

# Prologue

*Venice, 1582*

*“Soranzo is out for your blood, Fausto.”*

*The candles in the astrologer’s study flickered as he spoke, sending light dancing over a table covered with star charts and calculations.*

*“I know, Vito,” said the man with the hooked nose and dark eyes. “You are the third friend to warn me.”*

*“I fear for your safety, Fausto. Soranzo is not a man to be toyed with. He did not become one of the most powerful men in Venice without destroying the lives of those blocking his way.”*

*“And he is also greedy.” Fausto Corvo paced back and forth as he spoke. “I fulfilled my contract with him for four new paintings. I wanted that to be the end of my dealings with the snake, but he wants others—paintings he has heard rumors about.”*

*“Enchanted paintings?”*

*Corvo came to an abrupt stop.*

*“Yes, enchanted paintings—those that by their very nature challenge all that we once understood. And I wonder,” he added, turning to stare deep into the eyes of his old friend, “who might have started such rumors.”*

*The astrologer looked at him steadily. "None of our friends would do such a thing. We are all sworn to protect the ancient knowledge—and the way you have used it to bring your artwork to life."*

*"I know that." The painter's eyes were like flint. "But there is a traitor among us who has whispered a tale to Soranzo about my work. I have my suspicions about who it is, but no proof. I am not sure I can trust anyone, Vito, not even my apprentices . . . and they are like sons to me."*

*"The enchanted paintings," asked Vito, "are they safe?"*

*"Yes, they are well hidden, but I dare not leave them for long."*

*"That is a relief," the astrologer said with a sigh. "Such enchantment is not meant for the likes of Soranzo, who would use it only to gain more power for himself at the expense of others. If he were to get hold of the paintings, who knows how he would twist your knowledge for evil means?"*

*"Rest easy, Vito. I will not allow the paintings to fall into the wrong hands, and neither will I allow that villain to learn how they were made. But his spies now watch my workshop at all times, day and night. I realize that the time has come for me to act. That is why I am here today." Corvo waved his hand over Vito's table of papers. "Have you examined the portents, as I asked?"*

*The astrologer stirred himself and held a magnifying glass over a complicated chart. "Yes, yes. The heavens will look favorably upon travel by water for the next three days. The moon is strong and will aid you. But after three days, there is major opposition from the planets. I fear the stars will then favor spies and traitors instead."*

*Corvo let out a long breath. "So be it. We must move quickly."*

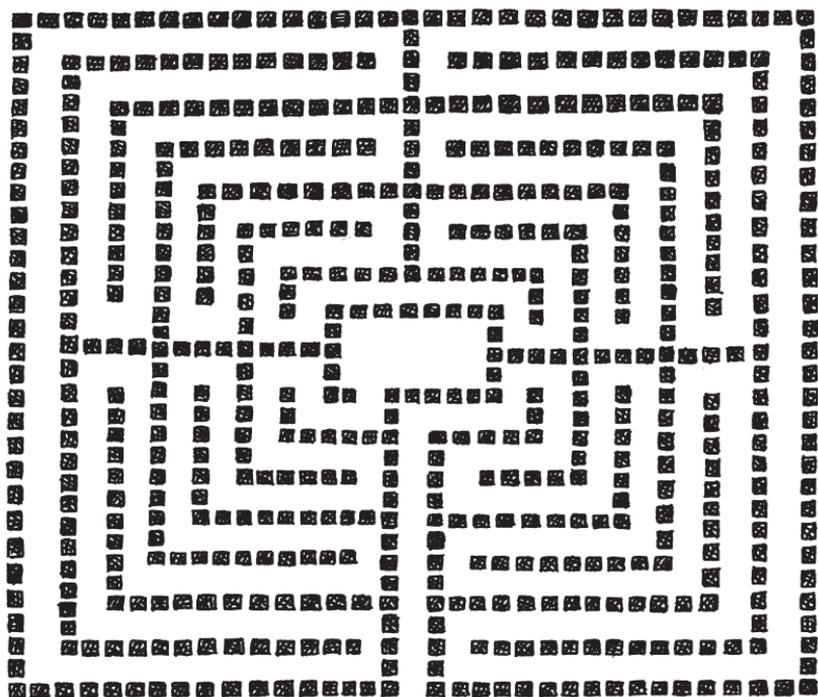
*"Do you have all your arrangements in place?" Vito asked.*

