

TIME'S CHILDREN, by D.B. Jackson

Chapters 1-3

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Chapter 1

21st Day of Sipar's Settling, Year 633

The between spat him out like chewed gristle.

Naked in the cold and dark, he dropped to his knees, shivering, sucking at precious air.

Another Walk, more years added to a body already abused by too many trials and too many journeys through time.

He clutched his chronoform in stiff, frigid fingers and braced his other hand on the courtyard stone. Fear lifted his gaze, despite the droop of his shoulders, the leaden fatigue in his legs. Torches flickered in nearby sconces. Stars gleamed in a moonless sky. He saw no soldiers, no assassins. He heard not a sound.

Had he arrived too early? Too late?

He fought to his feet and turned an unsteady circle to get his bearings before heading to the next courtyard and the castle arsenal. No soldiers here, either. Panic rose within him like a spring tide. Within the armory he found a stained uniform in Hayncalde red, as well as a musket and ammunition. He didn't see any boots that would fit.

He pulled on the uniform and loaded the weapon. He took extra powder, paper, and

bullets – habit born of years on the run. But he knew he wouldn't have a chance to use them. This night would end in one of two ways. In neither scenario would he get off a second shot.

As he left the armory, he noticed what he had missed earlier. A body lay in the grass a few paces off the stone path. A woman with a gaping wound across her neck, and a bib of blood glistening on her uniform. A few paces on, he spotted a second dead guard on the other side of the path. Both from Hayncalde, both killed with stealth. Not too early then, perhaps in the very teeth of time.

He hurried on to the hall, bare feet slapping on stone. Nearing the archway that led into the back corridor, he heard the first explosion rock the west gate. Voices rose in alarm and anger. Bells pealed from the castle towers. Moments now. He stole through shadow and candlelit passages, only pausing when he reached the door.

Another explosion, not so distant, but also not the one he awaited. Inside the hall, men shouted. A baby cried, and his heart folded in upon itself.

He gripped the musket, readied himself. One last explosion made the stone beneath him shudder and buck. His cue.

He kicked the door open, stepped through.

Bedlam. A haze of smoke. And the one he sought. He shouted the man's name and raised his weapon to fire.

Chapter 2

26th Day of Kheraya's Waking, Year 647

The summons came the day before Tobias's fifteenth birthday.

His instructors had prepared him, telling him they thought it unlikely he would have to wait the full sixteen years. Yet, for word from the Chancellor to come so soon – this exceeded even his expectations.

The herald found him in the lower courtyard, practicing his blade work before an appreciative audience of junior novitiates. He and a few of the other older boys and girls had long since graduated to training with steel blades. Sometimes the younger ones paused in their training to goggle at the blur of gleaming weapons, flinching with delight at the clang of steel on steel.

“Tobias Doljan,” the herald called, halting their parries, drawing their gazes, silencing them all.

The arrival of heralds in the novitiates' world presaged either tragedy or opportunity: dark tidings from home, or advancement into the unknown. Rarely did they bring word of anything in between.

Before facing the messenger, Tobias bowed low to Mara, with whom he had been fencing. He knew the others watched him, but didn't spare them a glance. They thought him young still. Too young. He was the least experienced of those who had taken up honed blades.

News from home then. That was what they would assume. He sensed their pity, their fear, and he wanted to laugh, confident they were wrong.

“You will come with me,” the herald said. “The Lord Chancellor is waiting.”

Sweat ran in rivulets down Tobias’s face and neck, and darkened the tunic he wore beneath his mail. But one responded without delay to a summons from the Chancellor; better he should arrive sweating and filthy than make the man wait. He handed his sword to Delvin, cast a quick grin Mara’s way, and followed the herald out of the courtyard.

The Chancellor’s man said not a word as they walked, so Tobias held his tongue as well. They climbed the broad, open stairway to cross from the lower courtyard to the middle, passing ivy-covered walls of golden stone. Bowmen and guards with muskets patrolled the battlements of the palace’s outer defenses, bare-headed and clad in uniforms of purple and black. It had been more than a century since this palace had been attacked by would-be conquerors, but other threats, some unique to a palace filled with Travelers, kept soldiers atop the ramparts.

Tobias and the herald made their way through the middle courtyard, entered the North Keep, and ascended the ancient, twisting stairway to the third level and the Chancellor’s quarters. The herald knocked once on the oaken door, and let himself into the chamber, leaving Tobias to wait in the corridor. Only a breath or two later, the man reemerged and told him to enter. Tobias stepped into the room, heard the door close behind him.

