."

Teo's hand went to his chest without his meaning it to.

"Mine too."

She looked at him. He looked at her. Neither of them said anything more, but Teo saw her glance at his star

through his torn shirt and saw her frown, and he knew she was thinking the same thing he was: that the two stars were beating in the same rhythm. That they had been beating in the same rhythm ever since he woke up.

They went down among the craters because there was no other way, because the Pillar lay beyond them, and because, as Nyra said, standing still on a hilltop at night was the quickest way to freeze to death. They walked slowly. Teo limped and swore under his breath. Nyra said nothing.

And halfway there, between the two largest craters, one of the rocks stood up.

Teo thought, in the first instant, that it was a landslide. He heard a rumble, like rolling stones, and saw a black mass rise from the ground to their left, and thought *the slope's giving way*. Then he saw that the mass had arms. And legs. And a head, if you could call it a head: a block of black, glassy stone the size of a cart, with two slits in the middle where a dull red light glowed, like embers.

It was a man. A man of stone, three times Teo's height, made of flakes of obsidian fitted one over another like the scales of a fish. Every flake had edges. The edges gleamed in the last of the light. And all around him, around his legs and arms, there were spikes: points of black glass, long as spears, which bristled when he rose, like a cat's fur.

"A golem," said Nyra, in a very small voice. "The Ancients made them. To guard things."

"Guard what?"

Nyra pointed with her chin. Behind the golem, on the rim of the largest crater, there was a light: a faint gold-and-silver glow coming up from the bottom.

"That."

The golem took a step. The ground shook.

"Run," said Teo.

"You can't run."

"Then you run."

"Don't be an idiot." Nyra stepped back, and back again, her good hand held out toward the golem. The silver glow was kindling in her palm, but weak, so weak, like a lantern at the end of its oil. "The Tide's in the middle. I've got no strength at all."

Teo put his hand in his pouch. His fingers found three shards. Only three; the rest must have scattered in the fall. He pulled one out at random. It was the squire.

He drew the Sun.

The Sun wasn't there. It was down below, on the other side of the world, weak as a coal under ash, and the Tide sat still in the middle, leaning nowhere, and Teo drew anyway, drew until he felt the cracked star burn, and the squire came out of the sigil. It came out badly. It was transparent, almost invisible, a golden outline

trembling in the air like a candle's reflection in a windowpane. It settled between them and the golem and raised its shield.

The golem struck it with its arm. The squire dissolved in a sigh of golden dust. But the stone arm stopped, for an instant, as though it had hit a wall, and that instant was enough for Teo to throw himself backward and for Nyra to haul him away by the collar.

"That's not enough," she said.

"I know!"

"Do it again."

"I don't have the strength!"

The golem raised its arm again. Teo saw the red embers in the slits of its head, without expression, without hatred, without anything. He saw the spikes of black glass pointing at them.

And then Nyra did something Teo didn't expect. She put her good hand on his chest, over the golden star.

"What are you—"

"Shut up." She put her other hand, the wounded one, on her own chest, over the silver star. She closed her eyes. "Up there, our stars were pulling toward each other. I want to see something."

And Teo felt it.

It wasn't like channeling. It was like opening a door in a wall he had thought was only wall. He felt her star, through her hand, through his chest: cold, silver, beating in the same rhythm as his own. And he felt the two of them *fit together*. Like two halves of a broken coin. Like two pieces of a gear train.

And the Tide, which had been stuck in the middle, which neither of them could move alone, moved. Not toward the Sun, nor toward the Moon. Toward both of them. Teo felt it pass through him and through her in a circle, like water running through a pipe that loops back on itself, and the star in his chest filled with heat and cold at the same time, and it hurt, and it was the best thing he had ever felt.

"Now," said Nyra.

Teo raised the next sigil. It was the lancer. And the lancer came out, golden and solid, with a shield of light around him, stronger than in the Circle, and settled in front of them with his lance leveled.

Nyra raised her good hand. The water in the ground, the damp in the gravel, the dew of the gathering night, all of it answered. White ice climbed from the ground around the golem's legs, thick, fast, up to the knees, up to the thighs, and the golem stopped with its arm raised, trapped.

Teo's lancer attacked. The lance struck the golem's chest, where the obsidian flakes met, and the spikes answered: they shot outward like the quills of a hedgehog and ran the lancer through from side to side. The lancer came apart. But the lance had struck first. And the flakes on the golem's chest cracked.

The golem staggered. Its legs, locked in ice, would not let it find its balance. It tipped backward, toward the rim of the crater, arms flung wide, the red embers blinking.

And it fell.

It fell into the crater with a crash that shook the ground under Teo's feet, and rolled down the slope of melted glass, and there at the very bottom it broke into a thousand black flakes with the sound of crockery falling off a shelf.

Silence.

Teo and Nyra were standing, leaning against each other, her hand still on his chest, his hand, he suddenly realized, on her shoulder. Breathing like people who had run a league.

She took her hand away first. He took his away right after. Neither of them looked at the other.

"This," said Nyra, to the crater, "did not happen."

"Agreed," said Teo.

Down at the bottom of the crater, among the golem's flakes, there was a light. Teo was about to climb down, but Nyra caught him by the arm.

"No. It's getting dark, you're limping, and I don't know what that is."

"It's a piece of a ring."

"It's a piece of a ring guarded by a golem with spikes. Tomorrow."

She was right, and he knew it, and that annoyed him more than if she hadn't been.

They made camp in a hollow in the rock on the rim of a small crater, sheltered from the wind. Nyra lit a fire with some dry brush and a flint she carried in her pouch, and Teo watched her with envy, because he carried nothing but sigils and a squire's knife he had never used. They sat on opposite sides of the fire. The Moon rose in the west, white and nearly full, and the Tide began, slowly, to lean toward it.

That was when the automaton appeared.

Teo heard it first: a ticking, small and irregular, like a clock with hiccups. Then he saw it, at the edge of the firelight. It was the size of a large dog, made of bronze gone green with age, with six legs thin as an insect's and a round head with a single glass eye in which a little blue light turned. One of its legs was bent and a piece of its shell was dented. It was looking at them.

Nyra got to her feet with her hand out. Teo grabbed a sigil.

The automaton tilted its head. It went *tick*. It took two steps sideways, quickly, effortlessly, as if the ground were ice. Then two more the other way. And it sat down. It folded its six legs under its body and sat at the edge of the fire, gazing at the flames with its blue eye, ticking.

"What does it want?" whispered Teo.

"I don't know." Nyra slowly lowered her hand. "I think it's cold."

"Automatons don't get cold."

"Then it likes the fire." She sat down again, watching the thing. "The Pilgrims get them walking. They dig them out of the ruins of the Ancients. My mother bought one once, a little one, that opened shells." A pause. "It broke after a month."

The automaton went tick and shifted, closer to her.

The three of them stayed there a long time, watching the fire, saying nothing.

It was Nyra who spoke first. Teo never knew why.

"I have a sister," she said, to the fire. "Mira. She's ten. She paints seashells. She asks questions nobody knows how to answer."

Teo said nothing. He had learned that from Sera.

"My mother died four years ago. Of a fever." Nyra threw a dry twig on the fire. "On the night of the Breaking, when the Moon rose, the dead got up. In Nocturna they all got up. And she was there, in the Glass Market, where I used to sell the lanterns. Standing, made of light, hands on her chest, the way I placed them when she died." Another twig. "Mira talks to her every night. She doesn't answer. She just tilts her head."

Teo felt something tighten in his throat.

"In Auren," he said slowly, "they call them shadows. Shadows of the Moon. The priests undo them with light, in the morning."

Nyra raised her eyes to him.

"Undo them?"

"With Sun sigils. They make a sound, when they come undone. Like a sigh." Teo looked at his hands. "My best friend had a brother. Edrin. Fourteen. He used to climb the rooftops. He died in the Breaking, on the roof of the infirmary, looking up at the sky. On the second night, his Echo appeared on the roof. Swinging his legs. And the next morning the priests went up and undid him, and she was down below, screaming at them to wait."

Nyra went very still.

"And you?"

"I was in the Temple. Learning to make light." His voice came out rough. "The same light."

The fire crackled. The automaton went tick.

"In Nocturna," said Nyra, very quietly, "the nobles of the Court eat them. The Echoes. To grow stronger. To fight you lot. I froze an entire Market so they wouldn't eat my mother."

"And up there, in the Circle..."

"Up there was different. It was the Echo of a projection. It wasn't anyone." She said it quickly, like before, and then stopped, and said it again, slowly: "It wasn't anyone. I think. I don't know."

They were quiet. The Moon was rising. The Tide was leaning toward it, slowly, and Teo felt it, and felt, across the fire, Nyra's star answering the Moon, and his own answering hers, like two notes vibrating together on one string.

"Why do our stars do this?" he asked.

"I don't know."

"Up there, when we both pulled..."

"I don't know, Teo." It was the first time she had said his name. "I don't know anything. I don't know if my Queen is good or bad. I don't know if your commander is mad or a saint. I don't know where the dead go or why the sky woke up or why a piece of it fell into my hands and not anyone else's." She pulled her knees up to her chest, the way Sera did on the roof. "I know how to make lanterns. That was the only thing I knew, and now not even that."

Teo looked at her across the fire. At the thin, pale girl with the wounded arm, a Moon star in her chest and a ten-year-old sister waiting in a glass tower. The enemy.

"I don't know anything either," he said. "I swore to protect the light and I don't know what that means. I thought it meant standing between people and whatever wants to hurt them. And then I watched the Commander burn a village and call it protecting, and I said nothing." He swallowed. "You froze an entire Market for your mother. I couldn't even open my mouth."

Nyra looked at him for a long time.

"Open it next time," she said at last.

They slept back to back, because of the cold, and because neither of them wanted to lie there watching the other sleep. The automaton stayed awake, ticking, its blue eye turned toward the dark.

Teo woke at first light. The Sun was rising, pale, in the west, where the Moon had set the night before; the sky was still running backward. The fire was ash. Nyra was still asleep, curled up, her cloak over her head. The automaton was standing, its six legs stretched out, looking toward the top of the hill.

Teo followed its gaze.

At the top of the hill, cut out against the pale sky, stood a man. Tall and thin, in the gray cloak of a Pilgrim, with a staff in his hand and a pack on his back. He was standing still. He was watching them.

When he saw that Teo had seen him, he raised his free hand in a slow greeting, and began to come down.

10 · Chronicle II

Orin

From the chronicles of the Pilgrim.

I walked two days and a night to reach the tower, and at the end of the second day I saw the sky burst open above the Meridian.

I was on a hilltop, halfway there, eating dry bread and pretending I wasn't afraid of arriving. I could see the Pillar awake in the distance, a needle of light rising into the sky; I had watched it wake on the night of the Breaking and it no longer amazed me. And in the middle of the afternoon I saw it change. It turned gold. Then silver. Then gold again, faster and faster, flashing like a lighthouse gone mad. And up above, very high, where the Pillar ends and the Circle begins, I saw something I had never seen and hope never to see again: two beams coming down from the sky at the same time, one from the Sun and one from the Moon, and meeting up there at a single point, like two swords clashing.

I heard nothing. I was too far away. But I felt the Tide stretch to its limit and snap, and I fell to my knees on that hilltop with my hands on my head, as though someone had struck me with a bell.

When I got up, the Pillar had gone out. Almost. A thread, flickering.

And two sparks, one gold and one silver, had fallen from the sky together, spinning around each other, somewhere toward the Crater Field.

I went after them. I'm not entirely sure why. An honest chronicler would say it was curiosity, and a vain chronicler would say it was duty, and I, who try to be the first and often slip into the second, will say only that I followed them the way you follow something that calls you by name.

