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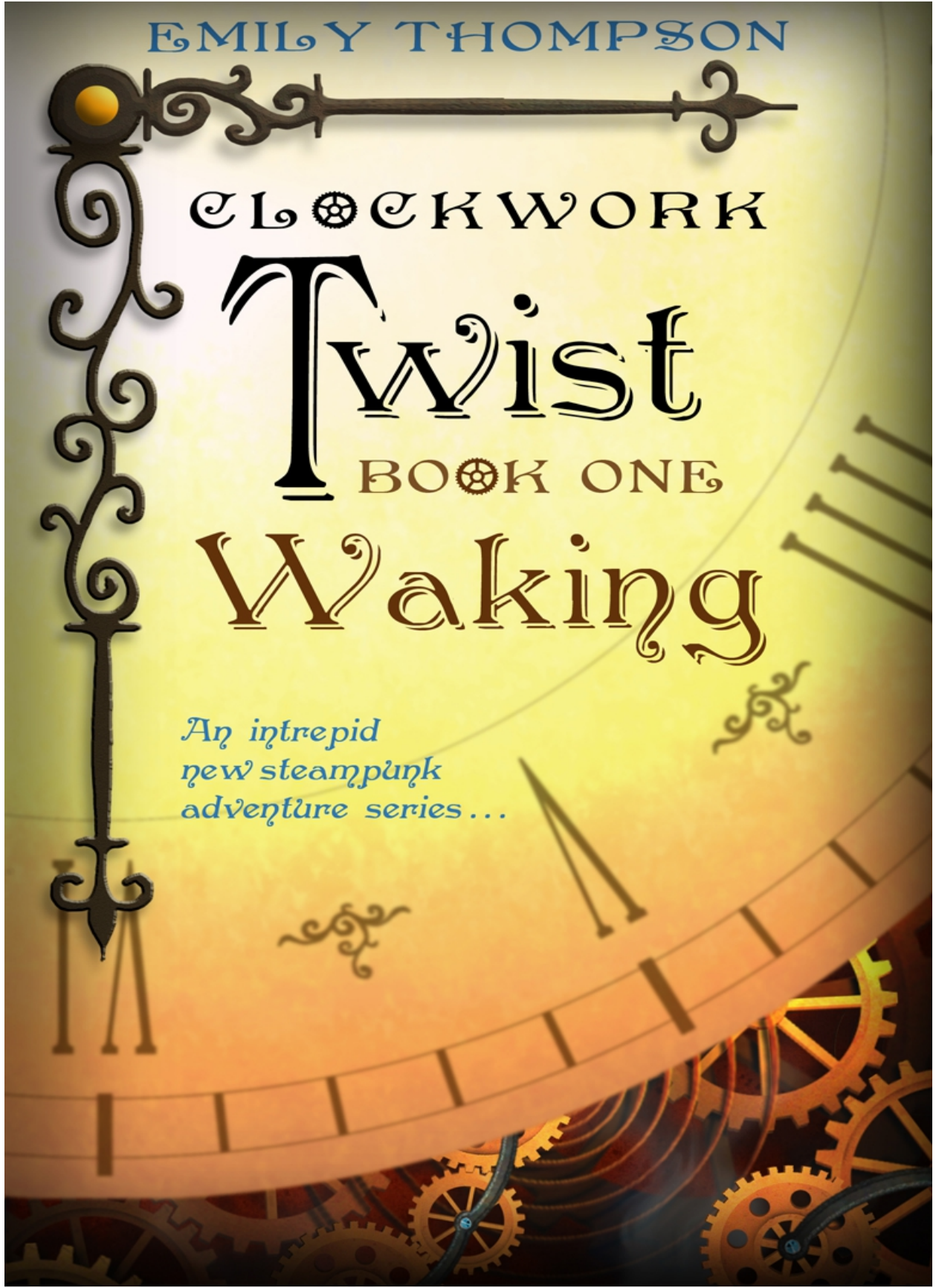
CLOCKWORK

