

Chapter 1
Jake
March 23, 1AE
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Body tense and heart racing, Jake scoured Zoe's face for *any* inkling of recognition. He couldn't allow himself to believe she had no memory of him or all they'd been through together. She'd admitted she loved him only hours earlier. Now, she was scared, casting furtive glances around the room at friends and family she clearly didn't remember, including him.

In the dying moonlight seeping through the undressed windows, Jake watched her, desperation making it hard for him to breathe. Her eyes...he couldn't tear his gaze away from her teal eyes.

Zoe studied the two women in front of her, taking in Chris and Dani before settling her gaze on her brother, Jason. Her wide eyes narrowed, and her chest heaved, like she was frantically trying to remember him. Her gaze lingered on him a moment longer without a hint of recognition, and then landed on Jake. He could see the confusion and fear warring within their depths, making his heart ache and his conscience cloud with an undeniable guilt.

He shouldn't have left her alone on the golf course.

Her head tilted slightly as she considered him, and he prayed there was even the slightest nagging familiarity. Remember, he silently pleaded. But seeing no recognition of him—of *them*—reflected in her eyes, he knew the Zoe standing in the room, looking at him like he was a complete stranger, was only a shadow of the woman he'd fallen in love with.

His grip on the doorframe tightened so hard he thought the wood might detach from the wall. Zoe was terrified, and for the first time since he'd met her, there was nothing he could do to help her. He fought the instinct to go to her, knowing that if he did, he would frighten her more, and then he might lose her completely.

Unable to stand the tension any longer, Jake turned and strode out of the suffocating room. He couldn't get away fast enough.

Cooper, his loyal-friend-through-it-all Husky, trailed behind him, panting and trotting to keep up as Jake made his way down the hall. He needed space...needed air. Continuing toward the kitchen, he hoped the fresh air beyond the sliding glass door would give him a clearer head. But regardless of how quickly he strode through the house, the image of Zoe's fearful eyes remained, permanently projected in his mind, a constant reminder of his failure to protect her.

His hands fisted at his sides. He'd known something wasn't right when Zoe said she felt strange outside of the Colony, and if he'd just stayed with her instead of leaving her side to help Harper,

she might not have run off...she might still be *her*.

With a roar, Jake spun toward the wall. His fist met the hard, textured surface in unbridled anger. His knuckles cracked beneath his skin as they barreled through a layer of drywall, but he was unfazed. Bracing his hands against the wall, he tried to catch his breath...to stop his mind from spinning out of control.

Hearing Dani and Zoe's muted voices in the bedroom down the hall, Jake turned away from the hole his fist had made and continued into the small kitchen, but stopped. With a heavy sigh, he leaned against the Formica countertop, not ready to go outside with the others. Not ready to answer questions.

Almost immediately, Jason came through the doorway behind him. In two steps he was at the counter, gripping the ledge, and in the dim light pouring in through the sliding glass door, Jake could see the hard set of his features.

"I can't blame the Colony this time," Jake said. "I knew something was wrong." Zoe was infuriating and stubborn, but she wasn't stupid; she wouldn't have just run off for no reason. But without her memory, there was no way to know why she'd done it.

With a heavy sigh, Cooper lay down on the linoleum floor, his eyes angling up to Jake and then to Jason, ensuring that, even in their silence, they were still standing there.

After what felt like a few minutes, Jason grunted and shook his head. His shoulders were tense, and dark emotions clouded his vibrant blue eyes.

Jake couldn't help but wonder if Gabe—his best friend turned traitor—was to blame. Despite their friendship as children, Gabe had brought soldiers into Jake's home, ready to take his sister, Becca, away from him, and then he'd lured Dani into the Colony for the General. Had he been just as involved in what had happened to Zoe?

"What a fucking mess," Jason said, shaking his head. "I guess I'll just keep nulling her, at least until—"

The sound of footsteps approaching brought both men's attention to the hall doorway. Chris spoke softly, Zoe's hand resting in hers as they entered the kitchen, Dani and Jack, her German Shepherd, close behind them. Though Chris and Zoe were both grown women, the image of them walking hand-in-hand resembled that of a mother and child.

Jake's eyes met Zoe's as she passed him; hers were shrewd and penetrating. They were the same eyes that had affected him so intensely the first moment he saw her, their brilliance and expressiveness capturing his attention—his soul—in a way no other woman ever had, pulling him in so fully that she'd become his home. Regret and anger gnawed at him; he'd never told her

any of that, and now she might never know how he felt.

Her eyes narrowed on him slightly. He could tell from the way Zoe walked—with less fortitude and more uncertainty—that she was a poorly made replica of *his* Zoe. But she was a version of her, nonetheless, and like always, the endless depths of her eyes housed her every emotion: embarrassment – curiosity – confusion. Jake was grateful she didn’t seem to be afraid, and he knew he had Chris’s Ability to curb Zoe’s unease with a single touch to thank for that.

Chris whispered something inaudible, and Zoe’s gaze shifted to the sliding glass door. They stepped through and outside, heading toward the rest of the group and the horses waiting in the early morning shadows, Dani’s dog traipsing after them.

Dani, however, hung back in the kitchen. She moved closer to Jason, her gaze darting between him and Jake. With her broken arm, swollen and bruised face, and hunched shoulders, she looked like she’d been the General’s punching bag while she’d been held captive in the Colony. The sidelong glance she gave Jake made his blood run cold.

“What is it?” he said.

“There was a letter,” she said tentatively, fingering the edge of the sling holding her left arm. “It’s from one of my Colony contacts. She brought Zo here after finding her in the golf course...with Clara.”

Jake stopped breathing. His anger drained from him, his stomach knotting with fear.

Clara.

He exhaled slowly and rubbed his hand over his face harsher than was necessary, fighting to maintain what semblance of composure he had left. Clara’d had it out for Zoe from the first moment they’d met. Back at Fort Knox, she’d poisoned Zoe in a desperate attempt to get rid of her, then attempted to kill them *all* in a barracks fire that had claimed several lives. And now she was here, in Colorado, trying to hurt Zoe again. White, hot rage and self-loathing scorched through him. He should’ve left Clara in the hospital where he’d found her, wandering and scared.

“She’s dead now,” Dani said, but Jake’s anger lessened only slightly.

“Dead,” he repeated hollowly. Clara might’ve been dead, but not before managing to strike one final blow.

Dani’s eyes met Jake’s for a brief moment before settling back onto Jason’s. “Did you tell them about the T-Rs and the memory wiping...?”

Jason nodded.

"It looks like that's what happened to Zo...sort of. Clara started the process, got interrupted...at least now she's dead."

Jake studied Dani, finding it difficult to believe in Clara's demise through hearsay. "How do you know for sure?" he asked.

Dani smiled weakly and shook her head, wisps of her curly, red hair escaping the braid it was gathered into. "My contact said so," she said. "I trust her...at least with this." She glanced between them once more, like she wasn't quite sure of something. "There's more, but we should probably get going."

Jason reached for her, lacing his fingers with those of her good hand, and nodded. "We'll figure the rest out on the way to Colorado Trails," he said. "We've got to get moving or Ky and the others will think something's happened to us."

The sliding glass door opened and Becca stepped into the doorway. She glanced between Jason and Dani, and even though she still didn't seem to believe that Jake was her brother, her eyes found and locked with his. "We should go," she said, her voice raspy, as it had been since she was young. "I have had a vision. If we do not leave soon, the General will find us."

"Shit," Jason muttered, and Becca turned slowly and exited the kitchen, leaving the door open behind her.

Dani led Jason toward the sliding glass door. His imposing form dwarfing her petite, battered one. Part of Jake wished Zoe's wounds were as straight forward as bruises and broken bones; *those* wounds would heal, what Clara had done to her might not.

Once again, Zoe was right in front of him, but as unreachable as though she were miles away; it infuriated him. While Clara's first attempt to kill the only woman he'd ever loved had inevitably brought Zoe and Jake closer together, Clara's *final* attempt might've succeeded in tearing them apart completely.

Chapter 2
Zoe
March 24th, 1AE
Rocky Mountains, Colorado

“Potty break,” Dani said, halting her Paint horse, Wings, in the middle of the highway just ahead of me.

I’d been riding a brown mare named Mocha since leaving the house in Colorado Springs, the others taking turns at staying close to me since I had no clue what I was doing. Tavis was my current companion, riding on my right. I liked him; he was a funny Australian man who didn’t talk much, but when he did it was playful and put me at ease. Becca, the woman who was sharing his saddle, seemed nice, though she hadn’t said much to *anyone* during the five plus hours we’d been on the road. She almost seemed as lost as I felt.

Dani struggled to dismount Wings using only her right arm, since her left arm was in a sling. She was obviously in a lot of pain, despite the medicine the doctor, Harper, had given her.