I reached the Field at dawn. I know it well: I walked it for many years before the Breaking, because the automaton builders went there to dig up parts and I went with them, and because there was something there I wanted to keep an eye on. An old crater, older than the Breaking, opened a thousand years ago the first time the Ancients tested the Astrolabe. The Ancients had set a golem to guard it, and nobody quite knew why, because the crater was empty. The golem had slept for a thousand years, standing at the crater's edge, covered in moss and lichen, and the Pilgrims' children used to climb onto its shoulders and write names on its back.

When I arrived, the golem lay in a thousand pieces at the bottom of the crater, and there were two children sleeping back to back in a hollow in the rock, and an old six-legged automaton standing guard over them.

The boy woke first. I watched him see me. He wore a golden cloak, torn and filthy, one leg was bound up with strips of cloth, and there was a star in his chest, under his shirt, glowing like an ember. And he had the face of someone who had not slept well in a great many days. I raised my hand. He did not raise his.

I came down the hill slowly. The girl woke when I was halfway, leapt to her feet and held out her hand at me, and out of that hand came a breath of frost that stopped me ten paces off. She had a silver star in her chest.

I stood there, looking at the two stars, and felt something I had not felt in ten years. I felt my heart stop and start again, the way it does when you miss a step in the dark.

Because the two stars were beating in the same rhythm. And I knew that rhythm.

"Who are you?" asked the girl.

"A Pilgrim," I said. "My name is Orin. I mean you no harm."

"Everybody says that."

"Everybody says that because it's the most useful thing to say to someone with frost in their hand." I sat down on a rock, slowly, so they could see I was in no hurry. I laid my staff on the ground. "But in my case it's true. I saw you fall from the sky. I came to see if you were alive."

"We are," said the boy.

"So I see." I looked at the crater behind them. "And you've killed Old Boulder."

"What?"

"The golem. The children called him Old Boulder. They used to write names on his back." I leaned over to look at the bottom. The golem's black flakes were scattered across the slope of glass, and in the middle of them, where he had stood guard for a thousand years, something was shining. "Never mind. He wasn't very fond of anyone."

They looked at each other. It was a curious look: that of two people who don't know whether they're enemies and who have already grown used, without noticing, to glancing at each other before they answer.

"He attacked us," said the girl.

"Woke up with the Breaking, I expect. Like everything else." I got to my feet. "May I go and fetch what he was guarding?"

"What was he guarding?" asked the boy.

I didn't answer. I went down into the crater over the slope of glass, slithering, cursing my knees, and reached the bottom, and pushed the golem's flakes aside with my staff. And there it was.

It was the size of my head. A teardrop of faceted crystal, half gold, half silver, and inside it, at its heart, light turning: rings, spirals, points. Exactly like the stars the two children carried in their chests. Exactly.

It had not been there ten years ago. The Ancients' crater had always been empty; the golem had been guarding a hole, out of loyalty or forgetfulness. This had fallen in the Breaking, in the very spot where, a thousand years before, the Ancients had tested the first Astrolabe, as though the sky, in breaking, had remembered the way home. One of the twelve. One of the great Shards.

A piece of it was missing. Two, to be precise. Two thin slivers, one from each side, as if someone had snapped two blades off a knife during the fall and flung them far away, one to the east and one to the west. The broken faces still gleamed, new, recent.

I picked it up. It was warm on one side and cold on the other.

And up above, on the rim of the crater, the two children cried out at the same moment and put their hands to their chests.

I didn't tell them straight away. A chronicler has a right to the order of things, and an old clockmaker's apprentice has a right to be afraid. I told them only that I knew someone who could explain what had happened to them in the Circle and why their stars did what they did, and that this someone lived in a tower half a day's walk away. And I told them that the Meridian Pillar lay three days off in the opposite direction, and that the boy's leg would not last three days.

"And why should we trust you?" said the girl.

"You don't have to trust me." I put the Shard in my pack, wrapped in my blanket. "You can follow me or not. But I think you'll follow."

"Why?"

"Because when I picked this up"—I touched the pack—"your stars cried out. And you want to know why."

They followed me. So did the automaton. I don't know where it came from; the old automatons woke with the Breaking just as the golem did, and now they wander the Line with no master and no task, like lost dogs. This one had a bent leg and ticked with hiccups, and it moved sideways with a strange ease, gliding over the stones as if they were ice. It followed the girl the whole way. She pretended not to notice. After an hour, she called it *Tick*.

We walked slowly because of the boy's leg. The boy's name was Teo and he didn't complain, which struck me as admirable and a little stupid. The girl's name was Nyra and she complained about everything except her arm, which really did hurt her. They talked little. When they did talk, they talked to each other, not to me, and always in the tone of people arguing, even when they agreed.

I walked in front, listening to them, and remembering someone else I used to argue with like that, many years ago, when I still thought I was cleverer than he was.

Halvar's Tower came into view at midday.

I saw it first, because I knew the way, because I know every stone of that path by heart even though I have not walked it in ten years. I saw the green bronze roof appear over the hill, then the crooked windows, then the whole tower, tapering and gray and absurd on its hilltop, with the wind whistling around it. I stopped.

The children stopped behind me.

"Is that it?" asked Teo.

"That's it."

"It looks like a lighthouse someone gave up on," said Nyra.

"It's a clock," I said. And I stayed where I was, because my legs wouldn't move.

It was Teo who noticed. Teo noticed things; I learned that on that day and confirmed it many times afterward. He limped up beside me and looked at me sidelong.

"Are you all right?"

"I am."

"You don't look it."

"I haven't been here in ten years." I said it without meaning to. It just came out. "I walked out the door of that tower in the middle of the night and never came back. The man who lives inside was my master. And I don't know if he'll let me in."

Teo said nothing. Neither did Nyra. The automaton went tick.

And then the tower door opened.

It was a small door, of worn wood, at the foot of the hill. It swung inward with a creak I knew, and out came an old man. Older than I remembered; more stooped, whiter, with a long yellowed beard and the same bronze spectacles as ever on the tip of his nose, their crystal lenses thick as the bottoms of bottles. He wore a leather apron full of pockets and tools. He had a wrench in his hand.

He looked down at us. At the two children with stars in their chests. At the automaton. At me.

He was silent for a long time.

Then he took a pocket watch from his apron, opened it, looked at it, closed it.

"You're late," said Master Halvar.

And he went back inside, and left the door open.

11 · The Tower That Stopped

Nyra

The tower had stopped, and its silence made your teeth ache.

Nyra noticed it the moment she stepped through the door. She had expected noise. Orin had said *it's a clock*, and she had pictured a clock like the ones in the Glass Palace, small and delicate, with a polite tick. Instead she walked into a well. An enormous, round well that rose until it was lost in the dark far above, and whose walls were gears. Bronze wheels the size of millstones, wheels the size of coins, wheels the size of tables, all meshed one into the next, tooth into tooth, axle into axle, belts and pendulums and levers, climbing in a spiral from the floor to the top of the tower. Thousands. Tens of thousands. A machine the size of a mountain, coiled up on itself.

And not one of them moved.

Everything was still. The pendulums hung straight down, motionless. The belts were slack. There was one enormous wheel, level with Nyra's head, that had a broken tooth, and the broken tooth lay on the floor beneath it, covered in dust.

"It stopped on the night of the Breaking," said Halvar, without turning around. He was ahead of them, climbing an iron spiral staircase that wound up through the middle of the gears. "At the third bell. Everything stopped at once, with a noise that blew out every pane in my windows. A thousand years of work, and it stopped like a heart."

"Why?" asked Teo, limping behind him, clinging to the rail.

"Because it had nothing left to measure." Halvar stopped on a landing and looked at them over his thick spectacles. He had tiny eyes behind the lenses, blue and hard as river pebbles. "This tower was connected to the Astrolabe. Every wheel, every tooth, every pendulum. When the sky fell behind by a hair's breadth, the tower knew, and I set it right. When the Astrolabe broke, the tower was left talking to itself." He started climbing again. "And a machine that talks to itself soon falls silent."

Orin came last of all. He had not said a word since they came in.

Halvar saw to their wounds in the workshop, halfway up the tower, a round room full of workbenches and tools and clock parts scattered everywhere like crumbs. He treated them the way one repairs a mechanism: with quick, firm hands and no delicacy whatsoever. He set Teo's leg between two boards and strapped it with leather until Teo went white. He cleaned Nyra's arm with something that smelled of alcohol and cloves and burned like fire, and then stitched it with silk thread and a clockmaker's needle so fine that Nyra barely felt it.

"Don't move."

"I'm not moving."

"You're thinking about moving. I can see it in your shoulders." Stitch. Stitch. "You've got a cut from glass, a stone from the Circle, I'd guess, that could have severed the tendon and missed by half a finger. You're lucky, witch."

"I'm not a witch."

"You've got a Moon star in your chest and you smell of dew. You're a witch." Stitch. "Your grandmother was a witch, and your mother too, and so are you. It's in your blood the way bronze is in the gears."

Nyra went cold.

"You knew my mother?"

Halvar tied off the last stitch, bit through the thread, and looked at her over his spectacles.

"Everybody says that, don't they? *You knew my mother.*" A pause. "No. I didn't. But I know dew. Anyone who works with it has fingertips like these." He took her good hand, turned it over, showed her the tips of her fingers, faintly wrinkled, faintly pale, like someone who has been in water a long time. "There. Done. Don't get it wet for three days."

"I'm from Nocturna. Everything in Nocturna is wet."

"Then don't go to Nocturna for three days." Halvar stood, wiped his hands on his apron and turned to Orin, who was leaning against the doorframe, arms folded, looking at the floor. "And you. Did you bring it?"

Orin raised his eyes. For an instant Nyra saw something cross his face very like what she felt when the Queen summoned her to the Hall of Tides: the fear of a child before a grown-up they love.

Then Orin took the pack off his back, unwrapped the blanket, and set the Shard on the workbench.

The star in Nyra's chest cried out again. Not in pain; with a kind of recognition, a longing, like hearing a song from childhood. Across the bench, Teo put his hand to his chest at the same moment.

Halvar looked at the Shard. Then at the two stars. Then at Orin.

And he began to laugh.

It wasn't a happy laugh. It was a tired, old man's laugh that shook his shoulders and sent his spectacles sliding down his nose, and that ended in a cough. Halvar sat down on a tall stool, took off his spectacles and rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand.

"Of course," he said. "Of course it had to be like this. The sky has a sense of humor."

"Master," said Orin, softly.

"Don't call me master. You lost the right ten years ago." Halvar put his spectacles back on. There was no anger in his voice; there was something worse, a kind of gentle weariness. "Sit down, Orin. Sit down, all of you. This is going to take a while, and my knees can't manage explanations standing up."

They sat. Teo on a stool, his leg stretched out. Nyra on a crate of parts. Orin on the floor, his back against the wall, like an apprentice. The automaton, Tick, came in through the door ticking, looked around with its blue eye, and went and sat beside Nyra.

Halvar laid his hand on the Shard.

"This," he said, "is a piece of the Celestial Astrolabe. Not a splinter, not a sliver like the ones that rained down everywhere in the Breaking. One of the great ones. One of the twelve. When the Astrolabe broke, it broke into twelve principal pieces, and each fell somewhere in Lumen. This is the one the Ancients called the Meridian." He turned it slowly, and the gold and silver light inside turned with it. "It was the piece in the middle. The one that joined the Sun's side to the Moon's side. The one that kept the two of them locked against each other."

He looked at Teo, and then at Nyra.

"And when it fell, it lost two slivers. One from the golden side. One from the silver side."

Nyra felt the star in her chest throb like a second heart.

"It's us," said Teo.

"It's you." Halvar nodded. "Your stars, your Cores, are the two halves of the same piece. Two blades of the same knife. That's why they beat in the same rhythm. That's why they pull toward each other." He paused. "And that's why, when you both pulled at the same time, up there in the Circle, with all your strength, one toward the Sun and the other toward the Moon, the Circle couldn't hold. You were pulling the same piece in opposite directions. You were trying to break the Meridian all over again."