Twist

BOOK ONE

Waking

*An intrepid  
new steampunk  
adventure series...*



Clockwork Twist  
Book One : Waking  
Excerpt

by Emily Thompson

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“Clockwork” poem by Janice Thompson



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Upon his bench the pieces lay  
As if an artwork on display  
Of gears and hands  
Of wire thin bands  
That glisten in dim candle play  
—*Janice T*

Twist always had steady hands. No matter how intricate the device, or how tiny the springs and cogs, his aim never wavered. After minutes of silent work on the small brass pocket watch, he finally allowed himself a smile of satisfaction. He placed the last cog and then closed the back of the watch, admiring the glinting metal in the dim glow that seeped in through the window over his desk. He held the brushed brass up to his ear and closed his large, steel-blue eyes as he listened to the faint pulse of clockwork life.

A silver bell set beside the window rang out like a thunderclap. Twist's slight frame shuddered at the sudden sound, his eyes flew open to stare at the bell in fright, and his grip on the watch slipped. He clutched at the chain as it fell through his fingers, catching the watch a moment before it crashed onto the desk. The unexpected success stole a breath from him as the bell rang again. Twist placed the watch in the pocket of his thin waistcoat and hastened to his feet, turning to the stairs at the back of the room.

The blackness of the room, out of the candlelight, stalled his steps. He snatched up the candle in its tin holder and set his jaw in annoyance, which only gave his angular features an even sharper and more delicate appearance. The bell rang out a third time as his feet flew quickly down the stairs. On the ground floor, Twist blew out the candle and hastily turned the key on the gas light at the front door, filling the small room with amber light.

Thick-paned windows flanked the heavy, dark, wooden door and spilled the ghost of damp light on the bare floor. There were no clocks on the walls of the shop, only framed mirrors of different sizes. There was nothing on the open floor save for a pair of red velvet couches that faced each other over a table made of disused gears from a tower clock. The silver mirrors multiplied the gaslight to a strange brightness that most people found unsettling. Twist didn't even look at it as he quickly took his short black coat from the rack by the door and threw it on over his white shirt, black trousers, and still-unbuttoned silver waistcoat. He only had time to straighten the collar and run a hand over his constant mess of wild and curly black hair before the bell rang out impatiently again.

Twist threw open the locks and pulled the door back just enough to peer out through the crack. A young woman stood on his step, her hand still on the bell pull. She was no older than him—older than twenty, but not yet thirty. She wore high boots over trousers; under a short, lace-rimmed skirt, and a velvet bodice. She held no umbrella, and wore only a thin jacket to shield her from the rain. Her blond hair looked dark from all the water in it, hanging in a loose braid at her neck. Her sea-green eyes locked onto Twist's with a strength and determination that startled him.

"Oh thank heaven!" she breathed out in relief. "I thought no one was here."

"Can I help you?" Twist asked, his voice as loud and clear as it would ever get.

"What?" the girl asked. "I didn't hear you."

"Come in," Twist said, his small voice colored darkly with disdain. He pulled the door open for her and turned away, taking a seat on the center of the couch that faced the door.

The young woman let herself inside and closed the door behind her. She looked around the room in the reflected gaslight until her eyes fell on Twist again. He saw the same pause in her gaze that he usually did when others got a clear look at him. Feeling reassured, he remained perfectly still, leaning forward on his knees and staring at her steadily: expressionless. The girl seemed to shiver slightly, either from the chill of the rain or from the effect of Twist's efforts, but she stepped forward all the same and took a seat facing him.

"You are ... Twist, aren't you?" she asked. She pulled the small shoulder bag that had hung behind her into her lap as she sat. Twist saw the rain water drip onto his couch and did his best not to grimace.

"I am," Twist replied, his voice stronger in the silence of the small, mirrored room.

"I'm Arabel Davis," the girl said pleasantly. "I need your help."

"Have you brought it with you?" he asked.

"Brought what?"

"Whatever you need fixed," Twist toned, as if to a child.