I glanced up ahead at Jason, assuming he’d be charging toward us to help Dani in her flailing attempt to dismount and chastising her for attempting it on her own. But he was at the head of our parade line, talking to Chris and completely oblivious to Dani’s self-dismount.

When Dani’s boots hit the ground, she glanced at Jason, then looked up at me, a sheepish grin on her face as she brought her index finger to her lips. “Don’t tell him...”

I smiled and shook my head. I liked Dani, a lot. She was fiery and peppy, and the ease with which she spoke to me made it easier to cope with what was going on, like I had a friend who would stay by my side no matter what. When she’d tried to explain to me what had happened to the world, that we’d grown up together and had spent the last three month trying to get to one another only for us to be separated by the Colony again, I’d begun to freak out. The weight of reality and my lack of memories and sense of self was all too much to bear at once.

But Chris had been quick to wrap her arms around my shoulders, telling me that it would be alright, I just needed time to readjust, and for some reason, that had made me feel better. Dani had later explained that it was because Chris had the innate ability to comfort people. Although I got the distinct impression there was more to Chris than that—a nagging suspicion in the back of my mind—I liked the way I felt in her presence and savored the reprieve of unwanted emotions when she was around me.

“Come on, Zo,” Dani said, holding her good hand up to help me climb out of Mocha’s saddle. “Let’s go pee. You never know...” She scanned the tall Aspens on either side of the road. “We might not find another woodsy spot before we stop for the night...might as well take advantage of the privacy while we have it.”

I considered the image of the two of us standing side-by-side, best friends who, I’d been told, were so completely altered from the last time we’d seen each other. Tiny little Dani with her bruised pixie face framed by wild red curls, and me, tall with an unmarred exterior yet hollow interior. *I wish I could remember...* But having been found inside the bedroom closet of an abandoned house the night before was as far back as my memory went.

“Zo? You okay?” Dani’s brow furrowed. “Do you need me to get Harper?”

I shook my head. I had a million and one questions, but a pee break wasn’t the time to ask them. Instead, I offered her what I hoped was a reassuring smile. “No, I was just thinking.” I waved her proffered hand away. “I got it, Dani, but thanks.” I didn’t want to hurt her by jerking her body around as I dismounted. “It’s only a couple feet.” I’d decided it was much easier getting up into the saddle than it was getting down, an art I was determined to master if this was going to be my spot during our several day journey.

While the others seemed all too excited to meet up with the rest of our group, it meant *I* had even more people to “reacquaint” myself with. Dani had spent part of the morning filling me in on my relationships with them. Now I just needed to remember all that she’d told me: Sarah, apparently a friend I’d traveled with from the East Coast, was pregnant; her boyfriend, Biggs, was a military man we’d met up with along the way; Mr. Grayson was my high school history teacher and had been traveling with Dani for months; and Jason’s best friend, Ky, and Ky’s older brother, Ben were waiting for us further into the mountains.

I stood up in the stirrups, prepared to fling my leg over for an awkward dismount.

“Here,” Tavis offered kindly as he strode up beside Mocha. I hadn’t even noticed him dismount his own horse. He wore an easy smile, and his blue eyes crinkled in the corners where his smile touched them. His dirty-blond hair was a little long and mussed from running his fingers through it so frequently.

Caught off guard, I felt my heart flutter a bit.

“Fling your leg over, and I’ll help ease you down...”

Flashing him a brief smile, I did as Tavis instructed. With one hand gripping the saddle horn and

the other gripped on the edge of the saddle seat for leverage, I swung my leg over Mocha's rump, just like Dani had shown me. As I was about to lower myself to the ground, Tavis's hands grasped my waist, firmly but gently, and he helped lower me the rest of the way down.

"It's not mountain climbing, so you'll be a pro in no time," he said as I pivoted around to face him.

"Thanks," I chirped, and he answered with a nod before he turned and headed back for his horse.

Turning around, I found Dani eyeing me carefully. Jake, a man who hadn't uttered a single word to me since they'd found me but had taken to watching me with unnerving intensity, sat upon his horse behind her, his gaze equally assessing.

"Jason," she called ahead, startling me. I looked up toward the front of the caravan as Jason turned around, his gaze questioning as it shifted between us. "We're gonna pee," she said. "It might be difficult for you to keep nulling for a minute, but we'll be right back."

Jason's eyes narrowed. "Be careful."

"Come on, Zo," Dani said, biting her lip. There was a hint of uncertainty in her voice. "There's some stuff you should know." She hooked her arm in mine, and we headed toward the tangle of leafy bushes a dozen yards away.

"Dani," Jake said, swinging his leg over his saddle, clearly intending to come with us.

Dani shook her head at him and patted the handgun in her shoulder holster. "We'll be fine, Jake. I need to talk to Zo for a sec."

Although Jake didn't seem pleased with the decision, he remained in his saddle, his gaze shifting between us as we turned away.

"Wait, Zoe—" Sam, a forward little boy I'd spoken to only a few times, called from behind us.

"We'll be right back, Sam," I said over my shoulder as Dani pulled me forward; I was practically stumbling as I tried to keep up with her. "What's—"

"Zo, I know you're probably exhausted and more than a little confused about everything that's going on, but you're super close to getting yourself into a mess that you'll regret later."

Trying to stay at least partially aware of where my feet were landing, I gave Dani a sidelong glance. Her bright green eyes were a bit glazed over in the sunlight. I could tell the pain meds were working.

“What do you mean by ‘a mess’?” I asked, near panting as we clumsily hurried through the underbrush and over uneven ground.

“You’re with Jake,” she said.

I blanched and stopped, the abrupt movement making Dani wince. “What?” A faint thrill wriggled down my spine.

“Yeah, for a few months now, I think...” She shook her head. “What’s important is that you remember that, especially when you’re chatting it up with Tavis.” She urged me toward the berry bushes a few feet away.

Falling into step behind her, I frowned. “But Jake hasn’t even talked to me.”

She snorted. “That *might* have something to do with the fact that you don’t even know him anymore.” Pulling a wad of tissues from her pocket, Dani handed me a couple, and then looked down at her broken arm. “This is gonna be fun,” she muttered, and I tried not to laugh, though I didn’t do a very good job.

I found that preoccupying my mind with observing Dani, her little quirks that I was still trying to understand, was a good distraction from all the things I was *supposed* to already know, the things that threatened to overwhelm me and bring me to tears.

As we each squatted behind our own cluster of bushes to do our business, I allowed my mind to wander, if only a little. I considered what Dani had told me about Jake and me being together. I found it impossible to picture. He seemed so quiet and capable, it was a little intimidating. I couldn’t even imagine having a conversation with him, let alone *being* with him. But in spite of my reservations, there was also a mysterious air about him that was intriguing, and I was curious to discover what the old me already had.

Hearing leaves crunch beneath footsteps on the other side of the shrubbery, I sighed and finished up. “Geez, you’re fast.” I assumed I’d have to *help* Dani, not that she would leave me in the dust. Jumping up to my feet, I zipped up my jeans and stepped out from behind the tangle of leaves and branches. I froze.

Sam was standing a few yards away, his bow drawn and an arrow aimed at the figure of a small

girl standing between us. Her back was to me, her blonde hair hanging in a knotted mess.

Sam's expression was horror-stricken—his pale eyes wide and his nostril flaring—but his stance and aim were unwavering.

“What the hell are you doing, Sam?” I screeched.

“What’s wrong, Zo?” Dani called from behind the bushes. But I was too focused on Sam and the little girl he was prepared to shoot an arrow through to answer.

“Sam,” I said again. “She’s just a little girl, put your bow down.”

Dark brown hair hung in his eyes, but he stared, unblinking at her, and I could see his uncertainty.

“Sam...”

As if hearing my voice had brought the little girl to life, she slowly turned around. At the sight of her, my heart nearly stopped. The front of her nightgown was *covered* in dried blood, as were her arms and neck. Her face was doll-like with eyes wide and gleaming in the sunlight, and her porcelain skin was hidden beneath what looked like weeks’ worth of layers of dirt and blood.

“Mommy?” The haunting pitch of her voice sent chills up my spine.

“Jesus,” I breathed. “Are you alright?” Although I had the innate urge to run away from the little girl, I took a hesitant step toward her, wondering what the poor child had been through.

“Zoe, get away from her!” Dani said from behind me.

The little girl took a step closer to me, her eyes narrowing and her lip curling into a snarl. Her body was suddenly trembling, like her muscles were coiling to strike. Gritting her teeth, she growled, “Are you my mommy?”

As she lunged forward, an ear-piercing crack resounded through the air. The little girl fell to a crumpled heap on the ground. A single crimson patch blossomed on her nightgown, spreading across her chest.

My hands flew to my mouth and I screamed, tears trickling down my face. “Oh my God.” Turning around, I found Dani, handgun drawn and still pointed where the little girl lay. Dani’s eyes were wide, her face ashen, and her mouth was hanging open. “What have you done?”