Nobody said anything. Tick went tick.

"And in the Crater Field," said Nyra slowly, "when we put our hands on each other... when we joined the stars..."

"The Tide ran through you both," said Halvar. "Yes. I imagine it did. Two halves together make a whole." He looked at them with a strange expression, somewhere between curiosity and fear. "I don't know what a whole can do. Nobody knows. It's never happened."

Halvar took them to the top of the tower toward evening.

They climbed the spiral staircase to the very end, until the gears ran out and the stairs opened into a round room under a glass dome. The glass was cracked in several places, patched with lead and cloth. Outside, the sky was turning orange; the Sun was going down in the east, backward, as it always did now.

And in the middle of the room, beneath the dome, was the sky.

In miniature. A model of bronze and crystal, the size of a cart, mounted on an iron pedestal. There was a golden sphere, the Sun, and a silver sphere, the Moon, each at the end of a bronze arm. And around them, rings: twelve thin bronze rings, tilted at different angles, nested one inside another like the layers of an onion.

They were broken. All twelve. Someone, or something, had broken them to pieces, and the pieces hung from copper wires, loose, crooked, swaying slightly in the draft that came in through the cracks in the dome.

"It broke in the same instant the real one broke," said Halvar. "It was connected to it, like the tower. When the one up there burst, this one burst down here." He touched one of the broken rings with a fingertip, carefully, the way you touch a wound. "A thousand years keeping it true. And now look."

Nyra looked. And she noticed something.

Between the broken rings, between the bronze Sun and Moon, there was a thread of light. Faint, almost invisible, like a spider's web in the sun. It ran from the golden sphere to the silver one, and back, and away, and back again.

"The Tide," she said.

"The Tide." Halvar nodded. "Do you know what it is?"

"The Commander says it's the will of the Sun fighting against the shadow," said Teo.

"The Queen says it's the Moon breathing," said Nyra.

"They're both idiots. With all due respect." Halvar clasped his hands behind his back. "The Tide is the Astrolabe bleeding."

Silence.

"The Astrolabe held the Sun and the Moon against each other. It was a spring, if you like. An enormous spring, wound tight for a thousand years, holding the sky still. When it broke, the spring came loose. And all that force, a thousand years of stored force, began to drain out. Running from one side to the other, between the Sun and the Moon, like water between two buckets." He pointed at the thread of light. "Every time one of you does anything with the sky, every projection, every sigil, every drop of frozen dew, it pulls a little of that force to one side. And when someone pulls too hard..."

"Apogee," said Teo.

"Apogee. The body touches the world. In the Circle, up there, it's harmless; the Ancients built it for exactly that, to contain the touch. But down here..." Halvar shook his head. "Down here, an Apogee of the Sun burns. One of the Moon freezes. I don't know how much. I don't know how far. But I know that each one that happens leaves the spring looser. And if someone manages to pull the whole Tide to one side and hold it there... if the Sun or the Moon stays in Apogee forever..."

He didn't finish the sentence. He didn't need to.

Nyra thought of the ice climbing the nobleman's arm in the Glass Market. She thought of a whole world like that. White, still, kept.

"And why is the sky backward?" Teo asked suddenly. "The Sun sets in the east. It rises in the west."

Halvar looked at him with something that might have been respect.

"Because the spring came loose backward. When a clock spring breaks, it unwinds the opposite way to how

it was wound. The sky woke up walking in reverse." He shrugged. "That's the least of it. You get used to it."

It was Nyra who asked. She hadn't planned to; it came out of her, the way important things always did, from a cold place in her chest that didn't ask permission.

"And the Echoes?"

Halvar went very still.

"In Nocturna, the dead got up," said Nyra. "All of them. On the night of the Breaking. They stand in the canals, watching. In Auren the priests undo them with light. In Nocturna the Court eats them." Her voice shook, and she didn't let it shake any further. "My mother's there. In the Glass Market. Every night. What are they?"

Halvar took off his spectacles and cleaned them on his apron, slowly, too slowly.

"The Ancients didn't build the Astrolabe only to stop the sky," he said at last. "They built it also to... set other things right. Things that move in circles. The seasons. The tides of the sea. And souls."

Orin, leaning against the wall, closed his eyes.

"A soul, when someone dies, has to go somewhere. I don't know where; the books of the Clockmakers called it *the other side of the sky*, and nothing more. The Astrolabe was a kind of door. A wheel. Souls passed through it and went on." Halvar put his spectacles back on. "When it broke, the door closed. Or opened wrong. The souls of those who died in the Breaking, and of those who had died before and were partway along the road, got stuck. Here. In the place where they fell."

"Echoes," said Nyra.

"Echoes."

"And when the Court eats them? When the priests undo them?"

Halvar looked at her with those tiny, hard eyes, and Nyra saw, for the first time, that they were wet.

"I don't know, witch. I swear to you I don't know. Maybe they go. Maybe they end." A pause. "Maybe they go somewhere that isn't where they should."

Nyra felt Teo looking at her. She didn't look at him.

"And if the Astrolabe is mended?" she asked. "If someone gathers the twelve? Does the door open again? Can they go?"

"Perhaps." Halvar touched the broken ring of the model. "It's the only thing I know of that might work."

At nightfall, when the Moon was rising in the west and the thread of light in the model was beginning to lean toward the silver sphere, Halvar showed them one last thing.

It was an instrument on the wall of the dome, a sort of bronze needle mounted on a dial, which trembled on its own like a compass needle near a magnet. Nyra couldn't tell what it measured. Halvar explained.

"It measures the Tide. Its strength, not its direction. How hard it's being pulled." He tapped the glass of the dial with a fingernail. "In the first days after the Breaking, the needle barely moved. A little this way, a little that. Now look."

The needle was trembling. Not only trembling: jumping. It lurched from one side of the dial to the other, like a dog straining at its leash, and swung back, and lurched again.

"Someone is preparing something big," said Halvar. "On both sides. I've felt it for a week. On the Sun's side, a force being gathered, squeezed tight, like someone filling a wineskin until it bursts. On the Moon's side, the same." He looked at Teo and at Nyra. "Your houses are getting ready to pull the sky with all the strength they have. To bring about an Apogee. Down here. On purpose."

Teo went pale.

"The Commander talked about that. The Zenith Rite. She said the books spoke of a ritual to call the Sun down to earth, and that when the Pillar..."

"The Queen talked about the Full Night," said Nyra slowly. "Once. She said there was a night when the Moon could be called down. I thought she meant a festival."

Halvar closed his eyes.

"And when are they going to do it?"

"I don't know," said Teo.

"I don't know," said Nyra.

"I do." It was Orin, against the wall, speaking for the first time since he had entered the tower. His eyes were fixed on the jumping needle. "They'll both do it at the next full Moon. Four nights from now." He raised his eyes to Halvar. "The books of the Ancients are the same on both sides, master. They both say the same thing: that at the full Moon the Tide is strongest. That it's the right night to pull."

"For both sides," said Halvar quietly.

"For both sides."

Nyra looked at the broken model. At the thread of light between the bronze Sun and Moon. She imagined it being pulled from both ends at once, with all their strength, down here, in the world, with no Circle to contain anything.

"If both of them pull on the same night," she said, "what happens?"

Halvar didn't answer straight away. He went to the window of the dome and stood looking out at the Twilight Line spread out below, gray and silver in the moonlight, with its hills and its little villages and its shepherds' fires.

"Fire on one side," he said at last. "Ice on the other. And here, in the middle, where it belongs to no one..."

He didn't finish. Nyra didn't need him to.

She looked at Teo. Teo was already looking at her. And for the first time since they had fallen from the sky,

neither of them looked away.

12 · Twelve Shards

Teo

The plan was made in the morning, around a pot of oatmeal, and Teo thought it was the stupidest plan he had ever heard, and the only one there was.

"Twelve Shards," said Halvar, spoon in the air like a teacher with a pointer. "Twelve pieces of the Astrolabe, scattered across Lumen. One is here." He pointed the spoon at the Meridian, which lay on the workshop table wrapped in Orin's blanket, shining through the cloth. "Eleven to go. If we gather them, I can try to rebuild it."

"Try," said Nyra.

"Try. No one has ever done it. The Ancients built it once and then they all died, and their books are written in a language I read badly and understand worse." Halvar put the spoon in his mouth. "But it's the only thing I know how to do. Set clocks right."

"And where are the other eleven?" asked Teo.

Halvar swallowed and pointed up, at the ceiling, at the dome and the broken model hanging up there.

"Every piece of the model was linked to a piece of the real thing. They still are, somehow. Last night, when I took the Meridian out of the bag, the middle ring of the model moved. A hair's breadth. This way." He tapped the spoon on the table. "If I spend a few nights with the other rings, I can work out where they point. Roughly."

"A few nights," said Orin. He was sitting on the floor again, bowl on his knees. "We don't have a few nights, Master. We have three."

They all fell silent. Outside, the wind of the Line beat against the crooked windows.

"The full moon is three nights from now," Orin went on. "The Order and the Court will each pull the sky their own way, down here, at the same time. If the Shards are tomorrow's problem, that is today's."

"Then we stop them," said Teo.

Everyone looked at him.

"How?" asked Nyra.

"We tell them." Teo set down his spoon. "You go to Nocturna and tell your Queen what Master Halvar told us. That the Tide is the Astrolabe bleeding. That an Apogee down here burns or freezes. That if both sides pull on the same night, the Line is caught in the middle. I go to the camp and tell the Commander."

"And you think they'll listen?" said Nyra. "An eighteen-year-old witch and a seventeen-year-old squire, who lost the most important duel in the world and vanished for two days, turn up saying *stop everything, an old*

clockmaker says the sky is bleeding?"

"My Commander listens to me."

"Your Commander burned a village while singing."

Teo opened his mouth. Closed it.

"She listens to me," he repeated, with less certainty.

"The Queen doesn't listen to me," said Nyra. "She listens to herself. But..." She hesitated. "But she's afraid. I saw it in her eyes, once. She's three hundred years old and she's afraid. Maybe she'll listen."

Halvar looked from one to the other, and then at Orin.

"And if they don't?"

No one answered. In the end it was Orin who spoke, eyes on his bowl.

"Then they come back here." He raised his eyes to the old man. "And we try something else."

"What something else?" asked Teo.

Halvar and Orin looked at each other for a long time. Teo couldn't read that look; it had layers, like the gears of the tower, ten years of layers he knew nothing about.

"There is a mechanism," Halvar said slowly. "An emergency mechanism the Clockmakers built in the beginning, when they were still afraid the Astrolabe wouldn't hold. They called it *the Equinox*. It doesn't rebuild anything. It just... pulls the Tide to the middle. By force. For an instant."

"Pulls it to the middle," Nyra repeated.

"To zero. Neither Sun nor Moon." Halvar rubbed his eyes behind his spectacles. "But it's broken, like everything in this tower. And even if I fix it, I don't know if it will hold. I don't know what it costs."

"Costs what?"

Halvar didn't answer.

Teo left at noon, in a cart.

It was a small two-wheeled cart of wood and bronze that Halvar dug out of a shed behind the tower, and it was pulled not by a horse but by an automaton: a four-legged thing, tall and slender as a deer, made of bronze rods and exposed gears, that trotted along with a sound like scissors. Halvar called it *Stilts*. He said it would reach the Meridian before nightfall as long as Teo didn't let it stop to eat flowers, because it had a habit of stopping to eat flowers, even though it had no mouth.

Nyra was leaving in the other direction, on foot, westward, with a bag of food, the sigils she had left and Tick ticking along behind her. Nocturna was two days away. Halvar had drawn her a map on a scrap of parchment, full of arrows and warnings: *there's a well here, don't sleep here, a woman who sells cheese lives here, buy her cheese*.