"Oh," she said, smiling to break the tension. Twist focused on keeping his breath shallow so that his small form would seem even more still. Her smile frayed slightly. "Well, I can't bring it here. I don't actually have it yet, you see."

"Bring it here and I'll see what I can do."

"I don't think you understand," she said, almost pleading in her eagerness. "I don't need you to repair a watch for me, or anything like that. I need your help. I need you to come with me." Despite himself, Twist blinked into a confused frown. "Where?"

"Well, Nepal, but—" she began.

"Isn't that in Asia?" Twist asked, hanging onto his placid expression for dear life.

"Yes, I have an airship," Arabel said, obviously meaning to continue.

"No," Twist said instantly.

"It wouldn't take more than a few days to get there," she tried, leaning closer over the table. Twist straightened up and leaned away.

"I'm not going halfway across the world, and I'm certainly not taking an airship to get there," he said as firmly as his soft voice would allow. "I'm sorry, but I can't help you."

"I can pay you, of course."

"No amount of worldly wealth will get me off of solid ground," Twist said, fighting to keep his anger hidden behind his chilly blue eyes. "I've never left London, and I have no desire to do so now."

Arabel's sea-green eyes flashed with such a sudden and keen annoyance—remarkably like the glow of a smoldering canon wick, Twist noticed—that for a moment, he worried that she might like to hit him. He felt his heart beat faster, despite his efforts to keep it slow and steady.

"I'm sorry," he said again, flatly. "If there is nothing else, then good day to you."

"Are you really just nothing but an ordinary little clock maker?" Her voice was suddenly sharp.

"Excuse me?" Twist asked, letting himself appear confused again by mistake.

"Do you only repair broken clockwork? Are the rumors about you all silly lies?"

"I'm sure you can find your way out," Twist said, getting to his feet as smoothly as he could, and turning for the back stairs.

"I've found the clockwork princess."

Twist froze in his steps. After a moment of silent bewilderment, he turned slowly to look back at his guest over his shoulder. "That's a myth."

"It's not," she said, a satisfied smirk now on her face. "I know where it is."

"You can't know where it is because it doesn't exist."

"It's in Nepal, right now," Arabel said. She reached into the bag on her lap, and pulled out a small clump of silver and copper gears, which she placed gently on the tabletop. "I've seen it with my own eyes. It's as real as I am."

Twist turned back as she spoke, and took the item off the table gingerly. The moment Twist's fingers touched the gears, his mind burned with images that he had never seen. He closed his eyes to see the vision more clearly in his mind: metal hands, elegant as a Vermeer maiden's now lying broken on the floor of a dark room—years of dust and neglect, like slime on the once-gleaming surface—those hands running lightly through tall grass in sunlight, long before—the sound of a girl's laughter, brighter than any sunlight Twist had ever seen.

A sharp intake of breath at the intensity of the images brought Twist's attention back to himself. His eyes flew open to see the gears in his palm, the clutching mechanism of a clockwork hand. He could just hear the echo of her laughter in the gentle shine. A shiver ran through his skin like an electric shock, making him shudder. She wasn't just a beautiful fairy tale.

"Are you all right?" Arabel asked, now standing just beside him.

Twist looked to her quickly, surprised to see her so close. He nodded and took a small step away.

"It's in pieces now," she said. "But if anyone can fix it, I'm sure that you could. Only, it can't be moved until it's repaired. It was risky enough just taking that."

Twist hardly heard her. His thoughts were still wound tightly around the images he'd seen. She'd been left all alone for so long, broken and forgotten. Overwhelming sadness tightened in his chest until he feared that he wouldn't be able to breathe. He felt terrible guilt at holding a piece of her so far away from the rest of her body. He knew the old stories well enough to easily guess at her constant misery. How could she have been treated so badly? Who could have left her alone? How could he stand by and let her continue to be abused by idiots and time?

"Did you take anything else?" he asked, surprised by how strained and rough his own voice sounded.

"Well, no," Arabel said, drifting closer to him again. "I didn't think it would be safe." She lifted a hand to touch his arm as she bent her head to see his face.