The Chancellor sat behind a large desk, which was piled high with leather-bound volumes and sheafs of curled parchment. Portraits of past chancellors adorned the walls, and a woven rug, rich with browns and blues and golds, covered a portion of the stone floor. Half a

dozen messenger pigeons, brown and white and gray, cooed in a wooden cage beside the open window. Otherwise the chamber again struck Tobias as sparse, as less impressive than the chancellor's quarters ought to be.

He had been in the chamber twice before: once the day he arrived on Trevynisle, uninitiated, confused, homesick; and a second time, three years ago, when he learned of his sister's death. The first instance, he barely remembered. The other haunted him still, not because he grieved for his lost sister, but rather because he couldn't call to mind an image of Yolli. She had been a squalling infant when he left Redcove, his village on Onyi; he recalled the sound of her more than anything else. He tried to mourn her, but it seemed her death had come from too great a distance to affect him as it should.

"Mister Doljan," The Chancellor said, not bothering to look up from the yellowed parchment he held with thick fingers. "It seems I interrupted your sword play."

The man's trim beard sharpened features that might otherwise have been open and friendly. Silver blended with bronze to lighten what little hair he had remaining on his head.

"Yes, Lord Chancellor," Tobias said.

"Do you know why I had you summoned?"

"I assume it's because I've been called to a court."

The Chancellor glanced his way, then laid the parchment atop one of the many piles and straightened. "You assume this? A lad your age?"

He held the man's gaze. "Yes, Lord Chancellor."

The chancellor eyed him, his expression resolving at last into a scowl. "You're brash.

Royals don't like that, particularly in green Travelers new to their courts.”

Tobias wished to ask if confidence was not a desirable trait in a court Traveler, but he sensed that challenging the Chancellor on this point would be a mistake.

“I meant no offense,” he said instead.

The Chancellor stared at him still. Tobias wondered if he ought to drop his gaze, at least give the impression of feeling abashed. He did neither.

The Chancellor reached for the parchment again. “You would not have been my first choice. You're young, and you have much yet to learn. Your teachers speak well of you; they see potential. Promise, though, is...” He waved his hand, a vague gesture. “Had the petition been for any sort of Traveler, I would have chosen another. They want a Walker, however, and you're the only one I have.”

Tobias stifled a smile; the Chancellor already thought him arrogant. He wouldn't add gloating to his transgressions. But behind his calm demeanor, he rejoiced. *They want a Walker. They want me.*

“May I ask where I'll be going?”

“The petition comes from Mearlan IV, sovereign of Daerjen.”

He had hoped for such a posting – all of them did. Not necessarily to Daerjen itself, but to a court of prestige and might, for only the most influential courts could afford Travelers, much less a Walker. This time, he couldn't quite mask his joy. He could barely stand still.

“Yes,” the Chancellor said. “You're fortunate. And so are we. The sovereign has paid handsomely for your services. You won't keep him waiting. You're to sail from Windhome

tomorrow, with first light. I trust you can have your affairs in order by then.”

“Yes, Lord Chancellor. I’ll be ready.” As soon as he spoke the words, though, he faltered.

“What is it?”

Tobias sensed impatience in the question, and didn’t know how to answer. Even as his initial excitement lingered, fears and misgivings crowded in. Daerjen was at war with Oaqamar, the single greatest power between the oceans. In addition to his grand army and navy, Oaqamar’s autarch was said to possess his own company of Walkers, Spanners, and Crossers, all of them schooled in the art of assassination. According to some, Oaqamar’s Travelers had found a way to overcome the limitations that forced them to make their journeys naked and weaponless. Tobias sensed that Windhome’s masters and mistresses had heard these rumors as well, but they refused to speak of them.

Whatever the truth, Tobias didn’t doubt that the moment he reached Hayncalde – and perhaps before – his life would be in danger.

Yet this mortal fear paled next to concerns far less threatening, but still burdensome: He had lived in Windhome Palace for nearly his entire life, rarely venturing beyond these walls. He would know no one in Daerjen. Everything about the place would be unfamiliar.

The Chancellor watched him, waiting, an eyebrow arched.

Tobias couldn’t bring himself to give voice to his mounting apprehension. Instead, he seized on a trifle.

