"NOTHING SHORT OF A TRIUMPH."
RICK RIORDAN

NIC BLAKE AND THE REMARKABLES

THE BOOK OF ANANSI



ANGIE THOMAS

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First published 2025 by Walker Books Ltd
87 Vauxhall Walk, London SE11 5HJ

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

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36 Cloch Choirneal, Balrothery, Co. Dublin, K32 C942, Ireland
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This book has been typeset in Minion Pro, Latienne URW and Fort Yukon

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data:
a catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-5295-0655-6

www.walker.co.uk



For Keisha and Xavier:

May your dreams forever live in these words.



1

MY FAVORITE AUTHOR WANTS ME DEAD

I'm running down a city street in my pajamas, 'cause my favorite author wants me dead.

OK, *former* favorite author. It's hard to enjoy somebody's books when their prime goal in life is to wipe you off the face of the planet. But I guess I shouldn't be surprised that a guy who traumatizes kids in his books also wants to do it in real life.

Authors. You can't trust them.

"Get back here, Nichole!" he shouts, less than a block behind me now.

I run faster. The skyscrapers of the Uhuru tech district tower above me, their floating holographic billboards lighting the way as I turn down a side street. It's gotta be after midnight. The sky high above me is pitch-black, and everything is eerily still and quiet. The tech district is usually one of the busiest in Uhuru, but there's not a Shapeshifter, Vampire, Rougarou, Giant, or Fairy in sight. Just one Manifestor; the one that happens to be chasing me.

A ball of fire whizzes past my ear. It strikes a trash can,

engulfing it in flames. Killer Author growls. "So close!" he says.

I try to will fire into my own hands, a juju I've done a dozen times before. But I find I can't use the Gift at all. My brain is blank, and my body is numb, except for this twinge deep down in my gut. All I can do is run.

Whoosh!

And duck! Right in time too. Killer Author sent another fireball zipping past me, and this one caught the edge of my sleeping bonnet, burning a hole right through the silk and singeing my hair. I yank my bonnet off and keep running. I need to get to my mom's—her place is in the city, much closer than my dad's—but I don't know where to go. Every block and every building look the same. I take a left, and then a right, but somehow, I'm right back where I started. It's like the sidewalk is a treadmill, taking me nowhere.

That is, until I turn another corner, and it leads me into a narrow, empty alleyway. There's nothing but a brick wall ahead of me.

"Your time has come, Nichole Blake."

I turn around.

Tyran Porter wears a twisted smile and has a wicked glimmer in his eyes. His face is thinner than the last time I saw him, he has a thicker beard, and his twists look brittle and unkempt. In his hands, balls of fire blaze the same color as the golden aura around him—the Glow that tells other Remarkables he's a Manifestor. It's just like the one I have.

It's hard to believe this guy was once my favorite author … and my godfather. My parents' best friend. They went on all

sorts of adventures with him growing up, helped him face evil head-on. And now he wants to kill me.

He stalks forward. I take a step back, pressing up against the brick wall. The twinge in my stomach becomes a burn. My own Glow pulses to the rhythm of my heart, brightening with each flicker.

"The power … it grows stronger, Nichole," Tyran says. "Soon, it will be too much for you to control."

My Glow brightens.

"Show them who you are, Manowari," Tyran taunts. "Show them all!"

I gasp and open my eyes.

I'm not in an alleyway. I'm in my bed at my dad's.

Tyran's not here.

It was just a dream.

But my Glow *is* pulsing intensely, like light bulbs are beneath my skin.

A loud snore echoes through the room. My best friend, JP, snoozes in the bed across from mine. Well, only half of him is in the bed. The other half hangs off, drool from his mouth pooling on the floor. I can't remember the last time I slept that peacefully.

I jump outta bed. I forgot that my hellhound, Cocoa, likes to sleep beside me, so I accidentally step on her tail. She yelps, and that stirs JP outta his sleep.

"Nic?" he mumbles, groggily.

Before he can see me, I rush into my bathroom and shut the door.