*"Yes. My apprentices and I will scatter to the four winds, though I have not yet revealed their destinations to them. We will be transported beyond Soranzo's long reach. That is all I can tell you. Vito, say good-bye to our friends for me. I will miss our discussions. But they know as well as I that my work must be protected at all costs."*

*Vito embraced the painter. "Godspeed, Fausto."*

*Corvo pulled up the collar of his cloak and smiled.*

*"Thank you, Vito." Moving quietly and swiftly, he closed the door and descended the stairs into the darkening Venice night.*



# Chapter 1

That's where they found the skeletons. Right where you're standing."

Startled, Sunni Forrest whirled around and found a lanky dark-haired boy smiling at her from a bench by the wall.

"Blaise! You scared the life out of me!" Sunni hopped away from where she had stood, in the center of a large, rectangular labyrinth picked out in black tiles on the stone floor. "Try saying hello next time."

"I'll just start over." Blaise said, looking sheepish. "Hey, Sunni, how are you?"

"Fine. Just waiting for my heart to stop pounding."

"I'm really sorry. You walked past without seeing me."

"I'll live." Sunni let out a long breath. "I came in to look at the painting and didn't notice anything else."

She nodded at the picture on the wall behind her. A medieval city, crowded with twisting lanes and buildings, sprawled across the huge canvas under a sky of robin's-egg blue. From the sailing ships moored in the foreground to the craggy hills behind the city, every inch teemed with tiny, brightly dressed figures. The plaque on the elaborate gold frame read, "Fausto Corvo, *The Mariner's Return to Arcadia*, 1582."

“I know—it’s like a magnet,” said Blaise. “Gets me every time. It had you in a trance, too, didn’t it?”

“A trance bordering on panic,” said Sunni. “I was wondering how I’ll manage to copy the whole thing into my sketchbook.”

“You just have to draw everything really small. That’s how I’m doing it, anyway,” said Blaise.

“You’re copying it, too?” A feeling of dismay crept over Sunni as she noticed the open sketchbook in his lap.

“Yep. I’m doing my project for art class on Fausto Corvo.”

That was typical. Blaise Doran would have to choose *her* artist. Sunni’s afternoon was going from bad to worse.

“But *I’m* doing Corvo for *my* project,” Sunni said. “It’s probably not allowed, two people doing the same topic.”

“No, it is. Mr. Bell said it was OK for some of the others to do the same artist,” said Blaise. “Anyway, so what if we both do Corvo? Our projects will still look totally different.”

*And yours will totally look better than mine*, Sunni thought. She pictured Blaise leaning over his drawings in their art classes, his hair falling in front of his face. Drawing, always drawing, even during break times and in the dining hall. Last year her project would have been the best, but then he had to sweep in from America. Now Blaise was always in the spotlight while she was shunted off to the wings.

Sunni dragged her shoe along the edge of a black floor tile. “But I wanted Corvo as *my* artist. I’ve loved his paintings forever. There’s no other artist I like as much.”

“Then I guess we’ve got a problem.” Blaise tapped his sketchbook with a stubby pencil. “I’m Corvo’s biggest fan.

I couldn't believe it when we moved to a town that has one of his paintings in its castle. I've been here every afternoon working on my project, so I'm not changing artists now."

"Well, I'm not changing either," said Sunni, tossing her honey-brown ponytail over her shoulder. "I'll leave you and come back another time."

She was stalking toward the door when Blaise said, "Wait a minute, Sunni. Don't get all upset." He moved over on the bench to make room for her. "There's space for both of us."

"Lucky me."

"I can show you my sketches so far. They're not that great."

"Oh, yeah, right." Sunni pulled off her school backpack and sat down beside him, unable to resist a closer look at the competition.

She looked carefully at each drawing, her spirits sagging even further when she saw how much he had already done. There was one of Blackhope Tower, the sixteenth-century castle they were in, its silvery stone walls and turrets surrounded by skeletal trees. And another sketch of the two stone lions at the gate, dusted with snow.

"You stood outside and drew these?"

Blaise nodded.

"Are you crazy? It's freezing!"