Twist jerked away from her before she could touch him, and turned to face her. "When do you want to leave?" he asked, his features—under control again—held impossibly still and empty.

"That depends on whether or not you would be coming," she said, hesitantly hopeful.

Twist's fingers tightened on the gears in his hand, and for just an instant he heard the gentle ring of that childlike laugh again. "I'm coming."

"Wonderful," Arabel said, smiling broadly. "Then we can leave tomorrow."



Try as he might, Twist simply couldn't fall asleep that night. He tossed and turned until the sky outside his dark rooms grew bright enough to count as daylight. The drizzle hadn't stopped from the previous day, leaving the world in a gray half-light long into the morning. As he stood at the window in his attic workshop, looking out through thick glass at the soot-blackened city of London, Twist struggled to imagine a world beyond it. Nepal: the highest mountains on Earth, on the other side of the world. The idea of it was simply too big to fit in his head.

Packing only made Twist more nervous. In the end, he found himself with a bag full of clothes, his best clock-mending tools, and a pair of candles, just in case. He looked over his bookshelf next—adventures, histories, and a fair amount of chivalry—and selected a book of poems to pass the journey. The chunk of clockwork that Arabel had brought to him last night was wrapped safely in soft cotton and buried deep in his bag. Looking about his workshop, he was suddenly struck by the thought that he might not stand here again for a very long time.

His own personal clock collection covered the bare wooden walls, filling the room with their constant, stable harmony. He looked over them in their gleaming perfection, recalling quiet, comforting moments with each one. The sound of their regular, mechanical rhythm was as familiar to him as his own breath.

His newly mended watch was still in his waistcoat pocket, ticking gently like a second heart. Twist drew it out, opened the face, and then placed it gently on the desk in the dim light that seeped down through the rain. He held perfectly still and quiet for a long moment, letting the soft sounds of the rain and his clocks soak deep into the tension on the spring, into the brass gears, into every part of the little watch. Then he closed it and placed it back into his pocket.

With nothing left to pack and the meeting time a mere half hour away, he set out for the airship docks. Twist didn't believe in umbrellas, and so put on a pair of silver trimmed, blue-lensed goggles to shield his eyes from the fine drizzle and wrapped a thick wool scarf around his neck. Water collected on the heavy black cotton of his loose, hip-length coat and fell into rivers down his back, but he was so accustomed to the chill of the air that he hardly noticed it. His boots, black as his jacket, hit the cobblestones with purpose as he forced himself to banish all second thoughts.

He hurried through the dark, narrow, winding streets, rushing past the unnamed masses of London without a moment's glance. By the time he got to the airship docks, perched high in the air on exposed wrought-iron platforms, his wild, curly black hair was heavy with the rain, and his hands were shaking. He told himself that it was because of the cold. His heart beat so strongly that he feared others could hear it as he hurried up the stairs along with the other travelers. He followed the signs to the seventh jetty, but his steps slowed as he drew near.

The airship was massive, large enough to carry a full crew and a significant amount of cargo, though it flew no flags of nationality. The body of the ship appeared to have three decks, with the topmost deck hanging out over the back of the ship like a platform, while the front end of the second deck reached out forward into a point. All the open areas were rimmed with metal railings of varying shades of patina and rust, but the rest of the ship appeared to be made of gray wood, the same color as the storm clouds overhead. Above, an enormous white balloon was stretched from bow to stern, and was flanked with wing-like sails on either side. Huge brass propellers were set at the stern of the ship. In the dim of the drizzle, the vessel appeared nothing but menacing and impressive to Twist.

"Twist, you're right on time," said a girl's voice from farther along the jetty. This time Arabel

had an umbrella, but she still looked a bit damp as she hurried closer to Twist. She was dressed much the same as the day before, except that her bodice was shimmering a deep green that matched her happy eyes, and there was a silver pistol strapped to her right hip. Behind her, Twist could see the crew turning to look at him. Each one differed in race, size, and shape. A few of them appeared to be armed as well.