Dani blinked several times, and her gaze slowly shifted from the small body to me. Her eyes were filled with shock and horror. “She was a Crazy,” she said, lowering her gun. “She was a Crazy.” I wasn’t sure if she was trying to convince me, or herself. “I—I had to...she was a Crazy...”

“A what?” Turning back to the little girl, I stared down at her. I was suddenly shaking uncontrollably. “What the hell just happened?” I asked no one in particular. “She’s just a little girl.”

I heard a rush of footsteps and calling voices, but I couldn’t focus on anyone but the dead child lying horrifyingly still on the ground. Her eyes were open and staring directly at me. *She asked me if I was her mother...*

“I’ve never seen a kid one before,” Sam said, and I looked at him. “I tried to warn you.”

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“This is gonna be bright,” Harper said as he sat me down on a log beside the fire and clicked on a small, near-blinding pen light. He shone it directly into my eyes, and on instinct, I tried to blink, but Harper wouldn’t let me; his fingertips were warm and firm as he held my eyelids open.

“Sorry, Baby Girl, but I just want to check one more time...”

Still trying to understand the whole Ability thing Sam had explained during the last stretch of our journey, I decided now was as good a time as any to start asking more questions, especially since I knew Sam was probably getting tired of being the one having to answer them all. “Harper?”

“Hmmm.”

“Were you a doctor before, or is this, you know, just part of your Ability?” I had no idea what counted as an “Ability,” only that Sam had said everyone who survived the Virus had one, at least those who weren’t “Crazies.”

Harper He smiled. “This doctor stuff is all training, Baby Girl. I was a medic in the Army. My Ability has to do with visions and seeing things that haven’t happened yet.”

I snorted, determined not to cry out in confusion and disbelief.

“I know it’s a lot to take in, especially all in one day, but we can’t risk another incident like

earlier today.”

I shrugged, figuring the more answers I had the easier it would be for me to fit in. “Yeah, Sam said he has heightened senses, that he can hear, smell, and see things that other’s can’t.” I shook my head.

“Try not to move, Baby Girl.”

“Sorry.”

Harper shifted his hand down to my chin, gently gripping it while he moved my head from side to side in tandem with the flashlight he waved in front of my face.

“What are some of the others’ Abilities?”

“Well,” he began, “let’s see...I’m not sure what Tavis or Daniel can do, but Carlos can control electricity, Dani can communicate with animals, Sanchez is telepathic, Jake can regenerate...Chris and your brother, well, they’re the reason you’re dealing with things as well as you are; Chris is keeping you calm, and your brother is keeping your Ability at bay. He can actually nullify *or* amplify other people’s Abilities.”

*Regeneration? Communicating with animals? Telepathy? Controlling electricity?* I was almost afraid to ask... “What’s my Ability?” I placed my hand on Harper’s, gently pushing the pen light down so I could look him in the eyes. “What’s Jason protecting me from?”

Harper gave me a sympathetic smile. “You can see people’s memories. You can feel what they’re feeling. On top of everything that’s happened today, we didn’t think it was a good idea to add your Ability into the mix, too.”

Jason and Chris had been shadowing me pretty closely all day. Part of me wondered if I should be offended that they hadn’t told me about this sooner. But then again, the idea of having an Ability, one that was so intrusive, didn’t seem like something I could handle on top of everything else.

Harper clicked the light on, blinding me once more.

“Is there something *wrong* with my eyes?” I asked a bit tersely. The more he wanted to check them, the more concerned I became.

“No. Sorry to scare you. There’s nothing wrong, I just”—he gave me another sympathetic smile

as he clicked the light off—"I was just making sure there's no brain damage or... I just want to make sure I'm not missing anything that might help us figure out exactly what she did to you, or tell us how bad it is." He sighed. "But I don't see anything, and I doubt I will without doing an MRI or—"

"It's only been a day," Dani said as she walked by. It was the first time I'd heard her speak since the incident with the little girl...the Crazy. Dani stopped in the narrow clearing where everyone was setting up their tents for the night. "You might be back to your old self by tomorrow, Zo. Could be all you need is a good night's sleep."

Dani fought to keep a nylon sleeping bag from slipping out from under her good arm. Although she flashed me a smile over her shoulder, I could tell it was weak and forced. I could picture a real Dani smile brightening her face to glowing, nothing like the half-hearted smile that quickly faded.

I watched as she struggled to open a tent bag. "I'm sure you're right," I said and glanced up at Harper. "Tomorrow will be better. Can I be done?" I felt like I needed to be doing *something* to help Dani since I was otherwise useless and she was having such a hard time after such a crappy day.

Harper nodded absently, not really staring at me so much as staring through me. He rubbed his jaw and took another deep breath.

I stepped toward Dani but hesitated the moment Jason appeared beside her, crouching to help. He muttered something I couldn't hear.

"Yeah...I just want to go to sleep," Dani said.

"This isn't even our tent, and you shouldn't be doing this on your own, Red. You'll just make your arm worse. Please...just ask me for help next time." Jason, a man of words that were few and to the point, continued to grumble as he pulled the tent out of its bag and unrolled it like doing so was second nature.

"I didn't want to bother you." Dani rested her hand on his shoulder, his body tensed and stilled. "I was thinking Zo and I could share a tent tonight. You know, since it would be weird for her..." Dani's gaze drifted to Jake.

Hurt flashed in Jason's eyes.

"It's alright," I rushed to say. The last thing I wanted to be was more of an inconvenience than I

already was.

Jason and Dani both looked at me.

“I don’t mind having my own tent. You guys share, really.”

“I don’t think you should be alone tonight, Zo. What if something happens?” I noticed Dani’s eyes skirted to Jake again; he’d just dropped his own tent on the ground on the other side of the fire.

Briefly, I thought about what Harper had told me, that Jake could “regenerate,” and I wondered what exactly that meant.

“What if your memory comes back and you’re all alone?” Dani said, bringing my attention back to her. “I should be with you...unless...” Again, her eyes drifted to Jake.

A rush of anxiety filled me as I thought about sleeping in the same tent as him. Dani might’ve told me that Jake and I were *together*, but she hadn’t given me any of the details, and I wasn’t ready for that yet.

Becca walked past, startling me. Her face was soft and glowing in the building flames. “We can share a tent tonight, if you would like,” she said. I hadn’t talked to her much since we’d left Colorado Springs, so I was surprised she’d even offered.

I flashed her a grateful smile. “Thanks, Becca.” Looking at Dani, I asked, “Do you mind?”

Dani shrugged and shook her head. “Only if you’re sure, Zo.”

“Yes, I’m sure.”

“You can use this tent,” Jason offered, prepared to pull out the tent poles.

“That’s okay, Jason. I can finish. You guys can set up your stuff. Can you just point me to my things?” I hadn’t needed them for anything yet since we’d been riding all day. “I do have *things*, right?”

Jason nodded to Dani, and with a willing smile she picked up the flashlight he’d set on the ground and walked with me over to Mocha.

As I trudged along behind her, I noticed how many people were bustling around, chatting while

they set up for the night. Our cramped little camp was in a wooded area off the highway, out of sight but not so far away from the road that I couldn't hear one of the horses clip-clopping lazily on the asphalt.

Stepping up to Mocha, Dani started untying the two long stuff sacks secured behind the saddle with one hand, tossing me each as she freed them. Both were black with a purple Celtic knot painted on the side.

"That's your sleeping bag and sleeping pad," she said, pointing to each before she peeked into one of the saddlebags, which were still on the horse. "Yep, your clothes and whatnot are in here. Give me a sec and I'll have these down for you."

"Don't worry, I'll get them," I said, not wanting her to struggle needlessly. As I fumbled to loosen the saddlebag, I stared at the knot painted on it. I had no idea what the heck it meant. "Apparently I really like this symbol," I said. "It's all over my stuff."

Finally unfastening the bag, I turned around. Dani eyed me a moment, her face cast in shadows; obviously it meant something important to her, too. I glanced back down at the bag, the knot glaring at me.

Assuming it was my confusion that made her expel a tiny sigh of sadness, I released a sigh of my own. "I'm sorry, Dani. I wish I could remember..."

She stepped closer and nudged my arm with her good shoulder, offering me a reassuring smile that didn't touch her eyes. "It's okay, Zo. We'll figure it out tomorrow. It's been a long day, and we all need our rest."

I nodded and turned to tug the leather bags off of Mocha's back, but grunted when they were heavier than I'd expected.

"Here." A deep rumble came from behind me, and an arm reached over my shoulder and grabbed the cross strap of the saddlebags. Effortlessly, Jake pulled them off the horse and asked me where I wanted them.