The American boy just grinned. "Fingerless gloves," he said.

The next pages in Blaise's sketchbook were crammed with drawings of armor, statues, and portraits from around Blackhope Tower. The unfinished last sketch was of the Mariner's Chamber, the room they were in. Blaise was painstakingly copying the painting and the tiled labyrinth

on the floor. He had even drawn a section of the ceiling's wooden beams, decorated with mermaids and sea monsters.

Sunni handed his sketchbook back. "You're right," she said. "You have done a lot already. More than me." She halfheartedly offered him her sketchbook in return.

She cringed inside as Blaise studied her pencil portrait of Sir Innes Blackhope, the rich sea captain who had built Blackhope Tower. It had taken her an hour to copy his stern face and the white ruff around his neck.

"It's terrible," Sunni murmured, snatching the book back.

"No, it's good," said Blaise. "As usual."

"Are you making fun of me?"

"No way. I don't get you, Sunni. You want me to say it's bad or something?"

They sat, silent and vaguely embarrassed, until Blaise began sketching again. Sunni made a tentative pencil mark on her blank page, but her eyes kept drifting over to watch him draw. She could sort of see why other girls thought he was cute. Several even went out of their way to be around him, but Sunni was most definitely not one of them. Blaise Doran already got more than enough attention from everyone else.

He caught her looking and grinned.

*Don't think I was looking at you, Blaise! I am not one of those giggly girls who always try to sit next to you in Art.* "So, what do you know about the skeletons you mentioned when I came in?" Sunni asked hastily. "Blackhope Tower's big claim to fame."

"Not much," said Blaise, sniffing the air. "Except it definitely smells like bones in here, all musty and moldy."

“Bones don’t smell.”

“They do when they have rotting flesh on them.”

“That’s disgusting!” Sunni’s short laugh echoed. “The skeletons they found didn’t have any flesh on them anyway. They were dressed up in clothes from centuries ago. They just appeared out of nowhere, right here in the middle of this room.”

“Somebody must have dug them up from the cemetery and dumped them here,” Blaise said. He scanned the windowless chamber. There was nothing else in it except the painting, the floor labyrinth, the bench they sat on, and the door. “Someone with a key to this room.”

“No, it couldn’t have happened that way. They appeared one by one over hundreds of years,” Sunni replied. Her grandmother had once told her that the skeletons were always laid out as if they were asleep—like they’d slipped from a long, deep sleep into death and all that was left was bleached bones and saggy old clothes. No one had ever even found out their names.

At this thought, a pang squeezed her heart, but she kept her voice steady so Blaise wouldn’t notice. “They found the last skeleton in the 1800s. It was a man dressed in clothes from a hundred years earlier. He was lying in the middle of the maze like the others.”

“Labyrinth,” said Blaise as he drew.

“What?” Sunni was trying to swallow the lump in her throat from thinking about Granny and lonely skeletons.

“That’s a labyrinth, not a maze. A maze has a lot of dead ends and you have to hunt for the right path to the center. A labyrinth has one path that twists and turns through

all four corners, but if you stay on it, it takes you to the center eventually.”

“Oh, right. I stand corrected,” said Sunni sarcastically.

“Sorry,” said Blaise. “But I’m kind of interested, especially since Fausto Corvo designed this one. You knew that, right?”

“Yeah. Who doesn’t?” answered Sunni.

Blaise pulled a leaflet from his back pocket and handed it to her. Its title was printed in bloodred letters: *The Blackhope Enigma*.

“I read about it in here.” He rubbed his hands together. “The enigma of the skeletons—the mystery that can’t be solved. Excellent.”

“Horrible, more like.” Sunni skimmed the leaflet. “I probably already know all this. ‘*The Mariner’s Return to Arcadia* was Sir Innes’s prized possession.’ Yeah, I knew that. ‘He wouldn’t ever let anyone take the painting down’ . . . blah, blah, blah . . . ‘Sir Innes stated in his will that nothing in this room could be changed.’” She stopped and looked up. “That’s kind of weird. It’s not like there is a lot you *could* change, unless you take out the bench and the painting and chisel the labyrinth out of the floor.”

“Maybe he just wanted to keep everything the way it was . . . to protect it.”