"Are you ready for your adventure?" Arabel asked, a wide smile on her face.

"Are you pirates?" Twist asked, looking at her through the blue lenses of his goggles.

She seemed to give the question some thought. "No, not really."

"Explain that, in detail, please," Twist said as calmly as he could.

"I assure you," Arabel said, "that we are fine, upstanding gentlemen and ladies who don't seek out unlawful activity. Now, are you ready to leave?"

Twist's jaw tightened despite his efforts to stop it. "I'm not skilled with ... *violence*, you know," he said softly, even for him, causing her to tilt her ear to hear him.

She moved back, a laugh on her breath. "My word, you are cute!" she said, the words forcing their way out through the tightly clenched teeth of her wide smile.

Twist bristled at the accusation, and he opened his mouth to tell her that he was going home and that she could very well leave him alone for the rest of his life.

"Oh, I'm sorry," she said, taking a breath to calm her apparent glee. "I see we might look a bit odd to you, but I can promise that you will be perfectly safe for the entire time that you are in our company. We need you, after all. So please, don't forget why it is that you're here."

A flash of memory followed her words, calming Twist's temper. He wasn't going on this trip for his health. He was doing it for the princess, because no one else ever had. He could almost feel her still, cold, clockwork, so far away, depending on him alone to bring her back to life. No one else would be able to do her justice.

"I'm ready," Twist said, looking to Arabel.

"Splendid," she said, guiding him towards the airship. "We're just about ready to cast off."



Twist had barely set foot on the open second deck before the crew began to throw off the mooring ropes. He heard the sound of the steam engine in the stern of the ship rumble to life below decks, and his blood ran cold at the sound. Arabel left him and climbed into the rigging at the side of the ship without a moment's hesitation. Rain fell from the balloon above in a curtain of drizzle around the outer edge. Twist found himself constantly in the way of the crew as they hurried about on the dry center of the deck.

He stepped to the damp railing reluctantly, and his gaze slipped into the distance below. Still hanging beside the docks, the ship was nearly a hundred feet off the ground. Twist's vision swam and he clutched hard to the railing, forcing his eyes to close. After a moment of standing still, head bent under the light rain, he began to feel his legs steady under him.

A curious sensation of rising crept over him gently. Against his better judgment, Twist opened his eyes to see London's blackened rooftops fall away beneath him as the clouds tumbled down. Terror gave way to a wild thrill as the airship rose to meet the wind. The air chilled, and the rain grew heavier and began to fly in strange arcs and angles, while the clouds fell faster and faster from the sky.

In moments, thick fog splashed down on the deck, blinding Twist to all but the space just around him. His breath caught, as if frightened to leave him now, and he clung to the railing as his only sure reality in this strange experience. But in another moment of that smooth rising feeling, the fog broke and fell away as the airship burst out of the clouds into brilliant, blazing sunlight and a pure-blue sky.

Twist blinked against the intense light of day, even though the tinted glass of his goggles. As the crew shouted in the sudden calm of open air, the ship stilled its rising pace to sail quickly through the puffy, twirling, impossible landscape on the tops of the pure-white clouds. Looking down, Twist saw the bottom of the ship barely submerged in the smooth valleys of the cloud tops. He looked up again to see an enormous mountain of twisting white pass by like an island in a calm sea. After a moment, the ship sped up to such a pace that a white, billowing spray began to fly off the bow, breaking like waves as the ship ran through inconsistencies in the surface.

Twist pulled the goggles off his eyes to hang around his neck and loosened his scarf to flap behind him in the rush of wind, while his hair flew free around his face and neck. The air was crisp as ever and stung at his skin, but the sunlight competed with it to warm him, stronger now than he'd ever felt it before. It took a few moments for his eyes to adjust to the extreme white and brilliant blue all around him, but he couldn't fight the desire to see it clearly, to experience this wonder fully.

"Welcome to the sky, Twist," Arabel said from above him. He looked up to see her hanging in the rigging, casual as could be, tying off a rope that was attached to the wing-like sails. "How do you like it up here?"