In the dark, I stare at my brightly glowing hands. I catch a

glimpse of myself in the mirror—my eyes are glowing too.

"The Badili grows stronger, Your Grace," a whispery voice says.

I jump. Only one creature calls me "Your Grace."

What looks to be a glittery blue lizard stares back at me from the windowsill. If I squint, I see her metallic horns and the spikes running down her back and the tiny plumes of smoke rising from her nostrils.

She's not a lizard, she's a miniature dragon. To be precise, she's the Msaidizi, the ancient weapon that had gone missing, until JP, my brother Alex, and I tracked her down a few months ago. The Msaidizi has taken many forms over time, but when I found her, she had turned into a dragon. Since returning her to LORE—the Remarkable government—I haven't seen her that much. Only when…

Well, only when my Glow does this.

The previous incident was just last week. Like tonight, I'd been dreaming that Tyran was chasing me, then this burning feeling came over me, and my Glow flared up. When I woke, the Msaidizi had appeared in my room, and she said the exact same thing she says now:

"You must take control of the Badili, or it will take control of you."

"Yeah, what does that even mean?" I whisper-shout. "What is the Badili?"

There's a knock at the door. "Nic? You OK?" JP calls out.

"Uhhh … yeah," I say over my shoulder. "Period stuff."

"Oh," he says, and I can practically hear him blush. "Good

luck? Is that the right thing to say? Do you need me to get you chocolate? My mom likes chocolate during her—wait, no, you like caramel, I can get you some—"

"JP—argh!" I cry out as the heat burns my insides.

"Nic?"

"I'm good," I grit out. "I promise. You can go back to sleep."

"OK," he says. It takes a moment for his footsteps to thump away from the door.

"You must calm yourself, Your Grace," the Msaidizi says.

I grip the sides of the sink. With each breath, the fire inside me seems to shrink, and soon, my Glow dims to normal. Whatever this "Badili" is, it seems to feed off my emotions, which is great, 'cause I'm not emotional at all these days. Nope, not one bit.

"What is 'the Badili'?" I ask again, keeping my voice low.

"The ancient power that waits to be unleashed."

That doesn't answer my question at all. "Why does this keep happening? Does it have something to do with … you know … *that*?"

"Yes."

Of course it does. Seems like everything in my life is connected to … *that*.

The Msaidizi answers to me because of *that*.

My dad ran off with me when I was a baby because of *that*.

He and I lived secretly as exiles in the Unremarkable world for ten years because of *that*.

I didn't know I had a mom and a twin brother because of *that*.

I didn't even know that my real first name is Alexis, not Nichole, because of *that*.

And now Tyran Porter wants to kill me because of—you guessed it—*that*.

That is a prophecy, one that was told centuries years ago. It says that one day, a Manifestor will destroy the Remarkable world. This person is known as the Manowari. And according to another prophecy that my parents received when I was a baby, *I'm* the Manowari. The destroyer.

"So what's this 'Badili' got to do with *that*?" I ask.

"It's the power that marks the one foretold," the Msaidizi says. "It's why Roho believed himself to be the one of whom the prophecy spoke."

I flinch at that name. *Roho*. The evil Manifestor who, back when my parents were my age, was believed to be the Manowari, and tried to destroy the Remarkable world. He almost did it before he was stopped by my grandpa. Thing is, Tyran thought *he* was the Chosen One prophesied to stop the Manowari. But he failed, and now that he's found out I might actually be the Manowari, he thinks it might be his second chance to fulfill his destiny. Which is why he wants to kill me.

I don't care what the prophecy says, though, or what the Msaidizi tells me this feeling inside me is called. I'm not anything like Roho.

"You're saying Roho had this … whatever it is too?"

"Yes, Your Grace. It's meant to help you fulfill your destiny. Just as I am."

"But I don't want *that* to be my destiny!" I say, and double

over as another flare shoots through me. I take a deep breath. "Can't it be someone else?"

"That is not how prophecies work, Your Grace."

"OK, so how *do* they work?"

"I don't have all the answers you seek," the Msaidizi says, and pushes herself away from the window with a flourish of her wings. "My purpose is merely to aid you in times of need. With that said, I must leave you now."