“Of course he wanted to protect it. It’s worth a lot of money,” said Sunni.

“Yeah, but maybe Sir Innes didn’t want to disrespect Fausto Corvo and his work. I wouldn’t want to. Corvo could do everything: paint, invent things, speak a bunch

of different languages, fight with swords, ride fast horses, write poems. . . .”

“Poems?”

“Uh, yeah.” Blaise cleared his throat. “They were all for this one lady. But her family made her marry someone else. Apparently he was pretty cut up about it.”

*I can't believe it. Blaise Doran is blushing.* Sunni suppressed an amused smile. “Really? Corvo doesn't seem like the poetry type. She must have been something special.”

“Guess so.” He suddenly slid from the bench and went up to the canvas. “You know, whenever I think I've seen everything in the painting, I catch something I missed.”

“Me too. It's going to take me at least two weeks to copy it all.”

“See this guy?” Blaise pointed to a man on one of the ships in the harbor. “Do you think that's Sir Innes Blackhope?”

Sunni shrugged. “Well, he's much bigger and better dressed than everybody else around him. Sir Innes paid for the painting, so maybe it was part of the deal that Corvo put him at the front.”

“Yeah, I think you're right.” Blaise's voice trailed off as he examined the picture, his nose practically touching its surface. “But something's really been bugging me about this painting.”

“What?”

“You know how its title is *The Mariner's Return to Arcadia*? Well, I looked up *Arcadia*, and it's supposed to be a paradise, with mythical creatures and stuff like that.”

“So?”

“Look at this. And this.” Blaise pointed to a group of ragged, shackled men being marched onto a ship and a thief stealing oranges from an old woman on crutches. “Doesn’t look like paradise to me. More like the opposite.”

Sunni crossed the chamber and peered at the place he was pointing to. “That is odd. And look there—a little girl alone, crying, and an old man lying in a gutter.”

“The painting’s title doesn’t make any sense, but Corvo got away with it anyway, so Sir Innes must have liked what he did.” Blaise’s finger moved down to the painter’s signature: the symbol of a flying raven and the date, 1582. “Corvo painted this and made the labyrinth in the same year. But pretty soon after that, he disappeared.”

“I already knew he vanished, but that’s about it.”

“This book I read said he escaped from Venice, chased by some rich guy called Soranzo. He’d bought some of Corvo’s paintings, but then something happened between them, and all of a sudden Soranzo was out to get him. Corvo was never seen again.”

“I heard something else about him,” said Sunni, another of Granny’s stories about Blackhope Tower coming to mind. *I bet you don’t know this, Blaise.* “They say that Corvo made magical paintings.”

Blaise leaped on this idea. “You’ve heard about that, too?”

“Yeah, maybe that’s another reason he had to disappear—to save his skin from people who thought he was a sorcerer.”

Before Blaise could say anything, a figure in a padded jacket and red knitted hat clomped into the Mariner’s

Chamber and planted himself between them.

Sunni grimaced. She had forgotten all about her stepbrother, Dean. “Take him with you after school. He’s been spending far too much time in front of a screen, playing those games of his,” her stepmother had said. “I’ll pick you both up at quarter to five.”

Sunni had been stuck with Dean more and more lately, as part of her stepmom’s quest to hook him on fresh air and educational pursuits. Her last good deed had been to take him to the Science Museum, where he’d hogged the interactive exhibits and trash-talked them loudly when he didn’t get the highest score. Later, in the café, he’d spilled his drink on her. At twelve years old, Dean was only two years younger than her, but to Sunni they seemed worlds apart.

She braced herself for something embarrassing to come out of his mouth now.

“You done, Sun?” Dean’s voice was like a horn blast. Then he turned to Blaise. “Who are you?”

“This is Blaise, and no, I am not done. I’ve barely started,” Sunni said.

“Huh? You’ve been up here for ages!” Dean sized Blaise up and said, “I’m Dean. She’s my stepsister,” in a man-to-man kind of way.

“Hey. Nice to meet you.”

“So, what’re you doing, supposedly?” asked Dean.

“Drawing that painting, supposedly,” said Sunni. “Why don’t you go and look around somewhere else?”

“I’ve seen it all twenty times before. Boring. I’m going to hang out here till Mom comes.”