"It's..." he tried to respond, but no other words came to him at first. "It's so bright," he said finally.

"Compared to London, anything would be," Arabel said with a smile in her voice. "You should see Greece. Those islands are at least as bright as this, down at sea level."

Twist couldn't imagine anywhere on the surface of the Earth looking anything like the otherworldly vista before him, but he nodded anyway. As he watched, other airships appeared behind them. Each one broke up out of the clouds with an arabesque of white mist before falling



to skim the surface the same way that this ship had done. Some of them seemed to follow the same direction, but most turned off for other destinations. Twist tried to wonder at where they might be headed, but he quickly realized that he had a very limited concept of geography. He couldn't even reasonably guess at which countries he might see between England and Nepal.

"Hey, landlubber," said a voice behind Twist. He spun quickly to see a young man with thin, black eyes and emerald-green hair, cut short and falling like feathers over his black-smudged face, grinning at him. "You're the clock guy, right?"

"Twist," he replied with a nod.

"I'm Zayle." He offered a handshake. Twist saw soot and oil stains on the boy's rough fingers.

"Nice to meet you," Twist said, bowing slightly but keeping his hands to himself.

"Wow, you're stuffy, aren't you?" Zayle said, giving him an uncertain look. "Oh well, come on, I'll show you where you'll be sleeping," he said, turning and reaching out a hand. Twist assumed it to be only a gesture, but Zayle's hand fell onto his shoulder with a solid pat.

In an instant, Twist's mind flashed with the vision of Zayle as a very young boy, suddenly aware that he was lost in the center of a huge, noisy, colorful marketplace. Zayle's mother was gone. People were talking, shouting, and laughing around him in a language Twist had never heard. The air was hot and full of strange smells. What if he couldn't find her? What if he would never see his mother again? Twist tore himself free of the image and backed away from Zayle with a jerk that tripped him. He landed heavily on the deck, his arms shaking as they tried to hold him up, his legs curled up under him, and his head ringing with the same fear and confusion as the little boy in the vision.

The crisp air above the clouds rushed in to ease his unsteady breath, but his vision and hearing only returned in waves. He saw a hand fly for his shoulder again and let out a terrified yelp, pulling away from it. Zayle stared wide-eyed at Twist as other faces appeared behind him, his hand frozen in its reach. Twist realized slowly that his own eyes were open wide with fear, and he was curled up into himself, pulling away from Zayle like a frightened kitten. It had been so long since anyone had touched him that he'd almost forgotten what it was like.

"I'm fine," Twist said, forcing what strength he had into his voice and pushing himself into a more dignified position. The emotions from the vision were still running wildly through him, but he did all he could to distance himself from them.

"What just happened?" Zayle asked, as the others began to circle Twist with a mixture of confusion and concern on each of their faces. "Are you all right?"

"Just don't..." Twist paused, not wanting to offend Zayle. "Don't touch me, please."

"But I hardly touched him at all," Zayle said to the others.

"Wait, did you just get a vision?" Arabel asked, kneeling down very near to Twist. He jerked again at her quick motion and found her peering at him intently.

"I thought it only worked with clocks," said one of the others.

"Apparently not," said another.

"It's nothing," Twist said, pulling himself to his feet on still-shaky legs. "Just try not to touch me, if you can," he said, straightening his clothes and not looking at anyone. Arabel stood as well, but seemed to hover much too closely for Twist's taste.

"What did you see?" Zayle asked, something like excitement in his bright voice.

Twist looked at him quickly, slightly alarmed that Zayle was so easily entertained by all this. As he looked at him, though, Twist realized that Zayle looked exactly the same now, despite the years. Somewhere, deep in his heart, Twist knew he'd never found his mother again.

"Nothing," Twist said stiffly, looking away. "It wasn't clear enough."

"Oh, come on," Zayle said playfully. "What did you see?"

Twist stared at him, still as he could be on the gentle sway of the sea of clouds, his steel-blue

eyes cold and empty in the stark brightness. "Nothing."