"Over by Becca," I said, pointing dumbly. I'd decided Jake was intimidating—alluring but intimidating—and it prevented me from putting on a show of calmness around him, unlike I could around everyone else.

A pained expression pinched his features, but without another word, he headed to the other side of camp, toward Becca.

Dani was watching me, idly patting Jack, his tongue hanging out of his mouth. She gave me a reassuring nod—the nod that I'd grown used to over the past twelve hours—before I followed quickly after Jake.

Feeling inadequate in our silence, I occupied my mind with observations of the rest of the campers, busy in their various stages of getting situated.

Chris, just finished setting up a tent for Camille and Mase, was pulling her blonde hair up into a ponytail, while Mase, huge, dark, and intimidating, stood in front of the tent with Camille in his arms, her head resting on his shoulder. They'd been inseparable since she'd awoken right before we stopped for the day, and despite being unconscious since before they'd found me, she still looked exhausted. Mase stared at the nylon dome like it was from another dimension. He seemed constantly confused, even more than me, which I thought a little strange, but after a brief moment of hesitation, he ducked inside the tent with Camille.

Gabe, the tall, blond man, who seemed to keep to himself, was setting up another tent beside theirs.

“What’s his Ability?” I asked Jake. When he peered back at me, I pointed to Gabe.

Jake’s jaw clenched, and I immediately regretted asking him. “He can manipulate people’s dreams,” he said. I didn’t need to know the history between them to know it wasn’t a good one.

“Oh.”

Sanchez, who seemed to be leading the group with Jason, was stacking wood next to the campfire, while Sam and easy going Tavis hauled over bunches of kindling. I enjoyed watching Sam and Tavis interact; they acted more like brothers than father and son—though I’d been told they were neither—and they laughed more than the others, which I found comforting.

But as much as everyone *seemed* to coexist easily enough, a cloud of tension hung over the group. I wasn’t sure I wanted to learn the cause yet. Trying to remember everyone’s names, their Abilities, and my relationship with each of them was chore enough.

Jake stopped short in front of me, and I ran into the back of him.

“Sorry,” I said, unable to stop a nervous laugh from bubbling out of me. “I got distracted.” I dropped the load in my arms on the ground near Becca.

Jake set my saddlebags down as well. “I’ll be right back,” he said and headed back toward the horses.

I watched him for a moment—watched the way he rubbed the back of his neck and the way his shoulders relaxed the further he was from me.

I turned to Becca, who was attempting to finish setting up our tent. “Thank you, Becca. I appreciate you offering to stay with me tonight.”

When I realized she was practically wrestling with the tent poles, I crouched beside her and started to show her how they worked. “It’s pretty easy once you get the hang of it,” I said. I was surprised I remembered silly things like that—how to set up a tent, how to excuse myself when I sneezed and cover my mouth when I coughed. *Why can I remember those things but not others?*

“You have done this before,” Becca said quietly, watching the way my fingers moved and how I maneuvered the fabric of the tent as I pushed the poles through the red nylon loops.

“Yeah, I guess I have. You’ve never been camping?” Slowly, I forced one end of the pole into the corner of the tent, and watched as Becca mimicked what I was doing.

“Not that I remember, no.” Her voice was distant, as if her mind was somewhere else.

“Yeah, me neither...at least, not that I can remember.”

Jake returned, dropping two more stuff sacks on the ground, what appeared to be another sleeping bag and pad. He looked at Becca. “Those are mine, but you use them tonight. We’ll stop somewhere on the way to get you your own gear.” Becca watched Jake, her mouth pulling into a barely there smile. “Thank you, Jake.” The way she spoke to him seemed deliberate, like she meant more than what she said.

Jake watched her for a moment, his head tilting slightly to the side before he nodded. When his stare shifted to me, he appeared uncertain and regretful, though I wasn’t sure why. There was a long, awkward silence before he said, “Will you please let me know if you need anything else?” His tone was soft, beseeching even. There was something warm and inviting about his deep, velvety voice. “Anything,” he repeated, his eyes filled with a sadness I didn’t understand.

“Yes, I promise. Thank you,” I said. I watched him walk back toward his tent, which he had yet to finish setting up.

Becca unzipped the tent door behind me, and I turned around, ready to follow her inside. But she

just stood there.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, stepping up beside her. The light from the fire danced around inside, illuminating the tent enough to know there was nothing wrong with it.

“I guess I will sleep in my clothes,” she said so quietly I almost didn’t hear her.

“Is that all?” I asked and snatched up my saddlebags before sidestepping her and heading inside. “I’m sure I have something you can borrow.”

Becca followed me in, bringing the sleeping bags and pads in with her.

Fiddling with the ends of my hair, which were draped over my shoulder, I watched Becca as she just stood there. “Have a seat,” I said and opened my bag. I rummaged through the haphazardly folded clothes tucked inside, trying to find something for the both of us to sleep in. “Here,” I finally said, handing her a long sleeve thermal shirt and a pair of sweatpants. “These look comfy, and it looks like I packed...yep, two of each.”

Becca smiled, or at least I thought it was a smile; it was the first time I’d seen her be very expressive at all. “Thank you, Zoe.”

“Why don’t you have any clothes?” I asked, zipping up the tent to change.

Slowly, Becca peeled her clothes off one-by-one, until her ensemble was piled on the floor of the tent. “I have only just joined the group, along with Gabe, Mase, and Camille. We were unexpected, so we are relying on your friends’ kindness to take us in...Dani and the clothes on our backs were all we brought with us.”

“Dani was with *you*?”

Becca made a noncommittal noise and pulled the sweatpants on. They were too long and very baggy on her, but I figured that meant they were perfect for sleeping. “Yes,” she said. “Dani was with Gabe and Dr. Wesley...in the Colony.” Becca’s voice was distant, her demeanor instantly shifting from open to hesitant.

I peeled my long-sleeve v-neck on over my head. “Did you not want to leave the Colony with Dani?” I couldn’t stop myself from asking. The more complicated things became, the more my curiosity amplified. “You don’t seem happy to be here...” I glanced over at Becca in time to see the bruises on the side of her body before she pulled her borrowed shirt down.

"I am happy to be away from there. It is just that things are not simple for me." She looked at me. "Or for you."

I shrugged. "Hopefully my memory will come back tomorrow."

The look Becca gave me made me feel nauseous.

"You don't think it will?" I asked.

"I do not know everything," she said, offering me the slightest of smiles.

"Only some things?" I asked wryly.

Without hesitation, she said, "I have the gift of prophecy."

Still unable to fully process the whole "Abilities" thing, I paused.

Becca bent down and began folding her clothes so meticulously that I thought she might be in the military. I looked over at my saddlebags and almost laughed. The clothes I'd changed out of were tossed on top, no rhyme or reason or organization. Feeling self-conscious, I gathered up my dirty socks, jeans, and shirt, and after unwadding them, I folded them as neatly as I could. My attempt was pathetic compared to Becca's, but it sufficed. *Apparently neatness isn't my forte.*

Becca must've been watching me because when I looked up at her, her smile turned genuine.

"You are very different from the last time I saw you."

My eyes widened. "How so?" I unrolled my sleeping pad, then pulled my sleeping bag out of its stuff sack and laid it out on top. Unzipping it, I crawled inside to keep my feet warm.

Becca studied me and did the same with Jake's sleeping gear. "You and Jake were fighting."

"Really?" I hadn't been expecting that. "We were fighting?"

She nodded, her eyes fixed on mine like she was gauging my reaction. "He was going to leave you and your people and take me away, he said it was not safe. But Father sent a team to retrieve me, and I escaped during the gunfire." Becca looked down at her fingers, which were laced on her knees. "I had to return to the Colony... Jake did not understand."

"Did Father do that to you?" I asked, pointing to the bruised side of her body.

After contemplating my question for a moment, Becca nodded. “I had to get them out of there,” she said to herself, and I assumed she was talking about Dani and the others she’d escaped with.

My mind filled with images of a distraught Mase and unconscious Camille. “The others are like you, too,” I said, suddenly feeling an intense desire to know what had happened in the hours I’d lost my memory. “Mase and Camille, they’re...different, like you. The way you speak and how you see things like it’s for the first time...they’re the same.”

Becca nodded. “Yes. We are called Re-gens at the Colony, though Jake says I am his sister as well.”

My brow furrowed at yet another surprising truth. Jake didn’t treat her like a sister, but then, Jason didn’t treat me like one either, at least not how *I* thought a brother should treat a sister. I was beginning to think that whatever remaining perception of reality I had was both a misleading and impractical one.

“I saw things,” Becca continued, her voice a panicked whisper. “Horrible things. Things that I could not let come to pass. I had to tell them. I had to get away from there.” Becca continued to stare down at her hands. “I am not sure what to think anymore.”

“No?”

After a depleted sigh, she said, “No.”