They said goodbye at the tower door. There were no hugs. Teo was in the cart, his splinted leg stretched out in front of him, and Nyra stood beside the wheel, her stitched arm in a cloth sling and the map in her good hand.

"If your commander doesn't listen to you," she said.

"I come back here."

"And if my Queen doesn't listen to me..."

"You come back here."

"We both come back here." She looked at the tower, at the half-finished beacon on top of the hill, and then at him. "And then?"

"Then we'll see."

"That's not a plan."

"I know." Teo smiled, without meaning to. "It's what we've got."

Nyra looked at him for a moment. Then she put her good hand on her chest, over the silver star, and Teo, without thinking, did the same over the golden one. And they felt them pulse. In the same rhythm. One, two. One, two.

"Don't die, enemy," said Nyra.

"You neither."

She turned and started walking, westward, without looking back. Tick went after her, sideways, ticking. Teo watched her go down the hill until she was only a dark blue smudge in the middle of the gray, and then he shook reins that weren't needed, and Stilts set off at a trot with its scissor sound.

The Order's camp was where he had left it, in the hills of Highstone, but it had changed.

Teo saw it at sunset, from the top of a hill, and told Stilts to stop. Stilts stopped, lowered its head of bronze rods to a bush of yellow flowers, and stood there pretending to eat them.

There were more tents. Many more. Reinforcements had come from Auren: Teo could see banners he didn't know, from noble houses of the highlands, and wagon after wagon of supplies. And in the middle of the camp, where the Commander's tent used to be, there was something new: a ring of wooden stakes, each as tall as three men, driven into the ground around an empty space, and on top of each stake a bronze mirror turned to the sky. Twelve mirrors. Twelve stakes.

Teo didn't know what it was. He knew he didn't like it.

He went down the hill on foot, limping, with a crutch Halvar had made him from a broom handle and a cogwheel. He left Stilts hidden among some rocks, pretending to eat flowers. The sentries saw him from two hundred paces and shouted, and raised their spears, and then one of them shouted something else, and the other dropped his spear, and Teo realized they were shouting his name.

Half the camp came running. Knights, squires, priests, cooks. People who had never spoken to him clapping him on the back, touching his torn cloak, looking at the star on his chest as if it were a relic. *He's alive. The Weaver is alive. The Sun brought him back.* Teo let himself be pushed through the middle of them, dizzy, his crutch slipping in the mud.

And then the crowd parted, and Aelis was there.

She was running. Teo had never seen her run. She was in armor, but without a helmet, her straw-colored hair a mess and her eyes red like someone who hadn't slept, and when she reached him she said nothing: she took him by the shoulders and pulled him against her, hard, the cold armor against his face, and Teo felt her shaking.

"I thought you were dead," she said, into his hair. "I saw the Pillar go dark and I thought... two days, Teo. Two days."

"I'm all right, Commander."

She held him away to look at him. She saw the splinted leg, the crutch, the torn cloak, the star.

"What happened up there?"

And Teo, who had spent the whole road rehearsing what he would say, found he didn't know where to begin.

He began at the beginning. He told her everything, in her tent, sitting on a stool with his leg stretched out, while Aelis paced back and forth and the captains listened, leaning against the canvas walls.

He told her about the Circle. The girl. The Tide swinging faster and faster. The double Apogee, the rope snapping, the fall. The Crater Field and the golem. He didn't tell her about the hands on each other's chests; not that. He told her about the Pilgrim, and the stopped tower, and the old clockmaker. And he told her what the old man had told them.

That the Tide was the Astrolabe bleeding. That every Apogee down here burned or froze. That if the Sun stayed in Apogee forever, Vesper would burn. That the Court of Night was going to pull the Moon at the next full moon, and that if the Order pulled the Sun on the same night, the Twilight Line would be caught between fire and ice.

That there were twelve Shards, and that perhaps, together, they could fix everything.

When he finished, the tent was silent.

Aelis had stopped pacing. She was standing with her back to him, looking out through the tent flap, at the night outside, at the ring of stakes with their bronze mirrors.

"A clockmaker," she said at last.

"The last one, Commander. Halvar. The Clockmakers watched over the Astrolabe for a thousand years."

"I know who the Clockmakers were." Her voice was calm. Too calm. "They were the men who told the

world, for a thousand years, that the stopped sky was a blessing. That the light should sleep. That no one should want more." She turned. Her eyes were dry now. "And now the last of them tells you that the woken light is dangerous. That the Sun, if we give it strength, will burn the world. That we should be afraid of it."

"He didn't say that, Commander. He said that..."

"He said the Tide is a wound. That the sky moving is a sickness." Aelis came closer and knelt in front of him, at eye level, the way she used to in the Court of Arms. "Teo. Listen to me. You saw what I saw. You saw the Sun wake. You felt it look at you. You felt it *choose you*. Do you really think something like that wants to burn the world?"

Teo thought of the heavy light falling over the infirmary courtyard. Of the warm finger touching his chest. Of the hunger.

"I think we don't know what it wants," he said. "I think no one knows. Not even you, Commander."

A silence so great that Teo heard Captain Ormond swallow.

Aelis looked at him for a long time. Teo saw something in her eyes, the same thing he had seen on the hill at Ashford, a doubt, a weariness, a person underneath the certainty. And he saw her push that thing away, slowly, deliberately, like someone drawing a curtain.

"You've spent two days with the shadow," she said, very quietly. "With a witch of the Night and a Pilgrim and an old man who spent his life hating the light. You're hurt. You're tired. You're confused. It isn't your fault."

"Commander..."

"Three nights from now," Aelis went on, getting to her feet, "we will perform the Zenith Rite. Here." She pointed outside, at the ring of stakes. "The books of the Ancients are clear. Twelve mirrors, twelve priests, a Weaver at the center. On the night of the full moon, when the Night is at its strongest, we will be stronger than it. We will call the Sun down to earth. We will show it that we are waiting for it. And the Night will see the light come down over the Line and understand that it is over."

"And if Master Halvar is right? If the Apogee burns..."

"Then it burns the shadow." Aelis said it without raising her voice. "It purifies. That is what light is for, squire."

Teo looked at her and didn't recognize her. Or he recognized her and understood that he had never seen her before.

"And who will be at the center?" he asked. "In the Rite. The Weaver."

Aelis didn't answer. She didn't need to.

"Rest," she said. "Ormond, take him to his tent. Put a guard on it. No one goes in and no one comes out until he's better."

"Commander," Ormond said slowly, "the boy isn't..."

"He has been touched by the shadow, Captain. He needs rest. And light." Aelis turned back to the tent flap. "In three nights he'll be cured."

His tent had two guards at the door and no window. Teo sat on the cot in the dark, his leg throbbing and the star throbbing and his heart throbbing, and for a long time he couldn't think of anything at all.

Then he thought of Nyra, on her way to Nocturna, with a map drawn by an old man and an automaton ticking along behind her. He wondered whether her Queen had listened to her. He thought not.

He thought of what she had said in the Crater Field. *Open your mouth next time.*

He had opened it. And it had done no good at all.

It was Sera who got him out.

He didn't hear her arrive. He heard the guards talking at the door, a woman's voice, *Mother Ondine sent me to change his bandages, do you want to see the written order?*, and the guards grumbling, and the tent flap opening, and a figure in a white tunic with a lantern and a box of ointments. The flap closed. The figure set the lantern on the ground.

"You look like a drowned dog," said Sera.

Teo stared at her and couldn't say a thing.

"I came with the supply caravan, yesterday," she said, kneeling by his leg and starting to undo Halvar's leather straps, as if she really had come to change the bandages. "I asked to come. Mother Ondine said the army needed healers. I said the army needed someone to knock some sense into you." She looked at the leg. "Who did this? It's well done."

"A clockmaker."

"Of course." She began to redo the bindings with her usual quick, steady hands. "I heard everything, you know. Through the wall of her tent. Acolytes hear everything; nobody notices us."

"Then you know."

"I know." Sera tightened a strap. Teo winced. "I know they're going to put you in the middle of twelve mirrors three nights from now to call the Sun down to earth. And I know you think it's going to burn the Line."

"It's not me who thinks so. It's Halvar."

"And you believe him."

Teo thought about it.

"I believe him."

Sera finished the bandage. She stayed kneeling in front of him, looking at the golden star through his torn shirt, and Teo saw something on her face he had never seen before: the same expression Aelis wore when she looked at the Sun. Not joy. Something else. A hunger.

"Did he say where they go?" she asked, very quietly. "The clockmaker. The Echoes. When they're undone."

Teo looked at her. At the oldest friend he had in the world, kneeling on the floor of a tent, with ash on her fingers.

"He said he doesn't know," he said carefully. "He said the Astrolabe was a door for souls. That when it broke, they got stuck. And that when they're undone, maybe they go. Or maybe they end." He hesitated. "Or maybe they go somewhere else."

"Somewhere else." Sera repeated the words the way Aelis had repeated Edrin's name. Keeping them. "And if they fix the Astrolabe?"

"He thinks the door opens again."

Sera was quiet for a long time. Then she stood up, suddenly, and took from the ointment box something that wasn't ointment: a white acolyte's tunic, folded, and a veil.

"Put this on."

"Sera..."

"Put this on and walk out with me. The guards will see two acolytes leaving with a lantern. They won't look twice. Nobody looks twice at us."

"If they catch you..."

"They won't catch me. I'm staying. I'll go back to the healers' tent and sleep, and tomorrow morning I'll be very surprised when they find out you've escaped." Sera tossed him the tunic. "I'm not doing this for you, Teo. Not entirely."

Teo caught the tunic.

"Then who for?"

Sera picked up the lantern. The light struck her face from below, and Teo saw her eyes, dry, hard, full of something he couldn't name.

"If you find the place where the Echoes go," she said, "tell me. Promise me. Wherever it is. Tell me."

Teo looked at her. He thought of Edrin, made of light, swinging his legs on the rooftop. Tilting his head.

"I promise," he said.

They left the tent together, two acolytes in white tunics, one of them limping, with a lantern. The guards didn't even look up.

They crossed the camp in the dark. They passed the ring of stakes with the twelve bronze mirrors, turned to the sky, waiting. They passed the sentries, who wished them good night. And they reached the rocks where Teo had left Stilts, which still had its head bent over the same bush, pretending to eat flowers.

Sera helped him up into the cart. She put the crutch beside him. She stood by the wheel, the way Nyra had.

"Come with me," said Teo.

"No." She shook her head. "Someone has to stay here and listen through the tent walls."

"Sera."

"Go, Teo. Before they notice."

He went. Stilts set off at a trot, westward, with its scissor sound, into the darkness of the Line. And when Teo looked back, Sera's lantern was still lit on top of the hill, small, motionless, watching him.

Overhead, the Moon was almost full.

13 · Fire and Ice

Nyra

The Queen heard her out to the very end, and that was what frightened Nyra more than anything.

Nyra had reached Nocturna at the end of the second day, her feet bleeding, her arm throbbing in its sling and Halvar's map so stained with sweat and rain that all that could still be read was *buy her cheese*. She had bought the cheese. She had slept in a dry well, against the map's advice. She had walked, and walked, and walked, with Tick ticking along behind her, and when at last she saw the violet glass towers rising from the Dew Sea on the horizon, she sat down on the ground and cried for a whole minute, from exhaustion, before getting up and going on.

The guards on the bridge recognized her. They took her to the Glass Palace without asking her anything, their eyes on the silver star on her chest, and Nyra understood, from the way they looked at her, that in Nocturna too they had given her up for dead.

The Queen was in the Hall of Tides. She was not alone.