Poof. She vanishes, and once again, I'm alone. My Glow is back to normal, but I don't feel normal for the life of me.

I take one more deep breath and open my bathroom door.

All the lights are on in my room. My twin brother, Alex, is sitting on my bed in his pajamas. JP's sitting up on his, scratching Cocoa near where her horns are coming in. The moment my hellhound sees me, she bounds over and jumps around. Although Cocoa is a puppy, she's practically a Great Dane—a red-eyed Great Dane with brown fur that stands on end. And she's not done growing yet, geesh.

I grab a squeaky toy that looks like a wizard and toss it across the room. Cocoa hates wizards (long story). She bolts after it to show it who's boss.

"Another nightmare?" Alex asks.

I nod. I haven't known my brother for long, but I've quickly learned that twin intuition is real. Any time I dream about Tyran, Alex somehow just … knows.

JP fumbles with his fingers. His brown skin is a shade darker from the scorching Mississippi summer back home, and there's a fresh dusting of freckles across his nose. His

hair's grown out some, like he's trying to start an Afro. I told him it looked cute like that, but that made him all flustered, which made me all flustered. I won't say anything like that to him ever again.

He looks flustered now, for a different reason. "I saw what happened with your Glow."

I glance away. JP's an Unremarkable—a person without the Gift we Manifestors have or any kind of Remarkable abilities—but as a Seer, he's a special case. He can see Remarkable things, parts of the world that most Unremarkables are completely oblivious to.

"It was … brighter," he continues. "Kind of like it was pulsing?"

Alex's eyes widen behind his holographic glasses. "Again?"

I nod.

"Is that normal?" JP asks. "Like … something that happens when you get your period?"

Alex's face screws up. "What?"

"I wish," I mutter, as I sit next to Alex. "Apparently, it's got something to do with … *that*."

JP and Alex are the only ones who know about *that* besides my parents and grandparents. Oh, and Tyran. Can't forget him.

"I hate this," I mumble. I hate the prophecy. I hate the *word* prophecy, almost as much as I hate the word Manowari. Hearing either of them makes my skin crawl.

Alex and JP share a worried glance when they think I'm not looking. Cocoa makes herself at home on my lap, and it's like

having a pile of bricks drop onto my legs. I bury my face in her fur. She smells like corn chips, but I'll take whatever snuggle I can get.

"You know, Nic?" JP says. "My daddy believes that free will is our God-given right. That we decide what we do, no one else." He gives me a smile, then his expression changes. "Of course, that's not always a good thing. Like, when my cousin Shawn got a poop emoji tatted on his face. It was a bad choice but it was his free will at the end of the day."

I blink. "I'm sorry, what?"

"What's an 'emoji'?" Alex asks. He's lived in the Remarkable world his whole life so Unremarkable tech is foreign to him.

I'm way too sleepy to try to explain. "What's your point, JP?"

"What I mean is: Why does a prophecy really determine what you're gonna do? Don't *you* get to decide?"

I look out my bedroom window. I've lived a lot of places, seen a lot of night skies, but the stars shine brightest in Uhuru. Way past the fields of my family's centuries-old estate, the rolling hills of the garden district rise. A flock of lightning birds fly overhead, electricity crackling as their wings flap. I'm pretty sure that's a unicorn galloping along the hills. Off in the distance, cars fly through the tunnels of light known as the skyway as morning rush hour begins.

It's still wild to me that my ancestors built all this after everything they went through. They were the first ones to remember the Gift. Generations before them were stolen from their homeland, cursed to forget who they were, and forced

into slavery. But somehow, despite all that, the ones who remembered didn't just survive. They built an entire world where all Remarkables could be free.

This is what Roho tried to destroy. And maybe there is someone out there who wants to try again.

But it's not me.

I exhale. "You're right, JP."

"I know—" He yawns. "I know I am."

His eyes are barely open now, and now I feel bad for waking him and Alex up. "Go back to sleep, guys," I say. "I'm good."