Pulling the rubber band from my hair and letting it fall around my shoulders, I ran my fingers through the dark strands, wading through my limited memories, trying to determine how *I* felt...what *I thought*.

All I remembered were strange voices and surprised faces staring down at me when I’d been huddling inside the closet. *Did I really forget all that Becca had just described?* It seemed impossible, and a ravenous emptiness drained any optimism and hope I had left. A sick feeling settled in my stomach as it dawned on me: every single moment that shaped me into Zoe was gone. *I am no one.*

“You are not ‘no one’,” Becca said, and I stirred, not realizing I’d been thinking aloud. She rested her hand on my shoulder. “You are important.”

“You’ve seen this?” My sudden curiosity to know more of what she’d seen was making me antsy.

Becca shook her head. “No, I haven’t seen your future, nor do I know your purpose, but your mother is Dr. Wesley, I know that much. If you are her daughter, you are important.” She paused in thought. “Jake loves you, and he is important...I know that as well. So, you must be, too.”

*Jake loves me?* I wasn’t sure why I was surprised, Dani had told me much the same earlier. “He’s barely talked to me all day,” I said.

“All day, I have thought about two things,” Becca began, her voice a bit softer than before. “I considered what I might do now that I no longer have a home, a place I belong. And I thought about Jake. If what he says is true, if I *am* his sister, then he has lost both his sister and the woman he loves. Now, here we are again, and neither of us remembers him. I cannot imagine how he might feel.” Becca frowned. “I generally am not so...reflective, I think is the word, but much is changing...” She stretched out in her sleeping bag, staring up at the bouncing shadows on the nylon overhead.

We were quiet for a while, and I nearly allowed the crackling fire outside and the sound of crickets in the woods beyond our tent to lull me to sleep. But before I was out completely, I heard low voices by the fire.

“We’ve got to figure out a way to fix her,” Harper said.

“It’s not like there are rules to any of this shit,” Jason grumbled.

“There has to be a way,” Jake said, and then I heard retreating footsteps.

I glanced over at Becca to see if she was awake, but her back was to me, and all I could see was the outline of her torso rising and falling with each breath. I lay there, listening to my “friends” discuss my condition like it was simply an infection needing proper treatment. My mind reeled with questions and mounting fear until their voices fell silent, and I eventually drifted to sleep.

*A slight breeze caressed my skin as I sat on a dock, gazing out at a lake—its glassy surface was illuminated with pinks and oranges, like it was set aflame by the sun sinking behind the rolling hills.*

*My chest grew heavier, and I was nearly suffocating under the weight of too many emotions.*

“*I know what I want,*” said a deep, rumbling voice.

*I spun around to find Jake standing beside me, his luminous, amber eyes peering into the depths*

*of my soul. He knew me, I could see it in the way he looked at me, those eyes filled with longing and uncertainty and need.*

*Like his emotions sparked my own, I felt the need to weep from the inexplicable love I felt for him.*

*“Jake, I—” I didn’t have time to think, to say anything.*

*In seconds his lips were pressed against mine, his kiss fierce and blazing. My hands moved of their own accord, grabbing a handful of his jacket and pulling him closer to me as his fingers tightened in my hair. An overwhelming, frenzied greed consumed us both as my arms snaked around his neck and his hands explored my body.*

*We were panting, and a low groan resonated deep inside Jake’s chest. My body throbbed with a pleasurable ache I wanted to both last forever and go away, ending me of my torment.*

*Jake froze, sending an unnatural anger and despondency simmering through me. He stepped away, leaving me to stand there alone, the cool breeze turning icy against my exposed skin. Panic riddled my nerves, and I tried fervently to grasp hold of him.*

*He was pulling away from me...*

*He was leaving me...alone...*

With a jolt, I opened my eyes. I was surrounded by darkness, only the starry sky overhead visible through the rectangles of netting on the roof of the tent. There was no more campfire, and there were no more voices. All I could hear was the wind whistling through the trees.

As I lay there, my heart still pounding from the dream, I felt completely lost and alone. I didn’t like the dangerous intoxication that settled over me as I remembered Jake’s hot breath...the thrill that sang through me as I recalled the feeling of his fingers pressing against my skin...

“Zoe? Are you alright?” Becca asked quietly.

I nodded, not feeling comfortable talking to her about it.

“Are you sure?”

“I just had a strange dream. I’ll be fine.”

Becca was quiet for a moment. “Was it a dream or a memory?”

Rolling over, I studied her darkened outline. “A dream...at least, I think it was...”

“Do not fight it,” she said. “If it *is* your memory, you should not fight it.”

Had it been a memory? It had been so vivid, so charged with emotions I couldn’t remember ever feeling before, that part of me doubted it was even possible.

Chapter 3  
Dani  
March 28, 1AE  
San Juan National Forest, Colorado

Carrying a small bin of grooming tools under my good arm, I led Wings toward a retention pond beside the field where we'd set up camp for the night. We passed between one of the three carts and the replica pioneer chuckwagon that had been given to us by Georgie, the sole occupant of Colorado Trails Ranch. We'd stayed at the ranch only one night, wanting to put as much distance between us and the Colony as possible, as soon as possible. That single night was just long enough for us to redistribute our supplies among the packhorses and conveyances, convene for a quick strategic meeting, and for Harper and Jake to attempt a regenerative blood transfusion on Zoe—which ended up being the most anti-climactic fail ever. She still remembered nothing of her life before the golf course.

Georgie had seemed sad to see us go, but she'd refused our offer to join our band of survivors as we headed west, instead sending us off with fresh tack, the carts and wagon, and another dozen horses, including trained driving teams.

Zoe's memory loss was proving to be as stubborn as my best friend was...or used to be. This new Zoe, this *not-Zoe* Zoe, was different; she was less closed-off, less severe, and every time she said or did something that emphasized just how much Clara's violent mind-wiping had changed her, the thundercloud that had become my mood darkened. Just as it did every time I spoke to Jason—*lied* to Jason—avoided Gabe, or remembered my time in the General's concrete interrogation room or the way the light had faded from the child Crazy's eyes as she bled out from a bullet wound I'd put in her chest.

Maybe if I hadn't burned out my telepathy *again*, and I could speak with Wings, Jack, and Ray, as I'd grown so accustomed to doing over the past few months, I would've been able to find comfort in their steadfast companionship and stave off the looming negativity. But my Ability was burned out, and missing my usually lighthearted, sometimes philosophical conversations with my animal friends only added to my doom-and-gloom mood.

I spotted Mase and Camille, sitting at the edge of the pond while they filtered water into large plastic jugs, and nodded a hello.

Camille's remarkable recovery was the only bright ray of hope keeping the thundercloud from overtaking me completely. She'd woken up five days ago, the night after we found Zoe and left Colorado Springs, her memory in-tact but her ability to speak apparently gone completely.

Harper's best guess was that certain parts of her brain must've suffered permanent damage during her seizure and resulting coma, and he'd even proposed that she might have had a stroke, though he couldn't tell for sure without some pretty high-tech equipment. But she was awake, and more whole than she'd been since she'd died...the first time. Her recovery, at least, was something.

I sighed and shook my head.

Zoe was following Wings and me, Shadow trailing behind her. The other seventeen members of our group were moving among the tents clustered around the campfire or through the scattering of trees lining the field, searching for firewood. Except for Jason; he was absolutely committed to the task of nulling Zoe, of keeping her Ability from surfacing and pummeling her shattered mind with foreign memories and emotions, and therefore had become her ever-present second shadow...or third shadow, if you counted her horse.

I snorted at my lame silent pun, and blinked rapidly as my eyes started to sting. I would not start crying just because I found Jason's commitment to protecting my best friend—the sister he'd successfully estranged through emotional and physical distance—so sweet, so admirable. It was like this tragedy had jump-started his brotherly instincts, making him realize all he'd missed out on over the years. His renewed devotion to her made me feel like such a crap friend in comparison, because the more time I spent with this Zoe, this hauntingly familiar stranger, devoid of everything that had made her my best friend, the less I *wanted* to be around her. Like I said—crap friend.

Reaching the edge of the pond, I set the small bin of grooming tools on the ground and waited for Wings to amble closer. She did and ducked her head down to slurp at the water.

Zoe and Shadow took up a position a few feet away, just on the other side of the bin, and Jason hoisted himself up and settled on the bench seat of the nearest cart. He pulled out a pocket knife and his latest whittling project—an as-yet unrecognizable hunk of wood about the size of a baseball.

My eyes lingered on him for a moment longer, tracing the angry red scar crossing his face from hairline to jaw and the hunched set of his shoulders, before I bent over to grab a soft-bristled brush and turned my attention to Wings.

"Thanks for teaching me all this horse stuff," Zoe said from behind me.