Around the mirror of shallow water, in a circle, stood all the Weavers of the Court. Nyra counted them: nine. Nine nobles in black cloaks and silver masks, silver stars shining through their clothes, standing around the water, motionless, hand in hand. On the floor between them, sigils lay scattered: dozens, hundreds, crystal shards with owls and wolves and spiders and shadows, laid out in spirals. And in the middle of the water, in a black dress, barefoot, Morwen.

And beside her, in a white nightgown, her feet in the icy water, stood Mira.

Nyra stopped at the entrance. Mira saw her and her face lit up, and she took a step toward her sister, and the Queen laid a hand on her shoulder, gently, and Mira stopped.

"Little witch," said Morwen. "You came back."

"Let go of her."

"She's fine. She's safe." The Queen didn't let go. "When the Pillar went dark and you didn't come back, your sister was left alone in a tower. I thought she'd be better off near me."

"Let go of her," Nyra repeated, and felt the cold rise from her chest to her fingers.

Morwen looked at her, and then at the frost beginning to form on the water around Nyra's feet. She took her hand from Mira's shoulder. Mira ran through the water, splashing, and threw herself against her sister, and Nyra hugged her with her good arm so hard that Mira squeaked.

"You're alive," said Mira, against her chest. "I told them you were alive. Nobody believed me."

"I'm alive."

"Your arm's been stitched."

"It has."

"Who stitched you?"

"A grumpy clockmaker." Nyra kissed her hair. Then she raised her eyes to the Queen, over her sister's head. "Majesty. I have something to tell you. And you're going to have to listen to me."

She told her everything. Exactly as Teo, on the other side of the Line, must be telling his commander; Nyra thought about that as she spoke, and thinking about it gave her a strange courage, as if she weren't alone. She told her about the Circle and the boy and the rope snapping. She told her about the fall and the golem. She told her about the stopped tower and the old man and the broken model of the sky. She told her what the old man had said.

The Tide is the Astrolabe bleeding. An Apogee down here burns or freezes. If the Moon stays in Apogee forever, the world goes white and still. And if the Court pulls the Moon on the same night the Order pulls the Sun, the Twilight Line is caught in the middle.

She didn't tell her about the hands on each other's chests. Not that.

She told her about the Echoes. That they were trapped souls. That the Astrolabe was a door. That no one knew where the ones the Court devoured went.

The nine Weavers listened in silence, hand in hand, behind their masks. The Queen listened standing in the middle of the water, without moving, without interrupting. And when Nyra finished, Morwen was quiet for so long that Nyra thought she wasn't going to answer.

Then she said:

"The Clockmakers." And there was something in her voice Nyra had never heard: a kind of tenderness. "I thought they were all dead."

"One is left."

"Halvar." The Queen said the name slowly. "I knew him. Sixty years ago he was a tall, awkward boy who came to Nocturna to buy glass lenses and haggled over the price like a fishmonger." A pause. "He was right about many things. At the time, I didn't want to listen."

"Then listen now," said Nyra.

Morwen looked at her. Her gray eyes were very tired.

"I'm listening. I believe you, little witch. I believe him." She opened her hands. "And it changes nothing."

Nyra felt the floor slip away from her.

"How can it change nothing?"

"Think." The Queen took a step through the water, which drew back from her feet. "You say the Order is

going to pull the Sun on the night of the full moon. That it's going to call an Apogee down onto the Line. Your golden boy is going to tell his commander the same thing you've told me. And will she listen to him?"

Nyra thought of Teo, across the campfire, saying *I couldn't even open my mouth*.

"I don't know."

"I do. I know the type. She waited a thousand years for a promise; she won't let go of it now because of an old man in spectacles." Morwen stopped in front of her. "So in one night's time, the Order is going to call the Sun. And the Sun is going to come down over the Line like fire. And if no one pulls from the other side, the fire doesn't stop at the Line, little witch. It keeps going. It reaches the shores of the Dew Sea. It reaches the islands. It reaches this city of glass that breaks when someone sneezes, and your sister."

Mira squeezed Nyra's hand.

"Then we both stop," said Nyra. "If no one pulls..."

"I don't control what the Order does. I only control what I do." The Queen's voice didn't rise. "And if I do nothing and they do everything, my people burn. If I do everything and they do everything, the Line is caught in the middle. The Line, little witch. Not Nocturna." A long pause. "I am three hundred years old and I have a city to protect. You know what I choose."

Nyra looked at her, and understood that the Queen was neither lying nor being cruel. She was doing sums, the way Nyra did with coppers in the Glass Market. And the sums came out like that.

"There are people on the Line," said Nyra. "Pilgrims. Shepherds. An old man in a tower."

"I know."

"Your Majesty knew him."

"I know." And for the first time, the Queen looked away. "That's why I'm asking you to stay. Here. In the center of the circle, tomorrow night. With your strength, with your star, the Full Night can be quick. We can pull the Moon so hard their fire won't even reach halfway across the Line. We can end this in a single night." She looked back at her. "If you don't stay, I'll do it anyway, only slower, and more people will suffer."

Nyra looked at the nine Weavers holding hands. At the spirals of sigils on the floor. At the Queen, barefoot in the water.

At her sister, beside her, in a nightgown, with frozen feet.

"No," she said.

Morwen didn't stop her from leaving. Nyra expected her to. She expected guards, ice, a threat. There was nothing. The Queen stood in the middle of the Hall of Tides, watching her go, and when Nyra reached the black curtain over the doorway, she said only:

"Your sister stays with me."

Nyra stopped.

"Not as a hostage." Morwen's voice was weary. "As protection. This tower is the safest place in Nocturna. When the Moon comes down, the ice will be strong outside. Not in here."

"And if I take her?"

"You'll take a ten-year-old child into the middle of the Twilight Line, on the night the Sun and the Moon come down on it at the same time." It wasn't a question. "You know you won't do that."

Nyra knew. She hated knowing.

She knelt by Mira, on the cold glass floor, at the door of the Hall of Tides. She put her hands on her face.

"I have to go back to the clockmaker's tower. There's something that might be done. I don't know if it'll work."

"I know," said Mira.

"You stay here. With the Queen. Until I come back."

"I know."

"You don't go out the window."

"Nyra." Mira put her hands over her sister's. Her pale eyes were very serious, the eyes of a father neither of them had known. "Go. The dead need someone to help them go. And you're the only one who doesn't eat them."

Nyra couldn't say anything. She hugged her. She stood up. And she left, without looking back, because she knew that if she looked she wouldn't be able to go. It was the second time in her life she had done that.

She reached Halvar's tower the following night, with the full moon rising.

She didn't arrive on foot. At the end of the first night on the road, she found a horse waiting for her by the side of the road, at a crossroads where Halvar's map said *don't sleep here*. It was a horse made of mist and pale light, its mane fraying into smoke, with round, empty eyes Nyra knew. When she came close, the horse lowered its head. Around its neck was a ribbon of black silk.

Nyra mounted it without a second thought. She galloped all day across the Line, with Tick scuttling sideways behind them like a bronze spider, and the mist horse didn't tire, didn't sweat, didn't stop, and when she reached the tower's hill at sunset, the horse dissolved beneath her into a cloud of frost, and the black silk ribbon fell into her hands.

Nyra put it in her pocket. She didn't understand what it meant. She understood a long time later.

Teo was at the tower door.

He was sitting on the step, crutch beside him, leg splinted, looking east. When he saw her climbing the hill, he got to his feet so fast he nearly fell.

"She didn't listen to you," said Nyra, when she got close. It wasn't a question.

"No." Teo had deep shadows under his eyes and a white acolyte's tunic over his clothes, which was so absurd that Nyra nearly laughed. "Yours didn't either."

"She listened." Nyra stopped in front of him. "She heard everything. And she believed it. And she's going to do it anyway."

Teo looked at her for a moment. Then he sat back down on the step, slowly, like an old man.

"Mine didn't believe it. And she's going to do it anyway. With twelve mirrors." He swallowed. "She wanted me in the middle."

"So did mine."

They were silent. Down below, the Twilight Line stretched out gray and silver, with its hills and small villages. There was a village at the foot of the tower, Stillrock, twenty stone houses around a well, with smoke rising from the chimneys. Nyra could see the people down there, tiny, bringing the goats in for the night.

They didn't know. No one had told them.

"Halvar?" asked Nyra.

"Up there. With Orin. They've been fixing something since I got here. They won't let me go up." Teo looked up, at the cracked glass dome on top of the tower, where a light could be seen moving. "They call it the Equinox."

Nyra sat down on the step beside him. Their shoulders touched. Neither of them moved away.

To the east, the Sun had just set. To the west, on the side of the Sea, the Moon was rising. Full. White. Enormous.

And Nyra felt the Tide shudder.

It began in the west, as she had known it would.

She felt it in her chest first: the Moon, suddenly heavier, closer, as if someone were hauling it down the sky with a rope. She felt the Tide tilt toward her. Not slowly, as on ordinary days, but in jerks, one tug and another and another, like a net full of fish being hauled in. Nine Weavers hand in hand around a hall of water. And the Queen in the middle.

The Moon in the sky shone brighter. It turned too white, too cold, a light that wasn't moonlight but something else, a light with weight. And from the western horizon, far off, where the Dew Sea lay, something began to come.

It was a mist. White, low, rolling over the hills like a slow wave. Where it passed, things turned white. The grass. The bushes. The stones. Nyra saw it catch a lone pine at the top of a distant hill and saw the pine turn white in an instant, from top to bottom, as if someone had painted it with frost, and then she heard, far, far

away, a crack: the pine splitting in two from the cold.

"Nyra," said Teo, in a strange voice. "Look east."

She looked.

To the east, where the Sun had set not long before, the sky was turning red again. Not like a sunset. Like a fire. A column of light was rising from the horizon, gold and white, thin as a lance, climbing all the way to the sky. And at the top of the column, where it touched the black sky, the sky was *tearing*: splitting open like torn cloth, and behind it there was light, sunlight, at night, seeping through the wound like blood from a vein.

"The Zenith Rite," said Teo. "The twelve mirrors."

The Tide, which was being hauled toward the Moon in jerks, was seized from the other side. Nyra felt it like a blow to the chest. The rope pulled taut. It hung still in the middle of the sky, between the Sun that shouldn't be there and the Moon that was coming down too far, pulled from both ends, vibrating.

And from the eastern horizon the fire began to come.

It was a wall. A wall of trembling air, orange and gold, rolling over the hills of the Line from the east, exactly as the white mist was rolling from the west. Where it passed, things burned. The sparse grass turned to ash. The bushes lit like torches. The stones turned red. Nyra watched it come, slow, relentless, a tide of fire the size of the horizon.

And the two tides, of fire and of ice, were coming toward each other.

And in the middle, exactly in the middle, stood the tower. And Stillrock. And twenty stone houses around a well, where people had stopped bringing in the goats and were standing, looking one way and then the other, not understanding.

"The people," said Teo.

He was already on his feet. Nyra didn't see him get up; she saw him standing, on his crutch, stumbling down the hill toward the village, shouting. She went after him. She didn't think. It was the fourth or fifth time in a few days she had done something without thinking, and she was beginning to suspect it was the only way to do the things that mattered.

They reached the village when the two tides were half a league away on either side. Teo was shouting at people to go to the tower, to the tower, the tower was stone and tall; some listened and ran up the hill, others stood still, staring at the torn sky. Nyra grabbed an old woman by the arm and pushed her onto the path. She grabbed a crying child and put it in the arms of a man running past. Tick ran circles around her, tick, tick, tick, faster and faster, as if it were panicking.

And the tides arrived.

From the west, the white mist climbed the village slope like water filling a glass. Nyra felt it in her chest before she felt it on her skin: the Moon, the hunger to keep, the cold hand wanting to grab everything and

never let go. From the east, the wall of fire reached the first houses and the turf roofs caught all at once, like straw.