“You’d better be quiet.”

“You won’t even know I’m here,” said Dean.

Blaise was back on the bench, scribbling in his sketchbook. Sunni sat down next to him and resumed sketching in hers.

Dean managed to be quiet for about two minutes, while he glanced over *The Mariner’s Return to Arcadia*. Then, in a mocking voice, he started reading the information card aloud.

“Dean!” Sunni hissed. “Quit it!”

“I’m helping you,” he replied, and kept reading. “‘Fausto Corvo was a prominent sixteenth-century Venetian artist’ . . . blah, blah . . . ‘This painting is a fine example of . . .’ Hey—how do you say this? C-H-I-A-R-O-S-C-U-R-O.”

“It’s ‘kee-ar-oh-skoo-roh,’” said Blaise. “Mr. Bell says it means ‘light and dark’ in Italian. Like the way artists paint highlights and shadows. See how Corvo put highlights on the people and animals to make them pop out against the dark background?”

“Don’t encourage him,” said Sunni. “You don’t care what chiaroscuro is, Dean. You’re just trying to get attention.”

“No, I’m not. I’m helping,” said Dean, strolling over to the edge of the labyrinth. “‘This painting is a fine example of kee-ar-oh-skoo-roh!’ Kee-ar-oh-skoo-roh!”

He skipped along the winding path through the first quarter of the rectangle and into the second, chanting loudly as he went. “Chiaroscuro, chiaroscuro.”

“Dean, stop it!” Sunni said. “I can’t concentrate with you doing that.”

Without pausing, Dean turned into the third corner and

then into the fourth, repeating “chiaroscuro,” now under his breath, and looking slyly at Sunni.

She glanced up from her sketch and noticed her stepbrother nearing the middle of the labyrinth, still muttering.

“You’re blocking my view, Dean!” she said, furiously erasing a line on her page. “And you’re incredibly irritating!”

There was no reply. She looked up, ready to tell him off again, but the labyrinth was empty. Dean had disappeared.

Something in the painting seemed to glow for a moment, near the center, as if a firework had exploded.

Sunni blinked and turned to Blaise. “Did you see where Dean went?”

“What do you mean? He’s right there.” Blaise looked up and stared at the place where Dean had been. “Oh.”

“He’s gone.” Sunni scanned the four corners of the room.

“He would have had to pass by us to get to the door,” Blaise said. “Maybe he snuck out.”

“It’s the sort of thing Dean would do to make me mad, but he didn’t go out that way.”

“Come on, Sunni. How the heck could he have left without going through the door?”

“Well, he was there. We both saw him. I only looked away for a split second,” Sunni said, her voice taut. “And now he’s gone. There’s nowhere to hide in here except for under this bench, and he’s not there.” Just to make sure, she bent down and peered below the seat. Then she jumped up and darted out the door.

Blaise followed as Sunni hunted through the other rooms that opened off the long corridor. There was no sign of Dean or anyone else. Blackhope Tower was almost

empty on this snowy Tuesday afternoon. At the spiral staircase that led down to the exit she called, “Dean!”

Her voice echoed in the dank air.

“This is pointless,” she said. “He didn’t leave the room. I just know it.”

“There’s no way he just disappeared.”

“He did—I know he did. Come on.” Sunni scurried back to the Mariner’s Chamber with Blaise at her heels and stopped in front of the painting, searching for the place where she had seen the explosion of light. “Help me look.”

“For what?”

“For Dean!”

“In the painting?” Blaise stared at her as if she had a screw loose. “You’ve totally lost me now.”

“I saw something flash in the painting right after he disappeared.”

“It was just an optical illusion or something. And anyway, what’s it got to do with Dean?”

“I don’t know—everything!” Sunni pulled her hair back from her face and yanked it into a tighter ponytail. “Look, are you going to help me or not, Blaise?”

“OK, whatever,” Blaise muttered, and moved closer.

Sunni located the man they assumed was Sir Innes on his ship, the *Speranza Nera*. He was resplendent in crimson, a sword dangling from under the black cape draped over his shoulders. One hand was raised before him as if to show off his magnificent ship to viewers, while the other rested on his hip. All around him, sailors hauled bundles of goods

and worked in the rigging. Ladies waved fans from the dockside as hawkers sold oranges from baskets.