I glanced over my shoulder to study her and frowned. I'd been doing that a lot lately, both studying Zoe and frowning. The setting sun gleamed a burnished purple off her and Shadow's

onyx hair alike. I'd offered to walk Zoe through the basics of horse grooming, hoping that doing something *with* her, something *I* always found soothing, might alleviate some of my infuriating aversion *to* her.

Meeting her eyes, I forced a tight smile. "No problem. You used to like helping me with grooming them, back when we were in high school, so I thought..." I shrugged. "I don't know." I returned my focus to Wings, running the brush over a coffee-brown patch on her shoulder. "I just thought you might still like it." I didn't tell Zoe that I was searching for some remnant of my best friend, some sliver of hope that she was still *her*.

There was a long moment of silence, and then Zoe exhaled heavily. "I've been thinking about that...about me before and me now. Do you think—" She paused. I could hear the sound of soft bristles running over Shadow's coat as Zoe started brushing him. The black gelding was still recovering from the neglect he'd suffered at the hands of a couple of Crazies, and the six-day trek through the southern Rockies with only a half-day and night's rest at Colorado Trails hadn't done him any favors. Although he was doing better than when Zoe's group had first found him, he was exhausted and hurting, much like the rest of us. I didn't need my Ability to know that.

When Zoe didn't resume her question, I looked at her. "Do I think...?"

She stopped brushing, turned to lean her shoulder against Shadow, and sighed. "It's just that, if I don't have any memories of what made me me, do you think I'm even still *me*?"

*Am I even still me?*

Zoe's question seemed to echo in my mind, burrowing deeply, mostly because it was pretty much the same thing I'd been wondering since we first found her. Was Zoe still *Zoe* if she had no memory of experiencing the things that made her the loyal, guarded, and determined person I loved? A dull, incessant ache spread through my chest, a yawning void created by her mental disappearance.

My eyes stung—*again*—and I cleared my throat. "You know, Zo...I think knowing who you really are is hard for a lot of people." Yes, I was avoiding answering her question completely, but I meant what I said. After all, I hardly recognized myself anymore. My frown reemerged. Anyone who cracked *me* open in an attempt to find out what made me me would discover a rancid, tangly wad of guilt. And self-loathing. And plain-old misery.

My best friend—who, thanks to a psycho with the Ability to alter people's perception, even erase their memories—had no idea that she was my best friend. And the reason she'd fallen into Clara's manipulative little hands?

Me.

I'd been stupid enough to get ambushed and abducted, and thanks to my bad judgment, Zoe wasn't really Zoe anymore. My frown deepened into a scowl. I really hated myself sometimes.

After a few more strokes over the Paint's sculpted shoulder, which I was pretty sure soothed me more than it soothed Wings, I glanced over at Jason. If he noticed me watching him, he didn't show it. It was like we'd traveled back in time ten years, to the days when I'd spend every possible moment stealing glances at him, and he'd spend just as much time ignoring me.

Before my stint in the Colony, I'd thought I had him figured out, but now he was even more of an enigma to me than he'd been during my teen years. He was still a classic Adonis, all lean muscle and chiseled features, but now his masculine perfection was marred by an angry red scar slashing across his face. It added a layer of menace to the confidence and sense of carefully honed power that he usually exuded. He'd always been guarded, just like his sister, but since my abduction, he'd withdrawn further into himself. For the life of me, I couldn't figure out why, and I didn't know how to draw him back out. Even though he was never far from my side, he was miles away, emotionally. I missed him.

I turned around, facing Zoe, and leaned my head on Wings's shoulder. My need for girl-talk, for Zoe to listen as I spilled out all of my gnawing worries and to offer up her usual, no-nonsense advice, was becoming overwhelming. *Should I just talk to her like everything's normal? Can't I just pretend she's her?* I really needed my Zo...

"You're staring at me," Zoe said. She lowered her brush hand, and using her opposite fingers, tucked a flyaway that had escaped from her ponytail behind her ear. "Are you okay?"

I blinked several times, noticing the excessive moisture in my eyes, and forced a smile. "I'm fine...I think."

Zoe shifted her feet and looked down at the dirt. She swiped ineffectively at a dark smudge staining her jeans. "You can cry...if you need to. I don't mind. In fact, you can consider me your official shoulder to cry on." She shrugged, meeting my eyes only briefly. "It's the least I can do since I'm pretty much otherwise inept...at everything."

The thundercloud thinned, just a little, and I started chuckling. That was something Zoe would have said; she'd always looked out for me, always been the first to comfort me when I needed it and the first to defend me when I couldn't defend myself. Not that I didn't try to defend myself. It was more that I was just so damn small that nobody was intimidated by me. When I made a

point to stand up for myself or—shudder—lost my temper, I was pretty sure people saw me as the human version of a viciously snarling Chihuahua. Not. Scary. At. All.

From the way Zoe was watching me, it was obvious that she was unsure how to respond to my abrupt shift from verge of tears to genuine, if gentle, laughter. Her eyebrows drew down, and the corners of her mouth twitched. She smiled weakly. It was like she was trying to figure out how I wanted her to react—how the old Zoe would have reacted—and for a moment, the disquiet I felt around her melted, and the only thing that mattered to me was making her feel comfortable.

I pushed off Wings gently and stepped closer to Zoe, nudging her arm with my shoulder. “Don’t try so hard, Zo. Just do what feels natural and stop worrying about the rest of us and what we expect from you.” I flashed her a half-hearted grin. “We’ll figure it out as we go.” Empty platitudes for the most part, but from the way the tension around her eyes relaxed, the words meant something to Zoe. Apparently even crap friends could pull through every once in a while.

Just as I was turning back to Wings to resume brushing her, I heard a dog barking. I craned my neck to see around Zoe and Shadow and spotted Jack trotting through the overgrown field beside our camp. He barked several more times as I watched him draw nearer.

Without warning, something inside me snapped. A whoosh, like the most intense ear-popping imaginable, knocked the air out of me, and I doubled over. Thousands upon thousands of sparks of awareness burst to life in my mind’s eye, a glowing galaxy representing all of the life forms around me. It was glorious. And unexpected. And so far beyond too much that I thought I might be crushed under the enormity of what I was sensing.

Several things happened at once: Jack reached me, dancing a circle around me, his tail hanging low while he whined and chanted, “*Mother? Mother! Mother?*” in my mind; Zoe’s hand wrapped around my upper arm, the support she offered the only thing keeping me from doubling over completely; and Jason appeared before me, crouching and placing his hands on either side of my head.

“Red?” Jason said. “Look at me, Dani. Open your eyes.” His hold on my head tightened.

I hadn’t realized I’d squeezed my eyes shut until he told me to open them. I obeyed, clenching my jaw. Inches from my face, Jason’s was carefully blank, but his eyes held a concern so wild and intense that it verged on panic.

“What’s wrong?” His voice was low and even—too even. “What do you need?”

I swallowed, despite my mouth and throat feeling unbearably dry. “My...Ability...too much,” I

managed to say through gritted teeth. Something like this had happened once before; I'd overextended the reach of my telepathy, and nearly lost myself to the collective pull of the minds around me. I should have been stronger now, especially after the painful but productive electrotherapy session I'd accidentally experienced back in the Colony. I should have been able to control my Ability, to pull back, to shut it off...to do *something*. But I couldn't.

As he'd done the last time, Jason acted as the grounding wire to my telepathic lightning rod. Using half of his Ability, he boosted mine, giving me back the control I so desperately needed. The magnetic lure of the minds around me waned, fading into the background until I could actually breathe.

I took a deep breath, then another. Smiling, I filled my eyes with as much warmth as I could and placed my hand over one of Jason's, giving it a gentle, grateful squeeze. "Thank—" My voice caught in my throat, and my chest clenched. Something was wrong.

I couldn't sense Jason.

I looked at Zoe, feeling my eyes widen. I couldn't sense either of them. I could sense the animals all around, but I couldn't sense any human minds at all.

"Red...?" Jason's voice was soft, cautious.

"You're gone," I whispered, feeling like I'd been kicked in the stomach. "You're all gone." I looked into Zoe's piercing blue eyes. "Gone." My voice sounded hollow.

Zoe's grip tightened on my arm. "Um..."

Jason swiped the pads of his thumbs under my eyes, wiping away the tears of strain streaming down my cheeks. "Do you have control of it?" The concern filling his eyes intensified, and his calm expression cracked. "I've got to stop boosting you—Zoe..."

*Oh God. No.* Reality slammed into me like a slap across the face. Jason's Ability had two parts: he could amplify others' Abilities, like he was currently doing for me, or he could nullify them completely, but he couldn't do both at the same time. If Zoe's empathy kicked in as violently as my telepathy just had, and she started feeling other people's emotions and seeing their memories without knowing how to control it...

I nodded vigorously. "I'm good. Help Z—"

Without warning, Zoe gasped, and her hand clenched. Her fingernails dug into my arm.

We were too late. The floodgates had opened.

