

Chapter 1

Surely I was dreaming—the bright sunlight, the sand, the girl standing beside the boat. Surely it was all a dream.

The girl came a step closer, her startled face reflecting mine exactly. It was like looking in a mirror.

Farrell Dean stood up. My feet were caught in the blankets, in the supplies at the bottom of the boat, but somehow I scrambled free and climbed out of the boat and stood facing the apparition on the sand. I stood toe to toe with her, not three feet away, and even that close I could see only myself in her.

Her hair, like mine, was long and flaming red, touched with gold sun streaks. Her eyes, like mine, were green. The shape of her face, the set of her shoulders, even the way she tilted her head—everything about her looked just like me.

She began circling around me on the sand, looking me over from every angle. I stood frozen in place, too stunned to move. So, apparently, was Farrell Dean. He was still standing in the grounded boat, staring at the two of us as if he doubted his own sanity.

“I’m a little bit taller,” the girl said, coming back to stand in front of me again. “And a little heavier.”

That was a tactful way of putting it. Beside her I felt half-starved, all elbows and angles. She was gently rounded, with curves I had just about given up on ever having. The other difference was that she was wearing a soft-looking dress in various shades of blue and green; a wide blue band kept her hair off her face; and a silver chain set with colored stones hung around her neck. She looked like a more elegant and civilized me. And definitely a cleaner one.

My face began to feel hot as I considered this unflattering contrast. I was wearing my usual rough gray

uniform, in worse than usual condition. My pants and my shirt both were torn, streaked with bloodstains, and had been slept in for—I winced—four nights in a row. My hair was wind-tangled, my nose sunburned, my fingernails jagged, and my skin salt-caked; I'd been in the sea more than once over the past few days, not always intentionally.

Farrell Dean looked just as bad as I did, with stubble on his jaw, his golden-brown hair stiff with salt, and his clothes even more tattered and bloodstained than my own. But he wasn't standing beside a clean, elegant, well-rested, well-fed version of himself.

That I was even thinking such trivial thoughts at such a moment speaks to how out of my depth I was; the sight of this girl had all but short-circuited my brain.

"I hope you don't mind my staring at you like this," the girl said, a smile lighting up her face. "I've always known there were two of us, but Papa never said we looked alike. Maybe he couldn't tell—babies all look so alike anyway. And of course you died less than a day after we were born."

Farrell Dean made a choking sound and the girl turned around to face him.

"You're laughing at me," she said, smiling. "I don't care. All my life I thought my sister was dead, and she isn't."

Sister.

There was no question of me finding my voice at the moment, but Farrell Dean didn't speak either. Usually he was unflappable, but he'd been through a lot in the past few days, and now he was seeing double.

"He doesn't talk much, does he?" the girl said, spinning back around toward me, the skirt of her dress flaring out with the movement, her hair glinting in the morning sun.

"Shock," I managed to say.

She lowered her voice. "Who is he? Your husband?"

Husband? I didn't know what she meant; that wasn't a

word we had, and somehow I didn't like to ask. I already felt awkward and barbaric enough.

"A friend," I said. "His name is Farrell Dean. He ..."

How to put it? I decided to keep it simple. "He helped me escape from a man who was trying to kill me."

The girl nodded, unfazed by this explanation.

"How did you get taken away from us?" she asked. "Do you know?"

"I don't know anything," I said. "I didn't even know you existed. I thought I was born in Optica." Seeing her puzzled expression, I clarified. "That's the city on the other island." I pointed south. "It took us almost two days to get here. Did you call me *Valentina*?"

The girl nodded. "That's your name," she said, and her eyes went round. "You didn't know your own name. Then what do you go by?"

"Red," I said. It felt very short and plain.

The girl laughed. "It's fitting, I suppose," she said, reaching out to touch my hair, so very like her own. "I'm Fiona."