“I... I have no chronofor. Shouldn’t I have one before I sail?”

Another frown creased the man’s forehead. “That expense will be borne by the sovereign.

He has a Binder in his employ who is crafting one for you even now. I'm sure that soon after your arrival in Hayncalde, you'll be given a device." The chancellor held out a roll of parchment, tied with gold satin. The sealing wax, also gold, had been imprinted with the open hand symbol of the Travelers' palace. "Your letter of introduction," he said. "You'll present this to Sovereign Hayncalde upon your arrival in Daerjen. Naturally, our contract with the sovereign is explicit with regard to the protocols and limitations of Time Walking. Should he ask of you more than he should, you are to refuse him and send a message here with dispatch. Do you understand?"

Master Ojeyd had explained these restraints to him in anticipation of this day. He was not to be sent back more than a year – although even a Walk of that length sounded impossibly long. And he was not to be sent on Walks in excess of thirty days more than a few times in any given turn. Tobias needed to consult his notes again for the exact number. Such strictures were intended to protect Walkers like him, and also to mitigate the effect his kind might have on the course of history.

"Of course, Lord Chancellor. Master Ojeyd has prepared me well."

"Very good."

Again Tobias hesitated. Ought he to say something, to thank the Chancellor? They hardly knew each other. Tobias was no more to the man than a single face among dozens. To him, the Chancellor had always seemed as remote as starlight. In the end, he sketched a bow and crossed back to the door.

"Mister Doljan."

Tobias halted.

“From this day forward, the world will see in you a reflection of this place: of the Palace, of your fellow students, of your teachers, even of me. Your duty is to Daerjen, but you will always be a child of Trevynisle. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Lord Chancellor. I won’t disappoint you.”

“Good. Go with His glory and Her grace.”

“Thank you, my lord. Blessings of the Two upon you and this palace.”

The chancellor replied with a nod and a thin smile, but already he had set aside the petition from Daerjen and reached for another curled missive. Tobias let himself out of the chamber. Finding the corridor empty, he hurried back to the lower courtyard.

Long before he reached his fellow novitiates, he heard the sharp echoes of pistol fire. Apparently Mara, Delvin, and the others had set aside their blades and were now practicing marksmanship. Reaching the stairway to the courtyard, he saw that they did so under the critical eye of old Saffern, the palace weapons master, whose white hair shone like a beacon in the sunlight.

Seeing Tobias step into the ward, Saffern waved him over and held out a pistol to him, butt first.

“You are two rounds behind,” the master said, his accent rounding the “o”s and rolling the “r”s.

“I know but I haven’t—”

“You will shoot. One in the center and you can skip a second round.” Saffern’s dark eyes danced. “Three in the center, and you may go.”

“Three out of how many?” Tobias asked, approaching the man and reaching for the pistol.

“Three in the center. Surely you don’t need more than three shots to do this. You, who are in such a rush to leave us.”

Tobias considered him. Did Saffern know?

“All right.” He walked to the white line from which Delvin had been shooting.

“Back here, I think.”

The master dug his heel into the ground five paces back from the line, and scraped a new line in the grass.

Tobias couldn’t help but grin. As good as he was with a sword, he was better still with firearms. Saffern knew this as well.

He loaded the weapon: white powder from Aiyanth, a wad of firepaper, and a lead ball, also Aiyanthan, pushed down the barrel with the ramrod. After priming the pan with a touch more powder, he set his stance, full-cocked the pistol, aimed, and fired. The report echoed across the courtyard like thunder, and white smoke rode the wind up and over the east wall.

“Dead center,” Mara said. Was that pride in her voice?

“Luck, I believe.” Saffern walked three more paces from the target. “There is less luck back here.”

Tobias smirked. Several of the older boys laughed, no doubt hoping Tobias would miss.

He reloaded, toed Saffern’s new line, and squeezed the trigger.

The others quieted. Mara clapped, long hair aglow with sunlight.

“Center again,” she said, her eyes finding Tobias’s.

“Clearly we’re still too close.” Saffern walked off ten more paces. This time, none of the novitiates so much as snickered.

“That’s too far,” Mara said, adding belatedly, “Master. I’m not even sure you could make that shot.”

“I’m not the one who has to. Mister Doljan?”

Tobias joined Saffern at this newest line and squinted back toward the target. For all his skill with firearms, he had little confidence that he could make this shot. He loaded, took his stance, and fired. He didn’t need to hear Mara say “Second ring,” her voice flat, to know he had missed.