Chapter 4  
Zoe  
March 28, 1AE  
San Juan National Forest, Colorado

I gasped as an unused part of my mind sparked to life. It seemed to shift and realign, jump-starting my true consciousness as if I'd been running on autopilot, but was now finally in control. Everything changed in the blink of an eye...I felt *whole*. At least more "myself" than I had since the others found me.

For a brief moment, among the torrent of feelings and memories flooding my mind, I thought the old me might resurface, too. "I think I'm—" *Getting my memories back?* It was almost too much to hope for.

As my mind spun, so did the onslaught of conflicting emotions—too random and unrecognizable to have been my own.

"Dani," I breathed. My eyes met hers, and I used the comfort I found in them as my anchor amid the impressions of foreign lifetimes competing for space in my mind. "Something's...not right." Dizziness enveloped me, and I gripped Dani's arm more tightly, automatically reaching for Jason, too.

"It's your Ability, Zo," Dani said, composed and reassuring. "Don't fight it—you'll only make it worse."

Images of Jason and Dani flickered in my head, but instead of trying to push them away, I let them come, vivid and countless as they were.

With what felt like a breath of life, I inhaled, and everything in my mind's eye sharpened. As unsteady as I felt, the clarity brought a sense of relief I hadn't expected, and the dark recesses of my mind filled with colors and shapes and sounds—recollections of the past. Dani and Jason's pasts, but not mine.

"I'm so sorry, Zo," Dani said, her fingers brushing softly over the back of my hand. "This is all my fault. Stupid...so stupid..."

I could feel her guilt, and I shook my head, only vaguely aware of *whyshe* felt that way. Dani's concern replaced my confusion, her curiosity and hope quickly following. Although I didn't necessarily understand the onslaught, I welcomed it. Everything I saw—everything I felt—was new and unexplored; my mind, once an empty cave, suddenly housed echoes of the past, assembling them into an irrefutable truth that seemed to lighten the darkness and partially fill the lingering void inside me.

But as abruptly as the emotions assaulted me, they vanished, and I felt empty again—the images and feelings were nothing more than fading memories.

Disappointed, I turned to Jason. “You’re taking it away?”

He exchanged a skeptical glance with Dani. “Yeah?” he said, sounding unsure.

No longer needing to steady myself, I loosened my grasp on his arm and looked at him beseechingly. “Please don’t,” I said, self-conscious but *needing* this other part of me. “It feels...right.”

Jason frowned. “Well...it’s your choice,” he mumbled, and although he seemed baffled, he nodded.

In an instant, another flurry of guilt, frustration, and despair swirled around in my mind. I blinked, once again focusing on Dani as memories and feelings poured out of her. Like a camera shutter opening and closing, I *saw* Dani for the first time. Yes, she was a fiery, red-haired pixie with bright green eyes and a seemingly carefree nature, but she also felt lost and afraid and confused. I could feel everything—her undeniable love for Jason, and the relentless shadow of a not-too-long-ago broken heart. Inexplicably, I shared her longing to see the woman who’d raised her, her grandma who was gone, and her yearning to speak with her one last time. And then I saw an image of the dead little girl, haunting Dani and flooding her with guilt.

My best friend, who I only knew from her coalescing memories and our stilted conversations over the past week, stood in front of me, and now I understood why she seemed to cry at the drop of a hat. Her emotions were so raw, rampant, and fierce that they almost brought tears to *my* eyes.

Enthralled by the insight I felt bringing me closer to Dani, I vaguely registered Jason walking away.

I blinked again.

“Zo?” Dani’s hand rested on my shoulder, sending acute waves of anxiety and eagerness rippling through me. “Are you alright?” Her voice teetered between panic and remorse, and I could *feel* the questions practically jumping off her tongue. She was hoping that my memories had returned, but felt guilty for thinking it, and she was worried she’d accidentally and irrevocably hurt me.

Forcing myself, I smiled, if a little weakly, and refocused on her imploring eyes. “Yeah, I am. I’m fine. Better than fine, actually.”

“Are you sure?”

Nodding, I tried to reassure her. “I can see and feel it all so clearly.”

“Like you can feel what I’m feeling?” A burst of apprehension flared inside her.

I bit the inside of my cheek, trying to articulate it. “It’s more than that,” I said, my voice tinged with excitement. “There are images...like memories, too...”

Dani’s eyes lit with hope. “You remember?”

*Crap.* I sighed and shook my head, feeling a tidal wave of excitement recede between the two of us. “No, I don’t remember,” I admitted, watching the light in her eyes dim. “I still don’t remember anything from before the golf course...but I *see* you, Dani. I see you and me...my dad and Jason.” I shook my head. “It’s the strangest, most horrifyingly amazing thing I’ve ever experienced.”

Although I had no attachment to the memories themselves, Dani’s profound intimacy with each impression made me feel like I’d found a small piece of myself within them. “It’s like I was there...when you were sick and Jason found you...and then when you were alone and at Grams’s house.” I tried to shake away the overwhelming fog in my head. “There’s so much...”

Dani eyed me curiously, her fingers stroking the sling cradling her injured arm.

“I can feel your pain,” I said, studying her black removable cast. “I can see what happened at the Colony. I feel like I finally understand what’s going on.”

Dani’s eyes widened as fear replaced her curiosity, and the jumble of images focused, a tumultuous memory flashing prominently through her mind.

*Dani stood in a stark office, a perfectly organized desk separating her from Dr. Wesley, who was sitting behind it.*

*The doctor eyed Dani warily. “So you know?”*

*Dani felt a pulse of rage. “That Zoe and Jason are your kids? Yeah...”*

Another more vivid memory immediately followed.

*In the same office, Dr. Wesley still seated behind the desk and Dani standing opposite her, the doctor's features hardened into a frown. "If your actions kill my children, then everything I've done to keep them safe will have been for naught. That's on you."*

*Dani shook her head, so much hurt and anger filling her that she could barely speak. "Zo and Jason might blame themselves for everyone's deaths if they knew about you, but I don't. I blame you," she seethed and stormed to the door.*

*"Would you rather I'd killed myself, thus killing the two people you love so dearly? Gregory would have found another geneticist to engineer his virus, and everyone would've died anyway."*

The memory faded, leaving in its place violent emotions tangled in my gut, nearly bringing me to my knees.

*Dr. Wesley is my mom... I'd completely forgotten that.*

Dani took a step closer. "We *can't* tell him," she whispered as her eyes darted around us. "He can't know about your mom, Zo, not yet."

I hedged. "But she's our *mom*, Dani. He'll be furious if we don't tell him, won't he?" Lacking any tangible connection to Jason, I still wanted to do what was right, and I'd seen enough of his silent tantrums in her memories to know this instance would be no exception.

"She's your mom *and* she killed nearly everyone to keep you guys safe." Dani closed her eyes and took a deep breath, her eyes pleading when she reopened them. "Please, Zo. Don't say anything. He's not ready. Can't you see...can't you *feel* it?" Dani's acute panic and desperation were nearly overwhelming.

Rough laughter startled me, and I glanced over to the cart to see Jason and Carlos chatting as they sat on the bench, whittling. Although I had the impression that Jason wouldn't want me to pry around inside his head, I needed to; I needed to understand *why* Dani was so adamant to keep the truth from him.

Focusing beyond her swirling emotions, I searched for Jason's. While Dani's were easy to access, an invisible wall surrounded Jason's, cold and excruciatingly controlled. I focused harder. It was difficult with Dani so close, her emotions so intense, but I could see and feel just enough from Jason to understand. There had been too much heartache, and too many lies and surprises to unleash another tumultuous mess on him while he was already so distraught.

Like he could somehow sense my cerebral intrusion, Jason stopped whittling for a moment and glanced over at me. The instant his knowing eyes met mine, the invisible wall protecting his

mind solidified, blocking me out completely.

Standing there, with only a brief impression of who he was fresh in my mind, I felt closer to him than I probably ever would have had my Ability remained dormant. And I understood; Dani was right. Learning that our mom was still alive, that she'd made the choice to leave when Jason was a young child, and that she'd been the cause of so much death would devastate him, especially while the real me wasn't around to help bear the weight of the discovery.

Dani clutched my hand, silently pleading with me to keep quiet as Jason glanced between us.

With a quick squeeze in return, I reassured her of my silence, at least for a while.

Harper and Chris emerged from the nearest cluster of trees, chatting amiably as they made their way back to camp with armfuls of firewood. When Harper's eyes found mine, his relaxed expression tensed, and he hurried over to us.

"You doing okay, Baby Girl?" His expression was pinched with worry—a look I'd grown weary of over the last few days. "You're pale."

"I'm fine," I said, waving his concern away. There was nothing like a resurgence of forgotten memories and pitying glances to make me feel like the most pathetic woman in the world.