Then her expression shifted to one of concern, and before I knew what was happening she had her arms wrapped around me and started running on with so many new words, I began to feel dizzy.

"You must be very weary," she said. "And hungry too. We should get you to Papa. You were dead and now you're alive again. I'm putting it all wrong, I know, chattering on, but I didn't start screaming when you popped up from the boat. Be sure to tell Angus and Rory that, when you meet them. Be sure to tell them I was very calm and brave."

"Who is Papa?" I asked, pulling away from her. "A teacher? A cook?"

Fiona looked puzzled. "He is both of those, yes. Sometimes. Mostly he's a farmer. A dairy farmer."

I couldn't fathom why she thought she needed to get me to a dairy farmer.

Fiona met my baffled look with one of her own. "I must not be making good sense," she said. "I'm so sorry—I'm terribly flustered. Papa is just papa. Our father."

Our father.

The light reflecting off the water suddenly seemed strangely fragmented.

My father.

From the moment I'd seen this girl it had been obvious that we were sisters; but somehow the mention of a father made it real. All those years in Optica when I felt like a stranger, an outsider, a freak, I was. Here, on this foreign island that I'd never known existed, I had family.

And I'd never have found them, if Farrell Dean had listened to my pleas and curses and demands to take me home.

Blindly I turned toward him. "Did you know?" I asked. "Did you know about her?"

"No," Farrell Dean said, climbing out of the boat. "I had no idea. Maybe Sir Tom did."

We looked at each other. How much had that wily old Guardian kept from us? And yet he had helped us, and was still helping our friends in Optica.

We hoped.

I saw my thoughts reflected in Farrell Dean's eyes. We'd been gone almost two days. Was everyone back home all right? Were they even still alive?

Fiona was peering into our little boat. "Shall we carry your baggage with us?" she said, and then she answered herself. "I think we should. Gabriel Drewblood is around, so it might get taken if we leave it."

She reached into the boat and lifted out the near-empty food bag, the flattened water skin. We divided the rest among

us—the blankets, the spade, the traps, various other items Sir Tom had stashed in the bottom of the boat.

If I'd seen all those supplies beforehand, I'd have known he intended to send me away, that the plan he presented to me was a trick. Then I would have refused to get in the boat, refused to come to this island, refused to be torn away from Meritt.

But I didn't see the supplies until too late. I had fallen straight into Sir Tom's trap, all the while thinking I was baiting a trap for someone else.

For two days I'd been furious with Farrell Dean for the part he had played in Sir Tom's ruse. Now I didn't know whether to be grateful or angry or both. I cast a sidelong glance his way, but he was gazing at Fiona. The sea was dancing behind her and the sunlight was catching in her hair, turning it into a fiery halo. Against its vibrancy her face looked very fair, her eyes very green.

"Oh!" she said suddenly, shifting her burdens to one hip. "It occurs to me—Valentina, please don't be offended, but I'm wondering whether I'm rushing you. Perhaps you would prefer to change clothes before meeting Papa?"

I felt my face flush. "I don't have any other clothes," I said. "We left in a hurry." Though even if I'd had time to pack, I'd still only have had gray uniforms. That was all I'd ever worn in my entire life.

Fiona nodded and for a moment stood there in thought, looking out across the sea. The sun was spangling the water with golden sparks, though the breeze was cool.

"Would you like me to fetch you something to wear?" she asked finally, then rushed on. "Though of course you're fine as you are, Papa will be so glad, it doesn't matter a bit how you're dressed, he won't even notice, no one will, they'll just be so happy to see you, but if you want clean clothes I can go get them—I'm a weaver and I have a pretty pink dress

I haven't ever worn, I was saving it for my seventeenth birthday—*our* seventeenth birthday—and I'd love to give it to you, if you'd like to have it, that is. As a welcome-home present."

A pink dress—something pretty to wear. The very idea silenced me.

Fiona, studying my face, misunderstood. "Of course most redheads can't wear pink," she said. "But it works for me—for us—haven't you found?"