And Nyra knew, suddenly, with perfect clarity, that alone she couldn't stop either one.

"Teo!"

He was ten paces away, in the middle of the street, between a house burning and a house freezing, pushing a boy onto the path to the tower. He turned. He saw her. And he saw her put her good hand on her chest, over the silver star, and reach the other, the one on the stitched arm, out toward him.

He understood. He limped to her, dropped the crutch, and put his hand on her chest. She put her hand on his.

And the stars locked together.

It was like the Crater Field, but bigger. Much bigger. The Tide, stretched across the middle of the sky like a vibrating rope, pulled by the Sun on one side and the Moon on the other, passed through them. Through the two halves of the Meridian. Teo felt the fire; Nyra felt the ice; and each felt what the other felt, at the same time, in a circle, like water running through a pipe that loops back on itself.

And for the first time since the Breaking, Nyra didn't feel the Moon's hunger. She felt something else. She felt both hungers, the one to keep and the one to burn, cancel each other out in the middle of her chest, like two waves that meet and go flat.

"Now," she said.

Teo took a sigil from his belt. He didn't look at it. He raised it, and Nyra felt him pull, pull through her, and out of the sigil came a golden figure. Not a squire. A warden: a tall woman in armor, with an enormous shield and spikes of light on her shoulders. She landed in the middle of the street, facing the fire, and grew. She grew until she was as tall as the houses, as tall as the tower, and raised her shield, and the wall of fire struck the shield and *stopped*.

Nyra raised her empty hand toward the west. She didn't need a sigil; she never had. She pulled, through Teo, and the white mist climbing the slope stopped too. Not because she froze it. Because she *held* it. The way you hold a lantern. The way you hold dew inside glass.

And for an instant, Stillrock hung suspended between fire and ice, held by two kids with their hands on each other's chests in the middle of a street.

But only for an instant. Nyra could feel it: the Tide was being pulled too hard. Nine Weavers and a Queen on one side. Twelve mirrors and twelve priests on the other. The rope was going to snap again. And this time there was no Circle to contain the snapping.

"We can't hold it," said Teo, through his teeth. The golden warden was cracking, her shield turning transparent at the edges.

"I know."

"Nyra..."

And then the tower woke.

Nyra heard it before she saw it. A sound she had never heard and recognized at once, because it was the sound that had been missing since she first walked into that tower: tick-tock. But not small, like Tick's. Enormous. A tick-tock the size of a mountain, deep, slow, like a heart of stone starting to beat again. *Thum. Thum. Thum.*

She looked up. High above, on top of the hill, the tower's cracked glass dome was glowing. Not with golden light, nor silver. With a gray and violet light, the light of twilight, the light of a thousand years of Equinox. The crooked windows lit one by one, from bottom to top, as the gears inside began to turn again.

And from the dome came a beam. Not upward; sideways. A beam of violet light, broad, that opened like a fan over the Twilight Line, east and west at once, and touched the Tide.

Nyra felt it in her chest like a hand seizing the rope by the middle.

The Equinox.

The rope, which was being pulled from both ends, was seized in the middle and *pulled down*. To the center. To zero. The Tide shuddered, resisted, vibrated, and Nyra heard, high up, in the tower, a scream. She didn't know whose.

It wasn't enough. She could feel it. The Equinox held the rope by the middle, but the two ends kept pulling, and the rope was going to snap anyway, only now it would snap in the middle, at the tower, at the old man.

And then Orin did something.

Nyra never knew exactly what. Later, Orin would only tell her that he had *turned a key he shouldn't have turned*, and nothing more. But she felt it. She felt the Tide, suddenly, *turn over*. Like a glove turned inside out. The pull of the Sun, which had been coming from the east, was suddenly coming from the west. The pull of the Moon, which had been coming from the west, was suddenly coming from the east. And the two, as they changed sides, passed through each other.

And cancelled out.

In the street of Stillrock, the wall of fire and the white mist met.

There was no explosion. There was a sound like red-hot iron plunged into water, but the size of the world: an enormous hiss, long, that filled the night from one side of the horizon to the other. And there was fog. A warm, white, thick fog that rose from the place where the fire and the ice had touched and spread over the Twilight Line like spilled milk, and covered everything, the village and the tower and the hills, until there was nothing to see but white.

The golden warden came apart. Teo's hand fell from Nyra's chest. Nyra fell to her knees in the street, in the warm mud, and Teo fell beside her.

And on his chest, through his shirt, Nyra saw the golden star.

It had a crack. A thin dark line running across it from side to side, like glass someone has struck with a hammer.

"Teo..."

His eyes were open. He was looking up, at the fog, with an expression of wonder, as if he had just seen the most beautiful thing in the world and wanted to tell someone about it.

"It's raining," he said.

And it was. From the warm fog above Stillrock, a fine rain began to fall, lukewarm, coming from neither side of the sky, and it washed their faces.

14 · What Remains

Teo

By morning, the Twilight Line had three colors.

Teo saw them from the top of the tower, leaning against the cracked dome, his leg stretched out on a stool and one of Halvar's blankets around his shoulders. The fog had lifted with the Sun, which rose pale in the west, as it always did now, and beneath the fog lay what the night had left behind.

To the east, the Line was black. A strip of scorched earth that began half a league from the tower and stretched to the horizon, as far as the eye could see, all the way to the hills of Highstone. The hills were black. The bushes were stumps of charcoal. Threads of smoke rose here and there, thin and straight in the still air, like candles left burning in a church after everyone has gone.

To the west, the Line was white. A strip of ice the same size, starting half a league away on the other side, out to the horizon of the Dew Sea. The hills were white. The trees were glass sculptures, shattered to pieces. There was a lake in the distance that hadn't existed the day before, smooth and white as a clouded mirror.

And in the middle, around the tower, in a ring of perhaps half a league on each side, the Line was green.

Teo had never seen the Line green. No one had. It was a land of gray stone and sparse grass, even after the Breaking. But the warm rain of the night, the rain that fell from the fog where fire and ice had met, had done something. The grass stood tall and alive. There were flowers on the bushes, small violet flowers, of a color that was neither gold nor silver. And on the hillside around Stillrock, the villagers were walking through the green with their hands held out, touching the leaves, as if they couldn't believe it.

"A perfect ring," said Halvar, behind him. "Exactly the size of the Equinox's reach. Not a hand's width more."

Teo turned. The old man was sitting in a wheelchair Orin had built for him before dawn out of two cogwheels and a workshop stool. His right hand was wrapped in bandages up to the elbow. And he had changed.

Teo couldn't say exactly how. It was the same old man with the yellowed beard and thick spectacles. But he looked older. More stooped, whiter, smaller, as if the night had taken something out of him and his clothes had been left too big.

"The Equinox," said Teo. "What did it cost?"

Halvar didn't answer right away. He looked out, at the green ring.

"Time," he said at last. "The Clockmakers knew. That's why they never used it. To pull the sky to the middle, you have to give it something. And a clockmaker has only one thing to give." He shrugged, and his right shoulder, the one with the bandaged hand, barely moved. "I don't know how many years. Some. Not many, I hope. I have work to do."

"Master..."

"Don't call me master, boy, I haven't taught you anything." Halvar pushed the chair forward with his good hand and stopped beside him, looking at the pale Sun. "And you? Show me that."

Teo hesitated. Then he opened his shirt.

The golden star was there, in the middle of his chest, pulsing. And the crack was there too: a thin dark line running across it from side to side. That morning, when he woke, Teo had tried to pull on the Sun, just a thread, just to see, and had felt the light come in and leak out through the crack like water through a holed bucket. He had managed to light a spark. One.

Halvar leaned in, his spectacles almost touching the star, looking at it the way he looked at a broken gear.

"A crack can't be glued," he said. "Not with what I have. Maybe with what the Ancients had."

"I can pull very little, on my own."

"On your own, yes." Halvar straightened up and looked at him over his spectacles, and there was something in those small blue eyes that might have been mischief or tenderness. "But you're not on your own, are you?"

Teo didn't answer. He closed his shirt.

Six people died in Stillrock that night. Six, out of two hundred. Halvar said it was a miracle, and Teo understood that it was true and couldn't feel that it was.

An old shepherd who wouldn't leave his goats. A woman who went back for a cat. Two brothers who were on top of the eastern hill when the fire came. A girl caught by the white mist halfway up the path to the tower. A man whose heart simply stopped when he saw the sky tear open.

They buried them at the end of the afternoon, in the new green, by the well. Teo helped dig, on his crutch, until Orin took the shovel out of his hands. Nyra stood beside the graves, arm in its sling, saying nothing. The villagers sang a song Teo didn't know, a song of the Line, slow, with words that seemed to come from a language older than either of the two he knew.

And when the Sun set in the east and the Moon rose in the west, the six got up.

Not from their graves. From the place where they had died. The old shepherd appeared on top of the eastern hill, in the middle of the black earth, standing among the burned bones of his goats. The two brothers appeared beside him. The girl appeared halfway up the path to the tower, at the spot where the mist had caught her, made of pale light, looking around. The others appeared where they had fallen.

The villagers saw them. Some screamed. A woman fell to her knees. A man picked up a stone.

"No," said Nyra.

She didn't say it loudly. But everyone heard her, and the man dropped the stone.

She crossed the new green to the path to the tower, where the girl of light stood. Teo followed her, limping.

The girl was young, fifteen or sixteen, her hair pulled back in a braid like Nyra's. She stood on the path, looking at the tower, with a lost expression. Like all of them.

Nyra stopped in front of her. She didn't touch her. She put her good hand on her chest, over the silver star.

"What's your name?" she asked, very quietly.

The Echo didn't answer. But it tilted its head.

"Her name was Lia," said a voice behind them. It was a woman from the village, red-eyed. "My daughter. Her name was Lia."

"Lia," Nyra said to the Echo. And the Echo looked at her.

Teo saw it happen. He saw the pupilless eyes of light settle on Nyra, on her star, and stay there. And he saw the Echo grow *calmer*. He didn't know how he could see it; nothing changed. But the lost expression, that endless searching, stopped. Like someone who had been wandering in circles in a dark room and suddenly sees a candle.

"I don't know where you can go," Nyra said to the Echo. Her voice was shaking. "The door is broken. But we're going to fix it. I promise. And when it's fixed, you'll be able to go. Until then, your mother is here. You can stay with her."

Lia's Echo looked at Nyra for a long time. Then it turned, slowly, and looked at its mother. And the mother held out her hands, without touching, and the Echo stayed there, beside her, head tilted.

Nyra turned and went back to the tower without looking at anyone. Teo followed her. He found her sitting on the doorstep, her face in her hands.

He sat down beside her. He didn't say anything. He had learned that from Sera.

"I promised something I don't know how to keep," she said, through her fingers.

"I know."

"My mother. Lia. Your friend's brother. All the dead, from Nocturna and Auren and the Line. I promised them a door." She took her hands from her face. Her eyes were dry. "I don't even know where the other eleven Shards are."

Teo looked at the new green, in the moonlight. At Lia's Echo, standing beside her mother by the well.

"Then we'll go and look for them," he said.

The news came from two directions, like everything in those days.

The first came on a wing of mist. A white owl, made of pale light, that landed on the sill of the workshop window on the second day and sat looking at Nyra with round, empty eyes. Nyra held out her hand. The owl opened its beak and spoke in a woman's voice, deep and calm, a voice Teo had heard before in the camp at Highstone.

"Little witch. The harbor of Nocturna is frozen to the bottom. There are boats caught in the ice like flies in

amber. The city is alive. Your sister is alive and asks for you every hour and has already tried to climb out the window twice."

Nyra let out something between a sob and a laugh.