As I took a few steps toward Harper and Chris, I stumbled, the bombardment of their worries, memories, and emotions throwing me off kilter. Dropping his armful of firewood, Harper jogged the final few steps between us to lend me a supporting hand.

I snickered. *Yep, I'm pathetic.*

"I'm okay," I said. "It's just my Ability...it's a little overwhelming, and my head's frazzled...I think."

"So, Jason's not..." Chris glanced over at my brother. "A little advanced notice would've been nice," she grumbled, though I didn't really understand her spike of irritation.

"It was an accident," Dani chimed in, sounding tired. She patted Wings's neck. "I'll send Wings and Shadow out to pasture with the other horses, then head over and warn"—Dani's gaze flicked to me, and her cheeks reddened as shame emanated from her—"tell the others." After a brief moment, the sound of lazy, clopping hooves retreated behind me.

Harper helped me over to lean against a lone tree trunk growing along the edge of the pond. His

memories and feelings resonated within me, and I mentally waded through the streaming information, effortlessly absorbing pieces of who he was. He was so good and confident and calm; I couldn't help but admire him.

"You sure you're alright, Baby Girl?" he asked, scanning me as I gripped the trunk of the tree.

"Yeah. I'm okay, really." I blushed at being the center of unwanted attention.

With a pat on my shoulder, Chris excused herself and headed over to join Jason and Carlos. I hadn't missed her and Harper's silent, charged exchange before she walked away. Their growing connection was impossible to miss, especially when I could *feel* their mutual attraction.

Harper glanced over at Chris's retreating form, appraising her covertly, or so he thought. When he noticed me eyeing him, he smiled, a knowing glint in his peridot-colored eyes.

"Interesting," I said, eyebrows raised in amusement.

He nudged my shoulder with his. "You see too much," he said and waggled his eyebrows.

I knew *that* was true, so all I could do was shrug. "I'm still learning how to navigate this whole Ability thing," I said.

He winked at me. "You'll get the hang of it."

"And in the meantime, you'll all avoid me like I'm a leper?" I asked acerbically. Being bitter wouldn't help, but it was hard not to be when people were suddenly running as far away from me as possible, despite their smiles.

"Everyone just needs time, Baby Girl, including you. You'll get the hang of it, and if not, they'll warm up to it eventually."

"I sure hope so," I muttered.

Tavis's laughter rumbled on the faint breeze, and I could hear him and Sam bantering back and forth. After a quick glance around, I spotted them walking along the other side of the reservoir, water jugs in their hands. The still water began to ripple, and I realized I hadn't noticed the wind pick up.

"Whatever," Sam said.

I smiled as they drew closer. Their companionable chatter was familiar, the one feeling I yearned for the most. I welcomed the sense of comfort that came with the sounds of their voices.

“Not true,” Tavis said with a laugh as they approached. “You’d never beat me if it weren’t for your Ability, mate, and that’s a fact.”

Sam sighed, his annoyance making me smile. “You’re just using that as an excuse.”

“As if!” Tavis said with half a laugh.

“Even Zoe’s a better shot than you,” Sam said. “At least she *was*.”

Tavis stopped mid-step, appalled by Sam’s comment. “Not even true, and your Ability gives you an unfair advantage.”

Sam laughed. “You’re just mad because you don’t know what your Ability is yet.”

“What? Grayson doesn’t know what his Ability is either.” Narrowing his eyes to slits, Tavis tried not to smile. “Maybe we’re Crazies...”

“That’s what *I* was thinking,” Sam said.

Looking to me and Harper, Tavis shook his head. “Can you believe this kid? He has supersonic hearing and can see a mile away, and he thinks I’m using it as an excuse.”

Unbidden, a soft chuckle escaped from my throat. “I just don’t understand why you’re not improving your archery skills, Tavis. I mean, Sam seems like a good teacher. Maybe it *is* you.”

“I can’t bloody believe it,” Tavis said, peering up into the sky and spreading his arms like someone might actually care enough about his aiming issues to listen. “I taught the kid everything he knows, and suddenly *I’m* the one who needs to practice.” He tsked and shook his head. “Cheeky little bugger.” A wolfish grin spread across his face, and he and Sam sauntered closer, stopping beside Harper and me.

Harper rumpled my hair, messing up my ponytail. “If you’re alright, Baby Girl, I’m gonna head back to camp.” He glanced at Chris again, who was still standing with Jason and Carlos, before he turned to Tavis. “Her Ability’s back online,” he cautioned, and I sighed involuntarily. *My presence warrants a warning now—great.*

Taking a deep breath, I tried to remind myself that while others’ memories helped me feel a little

more like a member of the group, being so emotionally exposed wasn't something most people would appreciate.

"Do you remember us yet?" Sam asked as he crouched and picked at the burs in his shoestrings.

I bit at the inside of my cheek and felt my eyebrows draw together. "No," I admitted. "Not yet." I didn't bother telling him that I knew he'd won his first blue ribbon in a relay race in third grade, and that his sister, Anastasia, had been born a year and half ago, and that his father had died from the Virus right before his mother had been raped and killed by Crazies. I knew all of that, but had no recollection of him from *my* past. "But do you think you can work with me on my archery? From what Harper tells me, I used be a decent shot. I could use a skill or a pastime or...something, at least until my memories get sorted out."

Sam peered up at me. "Yeah, we might as well." He paused, squinting one eye as he studied me. "Do you think you'll *really* get your memories back?"

Shrugging, I said, "I'm not really sure. I'm still trying to piece things together. It's weird to see myself with everyone...to watch their memories play out like a movie, but still not actually recall any of it."

Tavis crossed his arms over his chest and stared at me, contemplating. "Why not stop trying to figure out the past, and try embracing the way things are now? You can't change anything that's happened, and you have no idea how long this 'issue' might last. You might never be your old self again," he said matter-of-factly.

I looked into Tavis's inquisitive blue eyes. "I haven't thought about it like that."

"Well," Sam said, "I want you to get your memory back."

"Yeah? And why's that?" I asked.

Sam took a deep, thoughtful breath. "For starters, you can't hold up your part of our deal like this," he said somberly.

"Our deal?"

"Yeah." He shrugged. "You're supposed to teach me how to draw, and I'm supposed to help you with your archery." Sam seemed annoyed by the inconvenience of my memory loss, but I could tell he was more disappointed than upset with me.

“Well,” I ventured, “I can try—”

Sam was shaking his head before I could even finish my train of thought.

“No?”

He looked at me, a yeah-right expression on his face. “Do you even know if you can still draw?”

I feigned offense. “Well, no, not exactly. I haven’t thought to try. I can still do other things.”

“Just trust me,” Sam said.

“Well, you’re an...honest kid, I’ll give you that much. There’s no beating around the bush with you.”

Sam only shrugged again, and Tavis chuckled.

“Sam keeps things interesting,” Tavis said, his tone more affectionate than I thought he realized, and a great big smile engulfed my face. Being around them made me happy; it was a welcome distraction from the awkwardness I felt around the others.

“A girl could get used to hanging out with the two of you,” I said.

It was then that I noticed Jake and Cooper striding over from the other side of the pond. Jake’s gaze shifted between Tavis and me.

The look in his eyes sobered me instantly. There was something about him, regardless of the fact that I couldn’t remember him or the “us” I’d been told about, that made my insides flutter with anticipation. I took a step closer to him.

“Hi,” I said a little breathily. We’d barely spoken, and I always seemed to struggle with what to say to him.

Being around him made me want more than ever to have my memories back, to be able to understand the feelings I thought I could almost feel somewhere deep inside me whenever he was nearby. *Or is it all just in my head?* It was impossible to say, but I wished, more than was probably healthy, that one day I might know.

*If we were a couple, I should just talk to him.* I didn’t see any harm in that. He didn’t bite...at least not that I was aware of.

Jake's eyes passed over Sam and Tavis to land on me, and a tight smile pulled at his lips. His dark gaze focused on me like he was trying to see inside me, trying to figure me out.

"Hey, Coop," Sam called and shuffled over to the husky, patting the dog's head and rumpling his scruffy neck. "Wanna play fetch?"

Jake smiled down at Sam as the boy fawned over Cooper, but I wondered what brewed beneath the surface of Jake's composed demeanor. His eyes were telling, I just hadn't figured out how to read them yet.

Just as I was about to push away from the tree I was leaning against, Sam jumped up to his feet, brushing his hands off on his pants. "Did you hear? Zoe's Ability's back."

Jake's smile faltered, and his gaze darted from Sam to me. "No," he said. "I didn't." His hands flexed at his sides.

"Not her memory yet, but the rest of her."

I thought I should probably talk to Jake about us before too much more time passed and the distance continued to grow between us. But just as I was about to ask him if we could go somewhere to talk, he turned and walked away, calling for Cooper over his shoulder.

Slouching back against the tree, I sighed. *Or not.*