Most redheads? All my life I'd been the only redhead anyone had ever seen.

Fiona was gazing at me anxiously, apparently still afraid she'd caused offense. I wasn't offended—I simply didn't know how to answer. No one had ever offered me a pretty pink dress before. No one had ever given me a gift of any sort, save for the odds and ends of food Farrell Dean stole to keep me from starving, or the little corncob dolls old Louie used to make for me when I was very small.

I glanced at Farrell Dean for advice, but he was still staring at Fiona, transfixed.

Somehow that made up my mind. She might look like me, but she was not me, and I didn't intend to try to be her.

"Thank you," I said, raising my chin. "But no. I'll wear my own clothes. Please—"

A lump rose in my throat and I could hardly say the words. "Please take me to our father."

We climbed the dunes to a golden leaf-strewn path that wound back and forth up a steep hillside. Trees hung over us, their branches thin and bare; in the summer this would feel like a leafy tunnel.

Fiona hummed as we walked—she had decided to save her questions until Papa was present, she said, but really I thought she was giving me time to collect myself. She didn't

look anywhere near as shocked as I felt. I supposed it was because although she'd thought I was dead, at least she'd known I existed.

Farrell Dean and I walked silently behind her. The leaves cushioned our steps, rustling gently as we walked over them. I couldn't help but glance over my shoulder now and then at the undergrowth beneath the trees. Farrell Dean, I noticed, did the same. Our woods back home were not a safe place for a stroll.

Once Fiona paused and turned her head as if listening; but she said nothing, and after a moment walked on, apparently unconcerned. Though I peered in the direction she'd turned, I could see nothing but trees and leafy ferns.

At the top of the hill I could see the path straightening out in front of us, stretching through a furrowed field of dark rich dirt, then passing a long pond, and finally weaving through a meadow dotted with black and white cows and edged by large, luxuriant willow trees. Another pasture, fenced off from the first, held a scattering of brown chickens bustling busily around.

Just beyond the meadow stood a collection of four buildings. They weren't the cinder block or corrugated steel buildings I was used to. They were made of stones, flat boards, or a mixture of the two.

A dog came tearing up the path from one of the larger buildings—a big dog, black but with tan thumbprints above his eyes. I hadn't had much experience with dogs, but I didn't think this one looked friendly.

"Here's Rex," Fiona said casually, just as the dog bounded past her and faced us, growling, the hair on the back of its neck standing up.

"Rex," Fiona said, spinning around. "What are you doing? Sit!"

He ignored her and began to inch toward us, crouching,

baring his teeth.

Very slowly, Farrell Dean edged in front of me.

"Rex!" Fiona said, more loudly. "Bad dog! *Sit!*"

The dog lowered his rear end toward the ground, but didn't actually sit. He didn't take his eyes off us, either.

Fiona sighed and walked around him to us. "Angus can't seem to teach him manners," she said, then spoke to the dog. "Look, Rex, they're friends."

She patted my arm, and Farrell Dean's, then extended her hand to the dog, palm up. He leaned forward to sniff it curiously.

"Friends," she said firmly. "Be nice to the friends."

The dog seemed to relax a little. He straightened up, edged over to us, and gave us each a careful sniff before bouncing back. Now his tongue was hanging out and he looked like he was grinning.

"Come on, you idiot," Fiona said to him. "Let's go see Papa."

The dog gave us one last glance, then trotted at Fiona's side as we made our way down the path toward the group of buildings.

Fiona pointed to a stone building that had a wisp of smoke rising from its chimney. "That's our cottage," she said. "That's where you and I were born. For that one day there were nine of us, but only Papa and I live there now."

I silently tucked this information away, but Farrell Dean spoke. "You live with your father?" he asked. "Is that usual here?"

Fiona looked baffled. "Who else would I live with?" she said, and then her face fell. "Oh, you mean—Valentina, I'm so sorry. I should have told you right away. Our mother died when you did—I mean, when we thought you died. Right after we were born."

