

THE
ORB
OF
KANDRA

OLIVER BLUE AND THE SCHOOL FOR SEERS (BOOK TWO)



MORGAN RICE

Oliver Blue and the School for Seers

Морган Райс

The Orb of Kandra

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The Orb of Kandra / М. Райс — «Lukeman Literary Management Ltd», 2018 — (Oliver Blue and the School for Seers)

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“A powerful opener to a series will produce a combination of feisty protagonists and challenging circumstances to thoroughly involve not just young adults, but adult fantasy fans who seek epic stories fueled by powerful friendships and adversaries.” --Midwest Book Review (Diane Donovan) (re A Throne for Sisters) “Morgan Rice's imagination is limitless!” --Books and Movie Reviews (re A Throne for Sisters) From #1 Bestselling fantasy author Morgan Rice comes a new series for middle grade readers—and adults, too! Fans of Harry Potter and Percy Jackson—look no further! In THE ORB OF KANDRA: OLIVER BLUE AND THE SCHOOL FOR SEERS (BOOK TWO), 11 year old Oliver Blue is back in the present day, racing to save Armando before his destined moment to die. But when Oliver learns that the sacred Orb of Kandra has been stolen, he knows it is up to him—and him alone—to save the school. And the only way is to travel back in time, to the England of 1690s, and to save one very important person: Sir Isaac Newton. The Obsidian School, meanwhile, has powerful seers of its own, and all are bent on Oliver's destruction. And when they enlist and transform Oliver's bully brother, Chris, it may just mean a fight to the death. An uplifting fantasy, THE ORB OF KANDRA is book #2 in a riveting new series filled with magic, love, humor, heartbreak, tragedy, destiny, and a series of shocking twists. It will make you fall in love with Oliver Blue, and keep you turning pages late into the night. Book #3 in the series (THE OBSIDIANS) is now also available! “The beginnings of something remarkable are there.” --San Francisco Book Review (re A Quest of Heroes)

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Morgan Rice

The Orb of Kandra. Oliver Blue and the School for Seers—Book Two

Morgan Rice

Morgan Rice is the #1 bestselling and USA Today bestselling author of the epic fantasy series THE SORCERER'S RING, comprising seventeen books; of the #1 bestselling series THE VAMPIRE JOURNALS, comprising twelve books; of the #1 bestselling series THE SURVIVAL TRILOGY, a post-apocalyptic thriller comprising three books; of the epic fantasy series KINGS AND SORCERERS, comprising six books; of the epic fantasy series OF CROWNS AND GLORY, comprising eight books; of the epic fantasy series A THRONE FOR SISTERS, comprising eight books; of the new science fiction series THE INVASION CHRONICLES, comprising four books; and of the new fantasy series OLIVER BLUE AND THE SCHOOL FOR SEERS, comprising three books (and counting). Morgan's books are available in audio and print editions, and translations are available in over 25 languages.

Morgan loves to hear from you, so please feel free to visit www.morganricebooks.com to join the email list, receive a free book, receive free giveaways, download the free app, get the latest exclusive news, connect on Facebook and Twitter, and stay in touch!

Select Acclaim for Morgan Rice

“If you thought that there was no reason left for living after the end of THE SORCERER'S RING series, you were wrong. In RISE OF THE DRAGONS Morgan Rice has come up with what promises to be another brilliant series, immersing us in a fantasy of trolls and dragons, of valor, honor, courage, magic and faith in your destiny. Morgan has managed again to produce a strong set of characters that make us cheer for them on every page....Recommended for the permanent library of all readers that love a well-written fantasy.”

*--Books and Movie Reviews
Roberto Mattos*

“An action packed fantasy sure to please fans of Morgan Rice's previous novels, along with fans of works such as THE INHERITANCE CYCLE by Christopher Paolini.... Fans of Young Adult Fiction will devour this latest work by Rice and beg for more.”