"The Moon came down less than I wanted. Someone held it, halfway across the Line. Someone held it and someone turned it inside out. I can imagine who." A pause, and the owl tilted its head exactly like its mistress. "Tell Halvar he still haggles like a fishmonger. And tell him he was right. Don't tell him I said so."

The owl dissolved into a dust of frost. Nyra stared at the empty sill for a long time. Then she took a black silk ribbon from her pocket and stared at that too.

"What's that?" asked Teo.

"The horse that brought me," said Nyra. "It was hers."

The second piece of news came on foot, on the third day, with a Pilgrim fleeing west with his family and a cart full of goats. He stopped in Stillrock to water the animals and told them what he had seen on the other side of the black strip.

The Order of Dawn was celebrating. The Zenith Rite had worked, the knights said: the Sun had come down to earth at their asking, and had burned the shadow off the Line, and had stopped the Night halfway. Commander Aelis had burned both her hands holding the central mirror of the Rite, when the Weaver who should have been there wasn't, and she wouldn't let anyone treat them. She said they were the mark of the Sun. She said she would do it again, stronger, when she was ready.

And she said something else. The Pilgrim glanced sideways at Teo as he told this part, at the golden star on his chest, and lowered his voice.

"She says the Weaver of Dawn was taken by the shadow. That a witch of the Night bewitched him and carried him off to the Line. That whoever finds him must bring him back to Auren to be purified." He swallowed. "There's a reward."

Teo said nothing. He couldn't.

He thought of Aelis, with burned hands, holding a mirror alone in the middle of twelve stakes. Weeping with joy. He thought of her hand on his shoulder, on the first day, in the courtyard of the Cloister. *One day it will wake. And when it wakes, it will need someone to serve it.*

He thought of Sera, with a lantern on top of a hill.

"Are you all right?" asked Nyra, later, when the Pilgrim had gone.

"I can't go home," said Teo.

Nyra was quiet for a moment.

"I can," she said. "But I don't want to. Not while my Queen is busy doing sums."

"Then we're both homeless."

"We have a tower." Nyra looked up, at the half-finished beacon. "A stopped tower with a grumpy

clockmaker and a Pilgrim who won't say what he did." A pause. "It's no worse than a palace without doors."

Teo laughed, and it hurt his chest, the crack, and he laughed anyway.

On the third night, Halvar called them up to the dome.

The tower's gears were turning again. They hadn't stopped since the night of the Equinox: the enormous tick-tock, *thum, thum, thum*, filled the tower from top to bottom like a heartbeat, and Teo could no longer imagine what the old silence had been like. In the cracked dome, Orin had patched the glass with lead and cloth. And in the middle, the broken model of the sky had changed.

The twelve rings were still broken. But they no longer hung at random. They had turned. Every piece of ring, every sliver of bronze held by copper wire, had rotated slightly, and pointed somewhere. Teo followed the lines with his eyes. They pointed outward, at the dome, at the windows, at the Line and beyond it, in twelve different directions.

"When the Equinox pulled the Tide to the middle," said Halvar, in his wheelchair, his bandaged hand in his lap, "it pulled everything connected to it. Including the Shards. For an instant, all twelve were linked to the tower at once. And the model... remembered."

"They point to where they are," said Nyra.

"Roughly." Halvar raised his good hand and pointed at one of the rings, the lowest, which was turned out toward the south-west window. "This one, for instance. It's the closest. Five days from here, to the south, between the Line and the lands of the Night." He looked at them over his spectacles. "In a place people call the Vale of Echoes."

Teo felt a shiver.

The Vale of Echoes. *Where the dead go*, Mira had told Nyra, or so Nyra said. *The Gravedigger says that in the Vale the dead hang in the air like mist*. And Sera, kneeling in a tent, with a lantern: *If you find the place where the Echoes go, tell me*.

"Then that's where we're going," said Nyra.

"When?" asked Orin. He was leaning against the wall, as always, arms crossed.

"When his leg can take it." Nyra pointed her chin at Teo. "And when my arm stops looking like a sausage."

"Three days," said Halvar. "Four, perhaps. I'll stay. Someone has to keep this thing wound." He tapped the arm of the chair. "And you, Orin? Are you going with them?"

Orin didn't answer right away. He looked at the model, at the twelve turned rings, at the ring for the Vale of Echoes. Teo saw something pass across his face that he had seen before, at the tower door, when Orin had stopped halfway up the hill, unable to go on.

"I'm going," he said at last.

Halvar looked at him for a long time. Then he nodded, slowly, once.

"Good. Someone has to stop them from dying in some stupid way."

That night, Teo couldn't sleep.

He climbed to the dome alone, slowly, his crutch striking the iron steps in time with the tower's tick-tock. He sat on the floor, leaning against the pedestal of the model, his head against the cold iron, looking at the sky through the patched glass.

The Moon was waning. It wasn't full anymore; a shadow was eating away one side, like a bitten coin. The stars were everywhere. And the river of light of the Tide ran between the Moon and the hidden Sun, faint, swaying slowly, like breathing.

Teo put his hand on his chest. He felt the crack. He felt the Sun, far below, on the other side of the world, warm and patient and hungry. And he felt, somewhere in the tower, in a room below, a silver star beating in time with his own.

One, two. One, two.

He didn't know what was going to happen. He didn't know if the Commander would call the Sun again, or if the Queen would call the Moon again, or if eleven Shards scattered across Lumen would let themselves be found by two kids, a Pilgrim and an automaton with hiccups. He didn't know if the crack in his chest would grow. He didn't know if he would ever see Sera again.

He knew one thing. He had sworn, on the last twilight of the world, to stand between the shadow and those it wanted to take. And for the first time he understood that the shadow wasn't the Night. Nor the Sun. It was something else. It was what happened when someone was so certain they were right that they stopped seeing the people in the middle.

He sat there until the Moon set in the east. Then he went down, and slept, and dreamed of nothing.

15 · Chronicle III

Orin

From the Pilgrim's chronicles.

The kids asked me what I did that night, at the top of the tower, and I told them I turned a key I shouldn't have turned. It's true. An honest chronicler, however, ought to add that it was the second time.

I'll try.

At the top of Halvar's Tower, beneath the model of the sky, there is a bronze box the size of a fist, bolted to the pedestal, with a lock. The Clockmakers called it *the Reverse*. Halvar showed it to me when I was fourteen and told me that if I ever opened it, he would break my fingers one by one. I believed him. Halvar never broke anyone's fingers, but he had a way of saying things that made you believe him.

The Reverse does one simple thing. It turns the sky inside out. Not the Sun or the Moon; the bond between them. What pulled one way pulls the other, for an instant, like a glove turned inside out. The Ancients built it, the books say, to correct the Astrolabe when it fell out of balance: if the sky leaned too far to one side, you turned the key, and the imbalance traded places with the balance, and the Astrolabe returned to the middle.

But there is something the books say in small print, in a note in the margin, in a language that took me three years to learn to read. That the Reverse doesn't only turn the sky on the inside. It turns the wall as well.

I can't explain it better. The note says *the wall*. The Astrolabe held the Sun and the Moon against each other, and to do that it had to lean on something, the way a ladder leans on a wall. And the wall was the whole sky, the dome of the world, the skin that separates Vesper from whatever lies beyond it. When you turn the Reverse, that skin turns too. For an instant. And for that instant, the inside is looking at the outside.

And the outside is looking in.

Ten years ago, I was twenty and thought I was cleverer than my master.

I thought the Equinox was a coward's decision. That the Ancients had stopped the sky out of fear and that we, the Clockmakers, were the guards of a prison. I thought the world deserved to move. That the forests deserved to be green and people deserved mornings. And I thought, because I was twenty and had read too many books, that if I turned the Reverse at the right moment, with the Astrolabe at exactly the right point, the sky could *come loose*. Slowly. Without breaking anything. That it could teach the Sun and the Moon to walk again, to take turns, as in the old books, without the spring snapping.

I did the sums for a year. On wax tablets, at night, while Halvar slept. They had more digits than I had fingers. They were right, or so I believed.

One night of thin mist, I climbed to the dome with a lockpick I had made from a clock spring, and I opened the bronze box, and I turned the key.

Nothing happened. That's what I thought, in the first instant. The model of the sky stayed still. The sky outside stayed still. Nothing came loose, nothing moved, nothing bloomed. And I stood there by the open box, lockpick in hand, feeling like an idiot.

And then I heard the click.

Small. Almost nothing. A sound of metal giving way, far, far above, so far it could have been my imagination. And I felt something I had never felt and can only describe like this: a cold that wasn't cold, because it came from nowhere. A draft coming in through a door I hadn't known existed. I felt, for an instant, that something enormous, very far away, on the other side of the sky's skin, had *noticed* me.

It had no eyes. It had no shape. It had no hunger, because hunger is wanting something, and that thing didn't want: it was only absence, a hole in the shape of a mouth. But it noticed. And, for the instant the skin was turned, it came closer.

I turned the key back. My hand was shaking so badly it took me three tries. I closed the box. I went down the spiral stair and past the door of Halvar's room, where he was snoring, and out of the tower, and I started walking.

I walked for ten years. And for ten years I told myself the click had been nothing.

The Astrolabe broke ten years later, in the thousandth year of the Equinox, on the night two kids swore their oaths and caught stars.

I don't know if it was because of me. I wish I could write that it wasn't; a chronicler has a right to hope too. But I know this: a spring that has held for a thousand years can break from fatigue. Or it can break because someone, once, let it give a hair's breadth, and the give grew for ten years, slowly, like a crack in a glass, until the glass broke.

And I know something else. On the night of the Breaking, sitting in my scorched yard, feeling the Tide for the first time, I also felt that cold draft. That absence. Stronger than ten years before. Closer.

And three nights ago, when I turned the key a second time to save two kids in the middle of a village, I felt it again.

Much closer.

The kids don't know. Halvar suspects; I saw him look at the bronze box the next morning, and then at me, and he said nothing, which is Halvar's way of saying the worst things. But the kids don't know. They think I'm a calm, somewhat sad Pilgrim who knows a lot about clocks. The girl distrusts me on principle; the boy trusts me because he trusts everyone, a flaw I hope he loses slowly rather than quickly.

In three days we leave for the Vale of Echoes to look for the second Shard. I'm going with them. I told

Halvar it was to stop them from dying in some stupid way, and that's true. It's also true that I'm afraid of what we'll find there. Because the Vale of Echoes is the place in Lumen with the most trapped souls. And if that thing on the other side of the skin hungers for anything, if an absence can hunger, it is for things left stuck halfway.

I should tell them. I know I should. A chronicler who hides the most important chapter isn't a chronicler, he's a coward with ink.

But not yet.

Not yet, because I don't yet know how you tell two people who trust you that the door through which the end of the world came in was opened by you. Not yet, because the girl promised the dead a door and I don't know if I can tell her that the only door I know doesn't lead where she wants. Not yet, because I'm too old to be brave and too young to be wise.

Not yet.

I write this by candlelight, in the workshop, with the tower's tick-tock beating above me like a heart that has started again. Outside, the Moon is waning. And somewhere, very far away, on the other side of the sky's skin, there is a thing without eyes that remembers me.

16 · Vale of Echoes

Bram

The New Moon Gravedigger counted the dead every night, and every night there were more missing.

He did it at the hour the Moon rose, because that was the hour they got up. He would leave his hut with the moss lantern and the shovel over his shoulder, not because he meant to dig, but because the shovel was the only thing that sat right in his hands, and he would go down the stone path to the bottom of the Vale. And down there, among the graves, he counted.

The Vale of Echoes was deep and narrow, a wound in the earth between the last hills of the Line and the first moors of the lands of the Night. No one knew who had dug the first graves. They were older than the Court, older than the Order, perhaps older than the Equinox. Gray stones, worn, nameless, scattered across the slopes like teeth. For a thousand years, the people of the Line and the moors had brought there the dead they had nowhere else to put. The drowned with no family. The travelers with no name. The poor. And there was always a gravedigger to receive them, and the gravedigger was always called the New Moon Gravedigger, because the Vale was so deep that the only light that reached the bottom was on moonless nights, when the stars came all the way down.