"You sure?" Alex says. "I can stay and—"

"I'm good."

He knows I'm lying—that's that twin intuition again—but after a moment, he gets up and goes back to his room.

"Lights out," I say, and the lights obey.

JP lies down, pulling his duvet over himself. Cocoa takes that as her cue too. She climbs off my lap and curls up at the foot of my bed as I get under my covers. Before long, she's snoring along with JP.

But I'm lying here, staring at my hands.

Forget that it's a century-old prophecy, I tell myself. Forget that everyone and their momma seems to think it's gonna come true. Forget what Tyran Porter says.

I'm not gonna destroy the Remarkable world, it's just that simple.

I think.

I hope.



2

HOUSE ARREST, HAINTS, AND HOT MESSES

When my dad and I were living on the run as exiles, he was a pretty terrible cook. But ever since he got put on house arrest, he's found new ways to burn food.

Smoke curls in the hallway, hitting me, Alex, JP, and Cocoa as we go downstairs—or I should say as we *descend the staircase*. That's more fitting for a place as fancy as the Blake estate, with its polished floors, expensive-looking rugs, and chandeliers. It's still wild to me that Dad grew up here.

We find him in the kitchen with the estate's groundskeeper, Mr Lincoln. Mr Lincoln is this thin, older Black man with a salt-and-pepper beard and a missing tooth on the side. It's impossible not to notice, since he's always smiling. But the first thing I noticed when I met Mr Lincoln wasn't his missing tooth. It was his missing Glow.

Mr Lincoln *used* to be a Manifestor, but LORE, the Remarkable government, took his Gift away. A punishment for some crime he committed a long time ago. I don't know what he did, but it must not have been too bad, 'cause they didn't

take his memory too. That's the real worst punishment—when LORE strips someone of both their Gift and their memories, then exiles them to live as an Unremarkable, never knowing they were ever Remarkable at all. But Mr Lincoln remembers everything. He's always telling me and Alex stories about his childhood. He and my grandpa grew up together, and after Mr Lincoln had his Gift taken, Grandpa gave him a job working here on the Blake estate.

As for Dad's punishment, he's got five years under house arrest, plus mandatory volunteer work. He also isn't allowed to use his Gift, but that's better than having it taken away entirely. I guess he got off light, considering what they do to other criminals.

We enter the kitchen to find him taking a smoking pan of charred muffins outta the oven, waving away the smoke. On the counter is a small hologram of a man—Dad must be listening to a prism pod, which is basically a Remarkable version of a podcast.

The second I hear the voice of the person talking, I freeze in the doorway.

"And so, I gotta ask: Why aren't we questioning everything President DuForte and LORE tell us?" says the hologram. "They lied about the Msaidizi being missing, after all. What else might they be lying about?"

"Tyran," I mutter.

That's when Dad looks up, and when he sees me, he quickly grabs the remote on the counter beside him and jabs it. The hologram vanishes. "Morning, Nic Nac," he says. "Morning, A-Man, morning, JP."

Cocoa growls.

"I'm sorry, good morning to you too, Cocoa," he adds.

I inch into the kitchen, nod at the prism. "What's he saying now?"

"Don't worry about it." Dad kisses my forehead, then kisses the top of Alex's head too. Alex gives him an awkward smile back. Although Alex and I are twins, he's really Dad's twin—they look just alike. Same brown complexion, brown eyes, and dimpled cheeks. Only difference is Alex has curly hair, and Dad has locs and tattoos. Today, Dad's wearing an apron that's the exact same color as his nojo gloves—the silvery Giftech gloves LORE makes him wear to keep him from using the Gift.

"I was gonna make y'all some blueberry muffins but that ain't happening," Dad says, eyeing the muffins like it's their fault. "Cereal good?"

"Long as you have a dairy alternative," JP says. "My lactose tolerance is low lately."

Mr Lincoln chuckles. "You sound like me, young man."

"Oat milk and cereal it is then," Dad says, already pulling out boxes.

