

A strong breeze shot across the sky as Sarah and Tom followed the pack of balloons over Oxfordshire. Known as the Thames Valley, this lush countryside was a multicolored patchwork of square farmlands crisscrossed by hedgerows and rock walls. The Thames River gracefully snaked through the open fields covered with extravagant mansions built centuries ago. Although most of the balloons headed toward Canterbury, some floated off in opposite directions. By mid-afternoon, most of them had vanished. Tom and Sarah followed behind a few but soon lost them in the hazy clouds. Every so often, Tom gave the balloon a long blast of hot air to maintain its altitude. While they drifted southeast toward London, their main concern was Gowerstone. Peering through the binoculars, Tom searched for the helicopter.

“I don’t see him.”

“Do you think he gave up?”

“No,” he replied quickly. “He’ll never give up.”

“We seem safe for now.”

“For the moment,” he added with caution.

As Sarah admired the scenery, Tom reached into his pocket to retrieve her locket.

“This really does bring me luck,” he concluded, handing it to her. “Thanks for letting me borrow it.”

“It’s yours, silly,” she smiled, pushing it back. “Just promise you’ll always keep it with you.”

“But —”

“Promise.”

“All right . . . it’s a deal.” Stuffing it back in his pocket, he felt the piece of paper Patrick gave him and removed it.

“What’s that?” she inquired curiously.

“Before we left, Patrick broke into the Grievouses’ office and looked through my file. He wrote something down.”

“Let’s see.”

Tom opened it. Scribbled across the page was just one word.

“Hmm,” he grunted, expecting detailed information.

“What does it say?” she demanded.

“Britfield.”

“Britfield? What the heck does that mean?”

“How am I supposed to know?”

“There must be more.” She snatched the paper from his hand and thoroughly examined both sides. Dissatisfied, she shook her head. “So Patrick breaks into the office, sneaks your file out, and writes only one word on it — is he mad?”

“I’m sure he was in a hurry,” his voice deepened, “given that we were planning to rescue you and everything.”

“Then it’s a clue?”

“It’s a name.”

“Maybe it’s your last name,” she suggested encouragingly.

This comment caught Tom off guard. After all these years of having only a first name, it was a lot to digest and felt rather strange.

“Maybe,” he shrugged, not sure what to think.