Sunni followed one lane from the docks to a busy square with an ornate fountain. Each person wore a different-colored outfit, and she felt overwhelmed at the sheer number of them.

Then she thought she saw one of the splashes of color move. She was sure it had.

“Blaise, in there, around that crowd by the juggler,” she said, pointing at a man in a jester costume tossing three golden balls in the air. “Right there!”

A figure in a padded jacket and red hat stepped from the crowd and stood underneath one of the balls, staring up at it.

Sunni squinted at the minuscule boy, her heart starting to hammer in her chest as the horror of it sunk in. “Dean.”

“Whoa.” Blaise rubbed his eyes and looked back at the canvas. “Oh, man. I can’t believe this.”

As they watched, amazed, Dean moved away from the juggler toward a dim alleyway. He was half walking, half running, looking wildly around him.

“He’s so small,” said Sunni, her voice breaking. “And terrified. Like a bug that’s going to get squashed any minute. I have to get him out!”

“But how? I mean, what did—?”

“The labyrinth,” Sunni said, turning to Blaise. “That’s what took him there.”

“What do you mean?”

“That’s all Dean did. He walked around the labyrinth.”

“Loads of people do that, but they don’t vanish!” replied Blaise.

“I know,” said Sunni. “It must have been what he said while he did it.”

“Chiaroscuro.”

“And that triggered something that pulled him into Corvo’s painting.”

Blaise crouched down and touched the labyrinth’s black tiles. “They’re just pieces of stone. That painting is just a bunch of colors on a piece of cloth. How . . . ?” His voice trailed off.

“Magic.” The word flew from Sunni’s mouth like a bullet.

“You think those rumors about Corvo are true.”

“Seeing is believing.” She packed her sketchbook and drawing materials into her backpack and hauled it over her shoulders. “I’m going in after Dean.”

“That’s insane, Sunni.” Blaise threw his arms up in the air. “You might not get out again.”

“There’s a way in, so there must be a way out. Why would Corvo make a painting you can’t leave?”

“How do we know? He might have.”

“Then why make a rule that the labyrinth can never be dug out of this floor? Because it’s the way in and *out* of the painting.”

“Maybe. But you don’t have to be the one to find out, Sunni.” Blaise’s face was bone-white.

“I’m not leaving Dean in there.”

“And I’m not telling you to do that! Let’s get help. Let’s find the guards and tell them.”

“They won’t believe us. No one will. We’ll just be in

loads of trouble for losing Dean and I'll end up having to go in to get him anyway. At least if I go now, I know roughly where he is."

"Then I'm coming with you," said Blaise.

"Like I'm going to drag you into it." Sunni stepped up to the labyrinth's entrance. "This is my problem. Dean's my stepbrother, and I'm supposed to be looking after him. My stepmom will have my head if she finds out what's happened."

"But I'm part of this, too," Blaise protested.

"You have to stay behind to explain if I don't come back."

"If you don't come back?" He nodded his head in disbelief. "Is that what I'm supposed to do? Tell your parents I stood by and watched you disappear?"

Sunni wound her lavender-striped scarf around her neck and buttoned up her coat. Her heart-shaped face was pale but composed. "Look, I might find Dean and be back in five minutes. Or it might take longer. But hopefully you won't have to tell anyone. And who's going to believe you, anyway? So keep it quiet for now, huh?" She started to follow the labyrinth, murmuring "chiaroscuro" as she went.

Blaise trailed her around the perimeter as she went. "Stop it, Sunni, this is crazy!"

Sunni held one arm out to ward him away. Her heartbeat calmed as she walked along the path. At first she was aware of Blaise just behind her, begging her to stop, but then he and the rest of the Mariner's Chamber fell away. There were only the black tiles snaking around and around at her feet. As she neared the last corner, she felt sleepy in the

way she had when her mother had gently brushed her hair a long time ago.

There were distant footsteps somewhere. Sunni noted the sound and let it go. *It doesn't matter.* The weight of her body was draining away, as if she had thrown off a huge stone that was keeping her anchored. Only her feet were still grounded enough to stop her from floating away, to move her steadily and irrevocably into the labyrinth. When at last she stepped into its perfect center, her feet broke free of gravity and she was released like a leaf on a breeze.