“Ah,” Saffern said beside him. “A pity. I fear you’ll be training with us today after all.”

“No, Master, I won’t.” He held out the pistol to Saffern, grip first, as he had been taught.

“We had an agreement.”

He shook his head. “No, we didn’t. I tried to tell you, I’m leaving the palace, and Trevynisle.”

The weapons master didn’t respond. He had known. It was Mara who asked, “Leaving for where?”

Saffern had yet to take the pistol. Tobias let the hand holding it drop to his side.

“Hayncalde, in Daerjen.”

“Mearlan’s court?”

“Yes.”

“Why you?” This from Nat, one of the older boys. His tone bristled with resentment.

“You’re no better than the rest of us, and you’re younger than most.”

“They want a Walker.”

Which was really all that mattered, and Nat knew it. All of them did. They stared at him. Mara’s expression had gone blank. Nat, Delvin, and Mara were Spanners, capable of Traveling dozens of leagues, or even more, in the time it might take Tobias to walk from one end of the courtyard to the other. Others among the novitiates were Crossers. They could pass through solid walls of wood and stone. As the chancellor said, he was the lone Walker among them.

“I leave in the morning,” he said to no one in particular. He held out the weapon to Saffern once more, but the weapons master shook his head.

“Take it. And ammunition as well. Your voyage will take you near disputed waters. You shouldn’t sail unarmed.”

Tobias bowed. “Thank you, Master.”

“Remember this final lesson, Mister Doljan. You’re very good. But there’s always room for improvement.” He flashed a smile so fleeting that Tobias wondered if he’d imagined it. “The rest of you load your weapons,” he said, showing his back to Tobias. “You all need practice, particularly with your stances. I see no one here who could have made even two of the shots Mister Doljan attempted.”

The novitiates obeyed without delay.

Tobias lingered for a tencount, stunned at how quickly he had become an outsider. Only Mara continued to eye him, and when he looked her way, she turned and walked back toward the

targets.

Chapter 3

26th Day of Kheraya's Waking, Year 647

Aside from several changes of clothes, a leather-pommeled dagger, the pistol, powder, paper, and rounds given to him by Saffern, and the sealed letter from the Chancellor, Tobias had few belongings. His family had been poor, even for Redcove, and he arrived on Trevynisle wearing the only things he possessed. In nine years, he hadn't accumulated much.

Packing for his departure took him all of a quarter bell. Once finished, he had nothing to do. He considered rejoining his friends in the courtyard, but the memory of those final awkward moments stopped him.

Instead, he made his way back to the middle courtyard, and the workshop of Wansi Tovorl, the palace Binder.

Her door was shut, but at his knock she called for him to enter.

Wansi sat at her work bench, a nimbus of pearly light surrounding her head and hands, thick spectacles perched on the tip of her nose, yellow hair pulled back in a loose plait. She spared him a glance, her attention on the golden object clamped to the table.

"I thought you might come," she said, a lilt to the words. "Saying your goodbyes?"

He shut the door with care. "I suppose."

She furrowed her brow. "You suppose? Do you plan to take me with you then?"

He grinned and wandered the chamber. She continued to work.

“A new aperture?” he asked after a brief silence.

“Aye. Miss Craik damaged hers on her last Crossing. She tried to pass through a door that had iron imbedded in it. She’s fortunate to be alive. Her aperture was ruined. And so a new one.” She peered at him over her lenses. “I trust you’ll be more gentle with your chronofor.”

His eyes widened. “You have one for me?”

She shook her head. “The Chancellor told me you’d be given one upon your arrival in Hayncalde. I would have made one otherwise. I was prepared to.”

He answered with a small nod and resumed his pacing.

“Haplar Jarrett is the Master Binder in Hayncalde, and he’s as well-respected as any of my kind. He’ll Bind you a fine chronofor. I promise.”

“I’m sure he will.”

She sighed, put down her planer, and removed her spectacles. The glow around her vanished. “Out with it, Tobias. I haven’t time for games.”

He didn’t answer right away, but rather scrutinized her face, her milky complexion and brilliant blue eyes. Here on Trevynisle nearly everyone was as dark-skinned as he: the palace servants, many of the masters, all of the novitiates who honed their skills in the hope of being posted to a court. Wansi stood out among them like a gull in a flock of cormorants. In Hayncalde, he would be the one who didn’t blend in, who drew stares simply by entering a chamber or stepping out into the street.