I sit down, eyeing the prism pod on the counter again. Nobody's actually seen Tyran Porter in months—he's been on the run from LORE ever since he attacked me—but that hasn't stopped him from running his mouth. A few weeks ago, he started a prism pod, and he's had plenty to say on it.

At first, I was worried he was gonna expose my secret, but that hasn't been the case. Mom and Dad are convinced he won't try it. They say that even Tyran knows doing something

like that would only make people think he's more delusional than they already do.

I'm not so sure about that.

But Dad told me his prism pod is just a bunch of wild conspiracy theories that probably no one is listening to, and that I shouldn't waste a single second of my time worrying about it. So, that's what I've been trying to do.

While I'm awake, anyway. My dreams? A whole different story.

Mr Lincoln gives Cocoa a treat. She gobbles it up in one bite, then sits, wagging her tail like she expects more. He chuckles and gives her another one. Mr Lincoln loves himself some Cocoa. "I'm gonna go work on the bottle tree garden, Calvin. Holler if you need me."

"Will do, Mr Lincoln," Dad says as he joins me, Alex, and JP at the table. "A'ight, we got Bolt Bites, Fairy Flakes, Mojo-Mallows, and Unicorn Puffs. Take your pick, guys."

Hearing Tyran's voice has pretty much ruined my appetite, but JP is completely unbothered. He pours milk in his bowl and then dumps some Unicorn Puffs in. Who in the world puts milk in first? My best friend is a monster.

"Thanks for having me, Mr Blake," he says. "I've really enjoyed my time at your family's estate."

JP's been in Uhuru since Monday. Usually, Unremarkables aren't allowed here, but since he's a Seer and he helped me and Alex find the Msaidizi, he's a special case. LORE made JP sign a nondisclosure agreement that's bound with the Gift. Breaking it could give him gigantic pimples for life. Or worse.

Since it was Dad's week to have me and Alex, JP's been with us here for most of his visit. Mom's coming later to take us back to her place so we can spend our Saturday there before JP goes home tomorrow.

"You're more than welcome, li'l man," Dad tells JP. "You excited to get back home?"

"I guess," JP says. "On one hand, I'm glad my summer job at Uncle Willie's funeral home is over. The stories I could tell about the haints in that place alone. On the other hand, the first day of school is coming fast, and seventh grade is a big deal. Probably not as big of a deal as Manifestor school though."

"Don't remind me," I say. I start Manifestor school in two weeks. Not so long ago, I'd been dreaming of the day when I'd finally get to start learning how to use my Gift. But as someone who was homeschooled her whole life, I'm just as terrified as I am excited.

"It's gonna be fine," Dad says for the millionth time.

"Unless you fail the Manifest exam," Alex says. "Then nothing will be fine."

Dad sighs. "A-Man."

"It's the truth."

Before I can go to Manifestor school, I have to take the Manifest exam to prove I even belong there. It'll also determine which of the five schools I end up in. Alex calls it "one of the most significant moments in a Manifestor's life." I call it the most nerve-racking moment of mine.

"Like I said, it'll be fine," Dad repeats.

"If it's not, you're more than welcome to attend good ol'

Bailey Middle School with me," JP chimes in. "You won't learn to use the Gift, and the lunches are questionable, but at least you'd get a quality education courtesy of the Jackson Public School System."

"How are things in Jackson anyway?" Dad asks. "Anything interesting going on?"

"There's the water crisis, but I wouldn't exactly call that *interesting*," JP says. "Oh! Ms Lena made Junior the vegan chef at the juke joint. She says a lot of Vampires have gone vegan, go figure."

Junior and Ms Lena are Remarkables in Jackson. Junior is part Shapeshifter, part Rougarou, *and* part Manifestor. Ms Lena is a Visionary—a person who sees glimpses of the future. They're both exiles, meaning they either got kicked outta LORE cities, or choose not to live in them. Dad and I met lots of exiles when we were in hiding. The ones at Ms Lena's juke joint became family to us.

"Is Junior taking good care of my house?" Dad asks.