--The Wanderer, A Literary Journal (regarding Rise of the Dragons)

“A spirited fantasy that weaves elements of mystery and intrigue into its story line. *A Quest of Heroes* is all about the making of courage and about realizing a life purpose that leads to growth, maturity, and excellence....For those seeking meaty fantasy adventures, the protagonists, devices, and action provide a vigorous set of encounters that focus well on Thor's evolution from a dreamy child to a young adult facing impossible odds for survival....Only the beginning of what promises to be an epic young adult series.”

--Midwest Book Review (D. Donovan, eBook Reviewer)

“THE SORCERER'S RING has all the ingredients for an instant success: plots, counterplots, mystery, valiant knights, and blossoming relationships replete with broken hearts, deception and

betrayal. It will keep you entertained for hours, and will satisfy all ages. Recommended for the permanent library of all fantasy readers.”

--*Books and Movie Reviews, Roberto Mattos*

“In this action-packed first book in the epic fantasy Sorcerer's Ring series (which is currently 14 books strong), Rice introduces readers to 14-year-old Thorgrin "Thor" McLeod, whose dream is to join the Silver Legion, the elite knights who serve the king.... Rice's writing is solid and the premise intriguing.”

--*Publishers Weekly*

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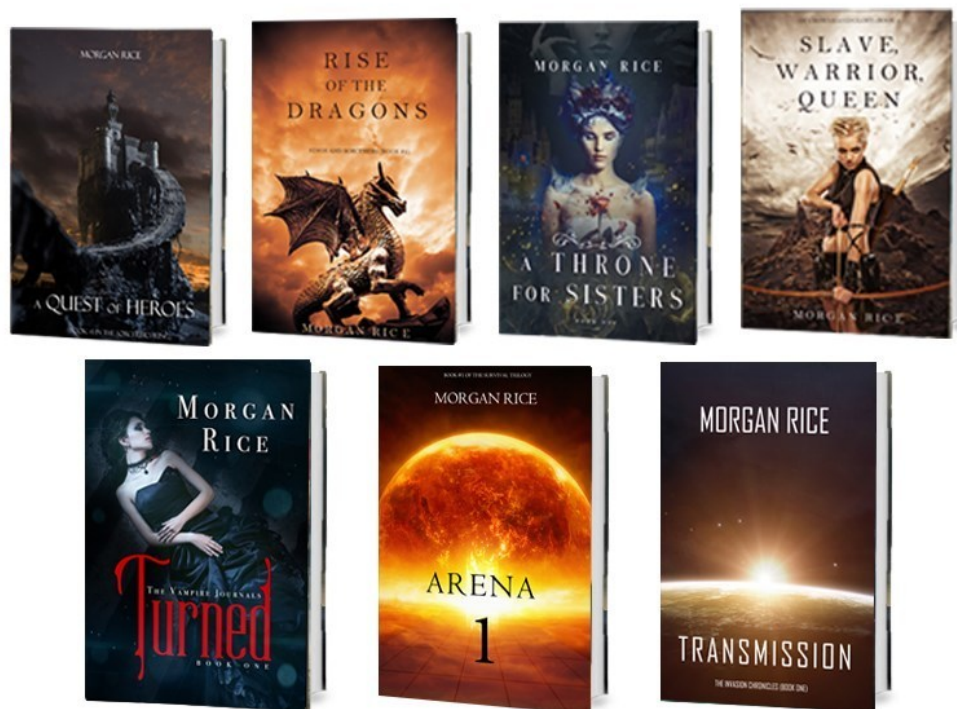
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CHAPTER ONE

Oliver Blue was standing in a cupboard and he didn't know why. His whole body felt peculiar, like a strange sensation was passing through him. His head was pounding.

He glanced about, disoriented, trying to piece together fragments of memory. He'd come here through a swirling vortex. A wormhole. Yes! He remembered now. Professor Amethyst had created a wormhole and sent Oliver through it. But why?

He turned, looking for the wormhole he'd traveled through, to see if it might give him a clue as to how he'd ended up here. But it was no longer there.