Mutely I nodded. I hadn't even thought about a

mother—a father and a sister seemed such enormous riches.

Fiona's smile flashed at me. "I can't tell you how glad you will make Papa," she said. "All my life he's been eaten up by grief. People say he has never been himself, not since you and Mama died. And now—" she laughed. "Now I feel as if I'm bringing life itself to him." She tucked one arm through mine and led me along the path, Farrell Dean following behind us.

Clouds were coming in now, muffling the sun, but the stone house looked snug and warm. The door was wooden, painted a dark green that contrasted prettily with the gray and brown stones. The windowsills were painted green as well. Beneath one was a small kitchen garden; beneath another, clusters of white flowers—a little weary, this time of year, but well tended.

A short fence made of wooden slats surrounded the house; here and there vines twined over it, dry now with winter coming on. As we drew nearer I smelled wood smoke, mingled with a scent that made my mouth water and my stomach growl. Bacon and fresh bread, and something sweet. Cooked apples, perhaps.

At the gate to the little fence Fiona hesitated. "Would you mind waiting outside the cottage for a short moment?" she said. For the first time her expression was less than open, and I had the feeling she was choosing her words carefully. "It's going to be such a shock for Papa. He's been unhappy for so long—I think perhaps I should prepare him a little."

We nodded. She led us across the little grassy area, Farrell Dean carefully pulling the gate shut behind us. At the door to the cottage she set her burdens on the flat stone step and gestured to us to do the same with ours. Then she put a finger to her lips warningly and slipped inside. Though she shut the door behind her it swung back open a crack, and she didn't return to shut it more firmly.

Rex sat down between us and the door and fixed us with a firm stare. He was no longer grinning. Farrell Dean took my arm and pulled me back a step.

"Papa!" Fiona called. "I'm home!"

"So I see," a male voice replied. "You were slow this morning. Rory and Angus have already been and gone again."

"That's a shame," Fiona said. "Papa, I'm starving. Can we set out an extra loaf and some cheese for breakfast?"

"Of course."

"And we'd better set out extra plates."

There was a silence. Then, "Fiona, what do you have to tell me?"

Fiona didn't immediately reply; I could hear the clink of plates, of utensils. I looked at Farrell Dean, shifted a little closer to him. He smiled at me reassuringly, but his eyes were wary. We weren't exactly prepared for a meeting with a father.

Inside the cottage the silence stretched. Somewhere out of sight chickens clucked quietly. A light rain began to fall, misting my hair and face with cool droplets.

"Well, Papa," Fiona said finally. "It's just this. After all these years I finally see the point of going to the beach every morning."

There was a sound of sudden movement; something fell to the floor with a clang; then came footsteps, and the door flew open and a tall man dressed in a dark green shirt and brown pants came out. He looked strong and he wasn't old, perhaps in his mid forties, but he was leaning heavily on a walking stick. His eyes were brown, and his hair was a dark red streaked with silver. He saw Farrell Dean first, then me, and one hand came up as if warding off a blow.

For a long moment no one said anything. Rex circled around us. Expressions shifted on the man's face, amazement

and relief, followed by—surely I misread it—something like dread or pain, before he seemed to gain control of his features and they became blankly courteous. I knew I was trembling but couldn't help it. I wanted to turn and run away, back to the beach, back to the little boat, back home to familiar Optica, however troubled it might be.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Farrell Dean glance at me. Then, with a cautious look at Rex, he stepped forward and cleared his throat.

"This is Red," he said. "I think she's your daughter. My name is Farrell Dean. We came in the night from another island."

The man looked at him and nodded, then back at me. His jaw clenched; I thought he might be trying not to cry. Fiona appeared in the doorway behind him and smiled at us.

Finally the man cleared his throat. "My daughter," he said, holding out a hand to me. "My lost child."