Zayle stared back at him for an instant before drifting close to Arabel. "Is he a vampire, too?"

"No, it's sunny and he's not sizzling," Arabel said, shaking her head. Twist heard another in the crowd give an annoyed tsk.

"You were going to show me something?" Twist said, with what little dignity he had left.

"Oh right." Zayle began to reach out to Twist again, but stopped, pulling back when Twist's eyes flashed with fear and his form tightened. "Right this way," Zayle said, gesturing instead.

Twist didn't look back as Zayle led him away and down onto the first deck of the ship. The brightness of the sky outside fought its way through the small porthole windows set into the sides of the ship, pouring into the hallways of dark wood. Zayle took Twist down the center hallway to a door, and then into a small room with a hanging hammock against one wall, a small chest against the other, and a desk under the two porthole windows in the side of the ship.

"It's not much, I know," Zayle said as Twist looked over his new space, "but it's nicer than the cargo hold."

"It'll be fine," Twist said, already missing his clocks in the silence of the sky. He put his bag down on the desk, expecting Zayle to leave him alone to unpack. Zayle didn't move from the doorway. He had a curious expression on his face when Twist turned to look at him.

"So, what did you see?" Zayle asked, watching him carefully. Twist's reflexes blanked his face and stilled his form. "I know you saw something," Zayle continued, narrowing his eyes.

The strong emotions of loss, confusion, and fear still shuddered in Twist's heart. He turned away from Zayle to keep him from getting a good look at his eyes. "I saw a little boy."

"How little?" Zayle asked, a smile on his face as he stepped closer. "Was I cute?"

"You were afraid," Twist said, watching him and backing away slightly. "Lost."

Zayle paused, his smile gone.

"I'm sorry," Twist said quickly. "I have no control over what I see with people. I didn't mean to," he continued, running a hand through his hair as an excuse to look away.

"It's okay," Zayle said lightly, though his eyes were different now, cold somehow. "I'm not mad. I was the one who touched you, right? It's just..."

Twist struggled to remember why he had decided to leave home. "It's just that you didn't expect me to see something like that. I know. I'm sorry."

"It's fine, really," Zayle said, smiling more warmly at him. "If you need anything else, just let me or Ara know."

"Ara?" Twist asked.

"Arabel," Zayle clarified quickly, to Twist's nod of understanding. "Well," he added, glancing around the room. "I'll leave you to settle in."

"Thank you," Twist managed.

Zayle shut the door behind him, finally leaving Twist alone in the near-complete silence of his cabin. Down here, he couldn't hear the wind except for a quiet murmur at the porthole seals. He couldn't hear the crew unless they walked over the boards above his head. There was no drizzle of rain, or hum of city life. There were no clocks and no machines except for the low rumble of the engines in the stern, so distant through the thick wood that he had to strain to hear it at all. After a moment of unbelievable stillness, the faint ticking of his own pocket watch drifted gently to Twist's ears.

He drew it out and pressed the back of it to his ear, leaning against the wall. Closing his eyes, the complex workings of all its tiny springs, gears, and cogs filled his mind like a beautiful thought. He felt his form ease and release tensions that he hadn't realized it had been holding, as the tiny, regular, heartbeat ticked softly against his ear.

The watch felt no fear. It didn't realize that it was already far away from home. All of its thoughts were as cold and mechanical as its form: complex, methodical, and constant. Twist felt

his heart ease as well as he opened himself to the little clockwork life in his hand, letting go of fears, both his own and external.

Thank you for your interest in the Clockwork Twist novel series. What you have just read is an excerpt of the first book in the series, *Clockwork Twist: Waking*. This book is available in both ebook and paperback. There will be 12 books in total in this series. As of 2017, all of the books in this series have been written, and the first 6 are available now

The Clockwork Twist series as of 2017:

Book One: Waking

Book Two: Trick

Book Three: Dreamer

Book Four: Missing

Book Five: Inquest

Book Six: Blood

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