"Eh…" JP does a so-so motion with his hand. "We're starting to smell an odor over there, but my parents don't know how to confront Junior about it. Nobody at church reacts as enthusiastically to Dad's sermons as Junior. He also joined the choir. Best tenor Momma's had in years. She's not gonna risk losing those pipes. All things considered, he's a pretty good next-door neighbor."

"Good," Dad says, with a smile that doesn't reach his eyes. He gets those kinda smiles a lot lately, like whenever Alex and I have to go back to Mom's. This deep sadness will creep into

Dad. He'll try to hide it, but his eyes tell the story he doesn't.

I feel it too. I mean yeah, Dad shouldn't have kidnapped me, but he was trying to protect me. He was afraid what LORE would do if they found out about *that*. I don't think he should be punished like this for doing what any dad would.

Maybe he sees the way I'm looking at him, because he's suddenly super chipper. "Ay, guess what? I got a new community service assignment. I'll be repairing cleaning robots in the tech district for the next few weeks."

"Cool!" says JP.

"Much better than last week's," Alex says.

Dad chuckles. "Don't remind me. I never wanna clean the zoo stalls again. Maybe I'll be working near your mom's building, then I can see you guys sometimes."

"Yeah!" I say, trying to sound excited.

"Yeah," he says softly, and looks down at his cereal. "Something to look forward to."

This is sadder than sad.

Grandpa Doc strolls into the kitchen, a fishing pole slung over his shoulder. He's tall and slender, his silver-streaked hair mostly hidden under a baseball cap. He grabs a banana off the counter.

"Goin' fishing. Later."

Just like that, he's gone. He's supposed to be this super powerful Manifestor—he's the one who defeated Roho, after all—but from what I can tell, his real power is disappearing. 'Cause he's never around.

We eat in silence for a minute until we hear the door in the

main entryway open, and a moment later, Mom walks into the kitchen. "Morning!" she says.

Dad stands up. For a moment, it looks like they might hug, but they hesitate. Then they go for a handshake but that seems weird too. So they just awkwardly stand there.

"You're early," Dad finally says.

"Sorry, I met up with a friend for coffee and decided to just come straight over. That's not a problem, is it?"

"Nah. No problem at all," Dad says, but that sad look is back in his eyes.

Mom comes and kisses the top of my head. "I missed you," she murmurs. The first time I saw her, I thought I was looking at my future self. We have the same lighter complexion, thick hair, and big dark eyes. She gives Alex a kiss too. "How does a Vipers and Lightning playoff game sound, guys?"

My eyes go wide. "You got us tickets?" I ask.

"Sure did. The RBA commissioner personally invited us."

"The RBA?" JP echoes.

"Remarkable Basketball Association," I explain.

"Oh, it's like the NBA," he says.

"Sorta," I say. "All genders play together. And most of the players are Giants."

"The guard points—or whatever they're called—are usually Manifestors," Alex adds. His basketball knowledge is so tragic, I don't know how we're related. "Probably because it's a highly strategic role. There's not a whole lot of 'strategy' involved once a Giant gets the ball and goes for a touchdown."

"You mean a dunk?" I say, and roll my eyes. He's not the

first person I've heard imply that Giants are only in the RBA because of their size. Or that they're thickheaded. "A Giant would at least know the right sport."

"Dunks, touchdowns, same thing," he says, even though they totally are not. "Anyway, the Manifestors on the teams can use mojos and jujus, long as they follow the rules. The Giants are the most fun to watch though. They pull off all kinds of crazy dunks and dribble moves."

"It's worth seeing in person," Mom says. "Tonight's game determines who goes to the finals to face the Bayou Bandits. My Vipers are gonna kick some Lightning tail."

Dad pretends to cough, but it comes out as "You wish." He told me that the Lightning and the Vipers are like the Lakers and the Clippers. The Lightning have won twenty championships and are one of the most popular RBA teams in history. The Vipers? Uh … they exist.

Mom side-eyes him. I don't see how you could ever have been married to someone when you don't even like the same basketball team.

"JP, sweetie, why don't you go get your things?" Mom says.

"I'll help you," Alex tells him.