Blaise stood frozen to the spot, staring at the dissolving girl in the center of the labyrinth. Sunni was as dreamy and still as a statue, her eyelashes fluttering slightly. She began to look vague around the edges, as if someone had thrown a gauze curtain in front of her.

Someone's footsteps in the corridor were coming closer, and Blaise looked away, momentarily distracted. In that split second, he knew he had missed his last glimpse of Sunni. He jerked his head back, but she was already gone.

A security guard looked into the Mariner's Chamber and saw a boy standing alone in the empty room.

"You OK, son? Seen a ghost?" he asked.

Blaise shook himself and answered, "No, I'm all right."

"Then make your way down to the exit please. It's closing time."

The guard left, whistling down the corridor.

Blaise moved close to the painting, his head reeling. He

had noticed the burst of twinkling lights there after Sunni vanished. *The way her body melted into nothing*, he thought, bewildered. *How could someone ever come back from that?*

The chamber walls seemed to be closing in on him, the idiot who let her go and stayed behind himself. If only he could run his hands over the painting's surface and somehow pluck her out, chisel her out if he had to. But she was embedded in there now. Blaise's eyes raced over the area where he had seen the lights. There were hundreds of little people and no time to search.

A distant voice called, "Son, come on. I have to close this floor."

Blaise wanted to pound the walls and shout for the guard to give him just fifteen more minutes. But he knew the man would say no and tell him to come back tomorrow.

*Come back tomorrow. That's all I can do.* He shoved his sketchbook and pencils into his bag and left the Mariner's Chamber, barely managing to mutter "Thanks" as he passed the guard and flew down the spiral staircase.

Another guard on the ground floor ushered Blaise outside and locked Blackhope Tower's main door. The wintry night air hit him like a hard slap.

He trudged along the winding driveway, snow crunching underfoot. The only other person in the parking lot was a woman sitting in a car, its engine thrumming, but Blaise was so preoccupied that he didn't even notice her.

The woman glanced at him as he went by, then continued to watch the main door for a sign of her son, Dean, and stepdaughter, Sunni.

## Chapter 2

Sunni was aware of someone standing over her. Her eyes fluttered open to find she was lying on the ground. A palm holding a few coins was thrust under her nose. The woman whose hand it was stared at her from under an elaborate hairstyle, woven through with pearls. Sunni cried out and pushed the hand away, but the woman did not blink or flinch.

Sunni glanced down at a bundle of rags beside her and realized to her horror that it was a person's legs; one knee jutting out sharply, the other just a stump wrapped in filthy cloth strips. Her heart thumped double time, sending bolts of fear shooting along her spine. She rolled away and scrambled to her feet, ready to sprint.

The richly dressed woman was bending down to offer coins to a one-legged beggar. His face was grimy but smiling at the lady. Neither had moved.

Sunni hugged herself and felt the familiar density of flesh and muscle under her skin. *I've seen these people before—in the painting. And now I'm in it, too.* The weightless, dreamy feeling she had experienced on the labyrinth had gone. Her feet were firmly rooted to the ground, and there was no way to fly off.

The medieval buildings in the small square where she

stood were bathed in a slanting lemony light. The air smelled of nothing. Not sea, nor smoke, nor food.

There was no sound. Not a rustle or hum or breath except for her own.

“Dean!” Sunni screamed to crack open the deadness of the place. It was as if she were shouting into a cupboard. No echo, no response. “Dean, Dean! It’s me!”

She shouted his name until she doubled over, coughing. Where was he? How far could he have gone? Had he even heard her?

Slowly Sunni walked back to the woman and the beggar. She touched the lady’s stiff dress. Then she gingerly touched her hand. Not exactly waxy, not exactly cold. Just not alive.

Sunni moved through the square, around a pack of young men with fixed laughing mouths and some toothless old ladies soundlessly shouting at street urchins. She hunted for something, anything that looked like a way out. But there was nothing.

She shivered. Although there was no breeze, there was also no heat from a real sun. She spoke out loud just to hear something. “Dean! How are we ever going to get out?”