Bram had been gravedigger for forty years. Before him it had been his father, and before his father his grandfather. He was sixty-eight, with a back bent from digging and a white beard that reached his chest. He talked to himself. He talked to the graves. The people of the moors thought he was mad, and he thought they were right, and he didn't mind.

Since the Breaking, he no longer talked to himself.

On the first night after the sky woke, when the Moon rose full over the Vale for the first time in a thousand years and its light came all the way down, the dead got up.

Bram was there. He saw them rise from the graves like steam from a pot: threads of luminous mist that took shape, shoulders, heads, hands. Hundreds. Thousands, perhaps. All the dead of a thousand years of the Vale, standing among the gray stones, looking around with pupilless eyes of light.

Bram had fallen to his knees and wept. Not from fear. From relief. For forty years he had talked to the graves without knowing whether anyone heard him. And now here they were.

They didn't answer. Bram understood that on the first night. But they listened, or seemed to: when he said a name, they turned their heads; when he told them a story, they tilted them. And Bram, who knew the names of almost all of them because he had written them in a thick leather-bound book for forty years, began to tell them their names. One by one. Night after night. *You are Talio, the fisherman, you came in a winter of mist with your nets still in your hands. You are Marta of the Goats. You are the nameless boy who came from the moor, and I called you Sparrow because you were small.*

And the Echoes, when they heard their names, grew calmer. They stayed in the same place, near their graves, instead of wandering lost across the slopes. It was as if the name were an anchor.

Then the others began to arrive.

They came from outside. In the nights after the Breaking, Bram began to see Echoes he didn't know. They came down the slopes of the Vale from the east and the west, slowly, like leaves carried by the wind, and hung among the graves as if they had come home. People who weren't buried there. People Bram had never seen.

An old woman with a spindle in her hands, who came from the west, from the islands. A soldier in ancient armor. A burned man in a merchant's tunic, who came from the east. A woman in a baker's apron. Dozens. Hundreds. They arrived every night, more and more, and Bram didn't know their names, and they wandered lost across the slopes, with no anchor.

It took him some time to understand where they came from. He understood when a traveler came through the moors, fleeing the Line, and told him that in Auren the priests of the Sun undid the dead with light every morning. And that in Nocturna the nobles of the Court devoured them.

Bram was silent for a long time after the traveler left. Then he went down into the Vale and looked at the Echoes who came from the east: the burned merchant, the baker, a horse with a mane of pale fire that galloped in slow circles at the bottom of the Vale. And he understood that the priests of the Sun didn't undo them. They only pushed them. Away from the light. And they came here, to the deepest, darkest place in Lumen, like water seeking the lowest ground.

There was a boy.

Bram noticed him on the tenth night. He was young, fourteen or fifteen, made of pale light, his tunic half burned on one side. He had come from the east with the others, but he didn't wander like them. He climbed the graves. The tallest stones, the granite teeth that rose from the slopes, and he would stand up there, on top, arms spread, looking at the sky. And then he would sit, his legs swinging over the stone, like someone sitting on a rooftop.

Bram didn't know his name. He called him *the rooftop boy*. And the boy, when he heard it, turned his head toward him and tilted it to one side, like someone thinking up something cheeky to say.

They began to disappear on the twentieth night.

Bram noticed Sparrow first. The nameless boy from the moor, the smallest of them all, who always stayed by his grave on the north slope, looking at the stars. That night, when Bram passed with the lantern and said *good night, Sparrow*, the grave was alone.

He searched the whole Vale for him. He said his name a hundred times. He didn't appear.

The next night three were missing. The night after, nine. Bram began to count. Every night, at the hour the Moon rose, he went down into the Vale with the thick leather-bound book and counted the Echoes of the

dead he knew, and crossed out the ones who were missing. The outsiders, the ones who came from the east and the west, he couldn't count; there were too many and they moved about. But his own, the ones from a thousand years of the Vale, he knew them all. And every night there were more missing.

It wasn't the Moon. The Moon set and the Echoes sank back into the graves and returned the next night; it had always been so. The ones who were missing didn't come back. It was as if something had taken them.

Bram spent three nights without sleeping, lantern lit, sitting on a grave in the middle of the Vale, waiting.

On the third night, he saw it.

It was at the bottom of the Vale. At the very deepest place, where the slopes came together into a narrow throat of stone and the moonlight barely reached. Bram never went down there. His grandfather had told him that at the bottom of the bottom there was a crypt older than the graves, older than everything, and that no gravedigger should ever enter it. Bram never had.

On the night of the Breaking, something had fallen from the sky down there. Bram had seen it: a streak of gold and silver light that crossed the sky and came straight down into the stone throat, without making any sound, like a star lying down to sleep. Since then, at night, a faint glow came from the bottom, between the stones. Bram hadn't gone to look. He was afraid.

Now, by the light of that glow, he saw the thing.

He didn't see it well. It was hard to see. It was like looking at a place where there was nothing: the eyes slid off it, searched for an outline and didn't find one. It was dark. Not dark like the night, which has stars, nor like a shadow, which has the shape of something. Dark like the lack of everything. It was the size of a big man, or a bear, or of nothing; it kept changing. And around it, very faint, there was an outline of green light, sickly, like the glow of rotting moonmoss, which was the only way to tell where it ended and the world began.

It had no stars. Bram thought that and didn't know why. He looked at it and thought *that thing has no stars*, as if everyone and everything in the world had stars and only that thing did not.

Before it stood an Echo. Bram knew him: Talio, the fisherman, with his nets of mist in his hands. He stood still, looking at the thing, not fleeing. The Echoes never fled.

The thing opened.

It had no mouth. It opened the way a wound opens, down the middle, and the inside was darker still than the outside. And Talio's Echo, slowly, like a leaf sucked down a drain, was pulled into it. Bram saw him stretch, fray, turn into a thread of pale light that went into the opening and vanished. There was no sigh. There was no sound at all.

And the thing grew. A little. The green outline grew sharper.

Bram dropped the lantern.

The lantern rolled down the stone slope and broke at the bottom, and the green light of the moss spilled across the ground. And the thing turned.

It had no eyes. Bram felt it look at him anyway. He felt that eyeless gaze pass over him like a cold draft, and felt that it wasn't interested in him. He was alive. He didn't have what it wanted. He was like a stone in the road.

Then he felt its gaze pass him by and go behind him. To the slope. To the graves. To the Echoes who had gathered, without a sound, along the stones, watching.

And to a tall stone, the tallest on the slope, where a boy of pale light stood with his arms spread, looking at the sky.

Bram didn't think. He was an old man with a bent back and a shovel. He was no Weaver, he had no star in his chest, he had never in his life faced anything more dangerous than a wild boar on the moor. But he had forty years as a gravedigger, and a gravedigger knows something no one else knows: that the dead belong to whoever remembers them.

He stood up between the thing and the slope. He raised the shovel.

And in the pocket of his coat, where he kept the things he found in the Vale, he felt something grow warm. A sliver of crystal, the size of a finger, that he had found among the graves the morning after the Breaking and kept because it shone. It had a figure engraved on it. Bram had never looked at it properly. He took it out of his pocket. In the green light of the spilled moss, he saw the figure: a man with a shovel over his shoulder, a long beard, and a new moon above his head.

The sliver was shining. Silver. Like a star.

"Go away," Bram said to the thing. His voice came out hoarse, an old man's voice, trembling. "These are mine. I know their names. Go away."

The thing stood still. The green outline trembled.

And then Bram heard it. Not with his ears. He heard it inside, in the place where thoughts are heard before they become thoughts. It wasn't a voice. It was an absence of voice in the shape of words, the way the thing was an absence in the shape of a body. And it said, very slowly, like someone savoring something:

...the door...

...someone opened the door...

...and the door is still open...

Bram felt the cold climb up his legs.

...I am hungry...

...and there are so many here... so many trapped... so many halfway...

The thing opened again. Not toward him. Toward the bottom of the stone throat, where the gold and silver glow came from between the stones of the ancient crypt. Where the fallen star had lain down on the night of

the Breaking.

...and there is a piece of the clock down here...

...with a piece of the clock... I can open it wider...

Bram gripped the shovel until his knuckles ached. He gripped the crystal sliver in his other hand until it cut his palm. Behind him, on the tallest stone on the slope, the rooftop boy had lowered his arms and was looking down, at him, head tilted.

"Someone will come," said Bram, not knowing to whom. To the thing. To himself. To the dead. "Someone will come."

And high above, very high, above the Vale, above the waning Moon, in the faint river of light of the Tide that ran across the sky, a thing that had no stars looked, for the first time, outside the Vale. To the north. Toward a tower on a hill in the middle of the Line, where a clock the size of a mountain had started beating again.

...I know..., said the thing. *...they are coming...*

...and he is coming with them.

END OF BOOK I

The story continues in Book II · Dusk.

Glossary

Apogee — When the Tide reaches its extreme, the dominant body touches the world. In the Celestial Circle it is contained; on the ground, the Sun burns and the Moon freezes.

Breaking, the — The night the Astrolabe broke and the sky woke up the wrong way round.

Celestial Astrolabe — A mechanism of bronze rings and light built by the Ancients to hold the Sun and the Moon locked in eclipse. It broke in the thousandth year of the Equinox.

Celestial Circle — The Ancients' arena in orbit around Vesper, where Weavers fight without destroying the world. It is reached by way of the Meridian Pillar.

Celestial Tide — The force that seeps from the broken Astrolabe and runs across the sky between the Sun and the Moon. Every act of magic pulls it to one side.

Channel — To draw the sky into the Core, gaining strength to spend.

Core — The star in a Weaver's chest: a sliver of Shard set into the body.

Echoes — Souls trapped halfway since the Astrolabe broke. They rise by moonlight at the place where the person died.

Equinox, the — The Clockmakers' emergency mechanism, which pulls the Tide to the middle by force. It costs its user time.

Law of the Circle — A law of the Ancients: no war between Weavers may be fought on the ground while there is a Circle.

Meridian, the — The middle Shard, which linked the Sun's side to the Moon's side. Teo and Nyra carry in their chests the two slivers it lost when it fell.

Perpetual Equinox — The thousand years of stopped sky.

Projection — The idea of a creature, given a body borrowed from the sky, called forth from a sigil.

Resonance — When the sky leans toward the side a sigil comes from, the sigil answers more readily.

Reverse, the — A bronze box at the top of Halvar's Tower that turns the bond between the Sun and the Moon inside out. And, according to a note in a margin, the wall of the sky as well.

Sigil — A sliver of star crystal engraved with a figure; a door to a projection. (At the gaming tables of Vesper, they are called *cards*.)

Star Shards — The twelve great pieces of the Astrolabe that fell on Lumen in the Breaking, and the thousands of splinters that rained down with them.

Study — To read the sigils: bringing more doors into your hands instead of more strength into your chest.

Twilight Line — The strip of land between the Sun's side and the Moon's side, where the Pilgrims live.

Void, the — What lies on the other side of the sky's skin. It has no stars.

Weaver — One who carries the sky in their chest.

The cards of this book

Every character, creature and moment in this book exists as a card in **Edition 1 — Dawnbreak** of the game ECLIPTICA: the *Dawn Squire*, the *Dew Witch*, the *Twilight Pilgrim*, the *Astral Clockmaker*, the *Zenith Paladin*, the *Court Vampire*, the *New Moon Gravedigger*, the *Obsidian Golem*, the *Wandering Automaton*, the *Equinox*, the *Star Shard*, the *Echo Devourer*, and the two gods, *Solaris* and *Noctra*.