JP slurps down the last of his cereal (again, who puts in milk first?) and the two of them hurry upstairs.

"Come here, Nic Nac," Dad says, and I step into his awaiting arms. I don't know who hates saying goodbye more, me or him. "See you soon, a'ight?"

"About that," Mom says, and Dad stiffens. "We should talk about changing the visitation schedule from here on out.

The kids are about to start school."

"Why does it have to change?" Dad says.

Mom's mouth makes a straight line. She turns to me and says, "Pumpkin, why don't you take Cocoa outside? I bet she'd love some fresh air."

In other words, they're about to argue. Again. I sigh and whistle for Cocoa. "C'mon, girl."

She follows me to the hall. We're barely out the room before my parents start up.

"Calvin, we've talked about this," Mom says. "We need to change to weekend visits so the kids can be home during the week. This will be Nic's first time going to a regular school, and we need to get a routine established."

"Why can't the routine include being here?" Dad asks.

"This isn't your decision to make. I've allowed you to have visits with them because—"

"Hold up, I get you're mad at me for what I did—"

"You kidnapped our daughter and abandoned our son—"

"That doesn't mean I shouldn't still have some say—"

I slide the patio door shut, sealing off their voices. I hate when they fight.

Cocoa darts across the backyard, straight toward a flock of phoenixes gathered near the pond. If you could even call what the Blake estate has a "backyard." It's got a pond, a basketball court, a pool, several gardens, unicorn stables, and acres and acres of fields. Cocoa loves to explore those.

I spot Mr Lincoln on a ladder in the bottle tree garden. That's this whole area filled with trees that have colorful glass

bottles hanging on their branches. The sunlight twinkles off the glass, and some of the bottles swirl with smoke—spirits and haints trapped inside.

Mr Lincoln laughs as Cocoa zips past him. "Run them phoenixes off, girl! I'm tired of finding piles of ashes everywhere," he says, as he pulls down a bottle filled with dark red smoke.

"Angry haint?" I ask, walking up to him.

"You know it," he says, as the bottle rattles in his hand. "This one finally got trapped last night. It's been causing a ruckus at the stables all week." He places the bottle in a crate with the rest of his collection then stretches for another bottle that's just outta reach.

"I've got you," I say. I think about wind—how it looks and feels. I picture it moving the branch and moving toward Mr Lincoln. I wave my hand.

The branch sways toward Mr Lincoln, and he grabs the bottle.

"You sure are getting good with those mojos," he says. "I wasn't nearly that good at your age. How long you say you've been training your Gift?"

"About a month." Manifestors are born with the Gift, but we've gotta learn how to use it before we can really do anything with it. Soon after I got to Uhuru, Mom hired a tutor who had me drawing mojos and jujus in no time. I can even draw illusions now. Small ones, I mean. Like I can make a pile of dirty laundry look like a lamp, which is super helpful on chore days.

Mr Lincoln glances back at the house. "Your folks arguing again?"

I pluck a leaf and roll it between my fingers. Guess I'm predictable. Every time Mom and Dad fight, I come out here. "Yep," I say.

Mr Lincoln moves the ladder to another tree. "Let me let you in on a li'l secret, li'l lady: adults don't have it all figured out. We're all learning as we go, and we're gonna make mistakes along the way. Your momma and daddy are no different. So don't think for one second that any of this is your fault."

Then why does it feel like it is? If it weren't for my stupid prophecy, Dad wouldn't have taken me away. I would have grown up here, he and Mom might still be married. He wouldn't be on house arrest, and they wouldn't be arguing all the time. My prophecy turned everything into one big hot mess.

"Incoming," Mr Lincoln says.

I look up just in time to catch a bottle he tosses my way. Inside, the gray smoke of a depressed haint swirls around. Haints are the spirits of dead people who refuse to go to "the other side," so they linger around. It could be that they're scared to move on and face God's judgment, or that they feel they have unfinished business here, something they gotta fix before they move on. Thing is, though, there's not much they can do, they're haints.

I look back at the house, where my parents are probably still arguing, and I know what it feels like to be a haint.