*Get a grip, girl.* She stopped and faced a church with a tall spire. *Did I draw that earlier?*

She pulled her sketchbook out and found her rough sketch of the painting. If she had had time to finish copying it, she would have had a sort of map of the painting to follow, but she had hardly drawn anything of importance. At least she had marked out the church spire. Its tip pointed her gaze in the direction of something even

more interesting: the castle on a hill overlooking the city. That must be the highest place in “Arcadia.” She flung her backpack over her shoulder and set off toward the hill.



Dean sat curled up in a dark corner of a deserted alley and looked at his watch. Three thirty a.m. He had been wandering around for hours and hours. But it was still bright sunshine here. The shadows hadn't moved. Nor had anything else.

He rubbed his swollen eyes, feeling slightly calmer inside now. Not like when he'd first woken up and found himself lying on a road in this place, whatever it was. He'd thought he must have been dreaming and had punched himself in the arm. It had hurt. This was no dream.

He'd ventured over to see the golden juggling balls suspended in the air. He didn't know why, but he could stand underneath them and they didn't fall on him. He had looked around the crowd of people staring at the juggler, some with mouths hanging open, some pointing. Only the ones at the front had complete faces.

Dean felt sick at the horrible memory. The people near the back had shadow eyes, no noses and their mouths were just a stroke of red.

He had run away, panicked. Everywhere figures were planted like statues.

He had yelled for his mom and been answered by silence. Hurling himself through the streets, he had fallen over a mangy dog and tripped into a wall. He had finally dragged

himself into this empty alley and hidden himself in a corner.

His stomach rumbled. He had taken a bit of bread from a baker's basket, but it felt odd and he decided not to try it. The same thing had happened with an orange he'd picked up. He'd tried peeling it, but it was as solid as if it had been carved from wood. If everything here was like this, he was going to starve to death.

Dean wished he were back in Blackhope Tower with Sunni, before he'd walked around those tiles in the floor and begun to feel dizzy. The last thing he'd seen before his vision faded was that painting.

A feeling started to tug at Dean from deep inside. The strange clothes people wore in this place, the odd houses, even the animals seemed familiar. The more it made sense, the more dreadful it was.

His head slumped forward into his hands. How could he be inside a painting? Would anyone ever figure out where he was? And how could they get him back?

After a while he pulled his jacket hood up over his head, hugged his knees even more tightly, and fell over onto his side. Moments later, he drifted off into a fitful sleep.



Sunni turned into another twisting lane and looked at the scene around her. *More clone people*, she thought. Fausto Corvo hadn't given his figures much variety. She saw the same nose over and over, and the same eyes, which was almost as unsettling as the weird, unfinished faces in the shadows and behind the crowds.

A donkey and cart loaded with sacks of grain caught her eye. She pulled the hat off the driver's head and perched it between the donkey's ears. If she came back this way, she would recognize them.

She drew the lane into a sketch map of the streets she had walked already and labeled it "Donkey with Hat." So far she had lanes labeled "Oranges in Fountain," "Upside-Down Dog," and others, making up a trail she could follow back if she had to.

"Donkey with Hat" Lane curved up a hill into a park surrounding the castle. Its towers and turrets gleamed in the perpetual morning sun, while its red banners and pennants were apparently flying in the nonexistent breeze.

Sunni walked along the castle walls until she came to an ancient tree. She hauled herself up until she was on the highest of its limbs and sat down, her legs dangling.

The view was not as good as she had hoped. She could see some of the lanes she had followed, but others were hidden below. Where the houses ended, masts of ships poked above the rooftops. There was no sign of her stepbrother. On top of that, she felt as if she had been awake for days, with her stomach rumbling continuously.

"Dean!" Sunni shouted, but the sound was still muffled, as if she had a box over her head. She rummaged through her backpack and pulled out her phone and a half-eaten bar of chocolate.

Nibbling on one square of chocolate, she stared at the phone. All she wanted to do was to call home and hear her dad's voice telling her he was coming for them. But

the signal was as dead as everything else here. Her eyes prickled as she pushed back frustrated tears.

Sunni stuffed the phone down to the bottom of her backpack and glanced at the landscape outside the city. A few cattle stood in pastures edged by woods. In the distance were craggy hills.

Suddenly she saw something small and dark scuttling along the road through the fields. It was wearing a red hat.