“I’m not ready to be a court Walker,” he said at last.

“What makes you say that?”

He lifted a shoulder, let it drop. "I've gone back a day at a time. Once I went back two, but that was the most. I know that the chronoform works the same way no matter how far back we Walk. But I've heard people talk about the courts. Sometimes kings and queens send their Walkers back a ha'turn, or a full one. Sometimes even more. I'm not... I've never done anything like that. And whatever chronoform they give me will be one I've never used before."

"First of all, remember your studies. The chronoform is a tool. Nothing more. The Walker does the work. And Master Ojeyd tells me that you're very good. True, you have much yet to learn, but from what he's said, I gather that even your most difficult passages have been relatively smooth. You've never had any trouble crossing back. To my knowledge, you haven't missed a chosen time by more than a click or two. Am I wrong?"

"No."

"Vaisan has been teaching Walkers for a long time, and before that he served the court at Rencyr. He's good at what he does, and he wouldn't allow the Chancellor to send you anywhere if he didn't think you were ready."

He stared at the golden aperture on her workbench. "I know that."

"Then what's troubling you?" She arched an eyebrow. "Lack of confidence has never been one of your shortcomings, so it must be something else."

"I- I don't know anyone there. I've never sailed beyond the Sisters and the Labyrinth." Tobias clamped his mouth shut. Already he had said more than he intended. His cheeks burned.

The kindness in Wansi's look did little to ease his thoughts. "I forget sometimes how young all of you are." She canted her head to the side and considered him through narrowed

eyes. “Your training is meant to conceal it, I think. The sovereigns who buy your services are paying for diplomats and ministers, not children. And so we train the youth right out of you. Or at least we try. Perhaps we’re not as thorough in that respect as we’d like to believe.”

“It’s not that I’m a child,” he said, aware of how sullen he sounded.

“No. It’s that you’re normal. You’re alive, you feel things, in this one small way you’re terribly, charmingly ordinary.”

He frowned, unsure if she was mocking him.

“What do you remember of your home?” she asked.

“You mean in Redcove?”

“Aye.”

“Not much: scattered images mostly. I haven’t been there since I was five.”

“Precisely. This is the only home you’ve ever really known. I’d find it hard to leave, and I first came here as an adult. Naturally it’s harder for you. It would be for any of the... Any of your fellow novitiates.”

Tobias had thought along similar lines since speaking with the chancellor, but hearing Wansi speak of these feelings made them easier to accept. He released a breath he hadn’t known he held.

“You’ll be just fine. It won’t be long before you’re the most famous young man in Hayncalde: the sovereign’s new Walker – handsome, brilliant, exotic. People there will clamor to make your acquaintance. The greatest danger I foresee is that all this attention will go to your head, and make you even more insufferable than you already are.”

A smile came unbidden. "I wish I could take one of your chronofors with me." He raised a hand, anticipating her response. "I've no doubt that Master Jarrett will Bind me a fine device. But still, I'll always prefer yours to anyone else's."

Wansi reached for her spectacles and planer. Tobias thought he glimpsed the shimmer of a tear in one eye.

"That golden tongue of yours will serve you well, Mister Doljan. Flatter the sovereign this way, and you'll have nothing to worry about."

"I wasn't—"

"I know," she said, her eyes fixed on the golden device before her. "You should be on your way. Miss Craik's aperture won't Bind itself, and I'm sure you've other farewells."

"Yes, mistress. Thank you."

He crossed to the door, pulled it open.

"I wouldn't object to a missive now and then." The soft gleam of her binding power enveloped her again. "When you've the time, of course."

"Of course," he echoed, and left her.

He returned to the Leeward Keep, the boys' dormitory in the Upper Courtyard, and sat on his pallet intending to draft a missive to his parents. He hadn't seen them in the nine years since his arrival here, but he had sent them messages now and again. For the first several years he had received gifts from them on his birthdays: toys of a sort he hadn't played with since leaving home; overshirts and breeches sown for a smaller body, as if they couldn't fathom the rate at which he had grown; bound volumes, no doubt far more dear than they could afford, and yet

written for a common child rather than for a future Traveler educated in Windhome Palace.

He sent messages of thanks each year, but despite his efforts to infuse the missives with enthusiasm, they might have sensed a growing distance in what he wrote. Last year he received nothing. No gift had come this year, either.

The note he penned struck him as inadequate to the occasion:

Dear Mother and Father,

I write today with glad tidings. I am to be posted as a Walker to the Court of Daerjen in Hayncalde. I will serve the sovereign himself.

I hope you, Bale, and Comas are well. I miss you all.

With love,

Tobias

He should have written more, but no other words came, at least none that he could bring himself to write. *I am leaving Trevynisle forever. In all likelihood, I will never see any of you again.*

After staring at the page for some time, he rolled it up, sealed it with wax, and placed it in his sack. Someone at the wharf would be able to deliver it for him.

The chancellor attended the evening meal in the refectory, as he did whenever a novitiate received a posting. He spoke ever so briefly.

“Tobias Doljan will be leaving Trevynisle tomorrow morning for a posting in Daerjen. We wish him well, and ask that the Two bless him in all his endeavors.”

“Hear us,” intoned the rest of those in the hall.

That was all. Following the Chancellor’s example, everyone took their seats and began to eat. Tobias sat with the older novitiates, as always, but the conversation at their table meandered over familiar territory – the day’s training, rumors of trysts among various masters and mistresses in the palace, the latest from the wars in the Aiyanthan and Herjean Seas. No one spoke of Tobias’s impending departure, and he contributed little to their discussion. Mara sat across from him, but refused to meet his glance. She excused herself from the table long before the entire meal had been served.

Tobias remained through the dessert course. Ojeyd, the Master Walker, came to the table to tell Tobias that he would accompany him to the wharves at dawn. A few of Tobias’s other instructors took the occasion to offer their congratulations and good wishes, but he had already said goodbye to Wansi and Saffern, who were, along with Vaisan, his favorites. When servants filed into the hall to clear the tables, Tobias fled into the night, wishing only to be alone.

Or so he thought.

Mara stood at the western end of the lower courtyard, a dark silhouette, arms crossed over her chest, still except for her hair, which rose and fell in the gentle wind blowing off Safsi Bay. In truth, it could have been any of the older girls, but he recognized the curve of her neck, the taut lines of her back and shoulders.

Torches burned on the ramparts where guards paced, but below there was only moonlight silvering the grass.

“What are you doing out here?” he asked as he neared her.

“When’s your birthday?” She kept her back to him and didn’t move. Her voice seemed to come from far away.

“What?”

“Your birthday? When is it?”

“I’m a Walker. My birthday is meaningless. Once I get to Hayncalde, I’ll be sent back and forth so many times, I won’t be able to keep track. Pretty soon I won’t remember how old I am.”

She faced him, the moon reflected in her bright eyes. She was a year older than he, but already he stood a hand taller. “That’s later. You know how old you are now. When is it? Please tell me.”

He sighed, knowing better than to argue with her. “Twenty-seventh day of Kheraya’s Waking.”

Mara blinked. “That’s tomorrow.”

“Yes.” He shivered, rubbed his arm. “It’s cold. Don’t you want to go inside?”

“Does the sovereign of Daerjen have a Spanner?”

“I don’t know.”

“If he doesn’t, you should tell him to request me.”

Tobias opened his mouth, closed it again. “Um... All right.”

“I’m good. And I’m almost sixteen.”

“I know you’re good. And I know how old you are. I just... I thought you wanted to be posted to Aiyanth. That’s what you’ve always said.”

She shrugged, gaze wandering. “Maybe I’ve changed my mind.”

“Mara—”

Before he could say more, she closed the distance between them with a single step, wrapped her arms around his neck, and pulled him down into a kiss. His first. He wasn’t sure what to do. He touched her hair, her shoulders, and finally settled on holding his hands to her back. Her lips caressed his and he did his best to kiss her back in the same way. He was aware of her breasts pressed against him, of the pounding of his heart, and of hers.

Too soon, she pulled back, her eyes still closed.

“Tell him,” she whispered. “If he needs a Spanner.”

She spun away from him and ran toward the middle courtyard and the Windward Keep. Tobias could only watch her go, his head spinning, his lips still tingling with the memory of that kiss.

He swallowed past a thickness in his throat and thought he might be on the verge of tears. Yet it was all he could do not to laugh aloud. He felt himself balanced on the point of a clock hand, caught between a past that already seemed to belong to a stranger, and a future he couldn’t imagine. It was an odd sensation for someone who could Walk through time.