He suddenly felt the cold sensation of metal on his chest and pulled out an amulet. Professor Amethyst had given it to him, he recollected. What was it he had told him? That when the metal became hot it meant there was a chance to get back to the School for Seers? That was it.

Right now, it was icy cold. That meant the route back to the School for Seers was gone.

A huge swell of sadness overcame Oliver as he remembered the school he'd left behind. But why he'd left it in the first place, Oliver could not recall. Anxiety took hold of him as he tried to piece it all together, to remember where he had landed. And why. Where was he? What year was it?

And then, slowly, it came back to him: Armando.

He had come back to the present day to save Armando Illstrom.

He looked around him with sudden urgency. Armando was about to be killed. Every second counted.

Oliver burst out of the cupboard and into the corridors of what he immediately recognized was a factory.

Armando's factory. Sure enough, there was a sign: *Illstrom's Inventions*.

He ran toward the factory forecourt. He reached the end of the corridor and tipped his head around the corner. Instead of Armando's fake internal corridors, the factory had an open plan and was bustling with activity, filled with workers wearing the old-style blue overalls that Oliver currently wore.

The whole place looked clean and well maintained. Flying robotic creatures whizzed through the air. Sparks flew from the welders of workers as they fixed up the joints of vast, giant machines. Metallic birds flew around in the rafters, where the windows were no longer boarded up.

Everything had changed. Oliver had a moment of pride. Clearly, his actions back in 1944 had altered the present day. Thanks to him, Illstrom's Inventions was up and running.

But not for long.

Not if he didn't save Armando in time.

Through the skylights, Oliver saw dark storm clouds. Rain began to hammer on the glass. Then a sudden flash of lightning forked across the sky, followed swiftly by a huge boom of thunder.

The lights in the factory began to flicker. Then they went out completely. With a whirring sound, all the machines powered down.

The backup generators kicked in and emergency lights flickered on around the factory, making the whole place glow ominously red.

Oliver now realized *when* he'd come back to. It was the day of the big storm. The day the mayor had closed all the schools and businesses in town. The day he'd hidden in a trash can to escape Chris and his bullying friends. The day he'd met Armando.

Through the gloomy red lights, Oliver caught sight of Armando. *His* Armando. Not the young man from 1944, but his elderly hero.

His heart soared. But a moment later it fell again. Armando would not remember him. They had not even met. All those precious memories of their time together would now be gone from Armando's mind.

“I guess we should call it a day!” Armando called out to his workers. “Looks like the storm is hitting earlier than the mayor said. The bus will take you all home.”

As the workers headed for the door, Oliver caught sight of something peculiar. Something blue and shimmery.

He instantly recognized the unique shade of blue. It was the color of a rogue seer’s eyes. And that could only mean one thing. Lucas, the evil rogue seer, was here.

Oliver searched through the gloom. A sudden bolt of lightning illuminated the whole place. Oliver saw a silhouette streak through the shadows of the factory.

He gasped and his blood ran cold. It was Lucas. He was following Armando.

Thunder boomed. Oliver leapt into action, heading in the direction of Armando and Lucas. He drew closer and closer to the evil rogue seer until they were running parallel.

With another sudden crash of lightning, the old man’s face snapped to the side. Oliver saw Lucas’s wizened face in all its glory. His evil blue gaze locked on Oliver and his eyes flashed disconcertingly.

“Oliver Blue,” he snarled.

Oliver gulped. His throat felt constricted. Coming face to face with the man who wanted him dead was terrifying. Paralyzing.

Just then, Horatio the dog leapt out of the darkness. He wove his body around Lucas’s ankles, making the old man stumble.

“That blasted dog!” Lucas yelled as he staggered to stay upright.

Oliver had never been so happy to see the old bloodhound. He immediately made use of the moment Horatio had given him, running in the direction that Armando had gone. He reached the corridor just in time to see Armando disappear into his office.

The sound of heavy footsteps came from behind. Oliver glanced over his shoulder just as a flash of lightning illuminated Lucas’s deranged features. Scrambling with terror, Oliver reached the door of Armando’s office and burst inside.

Armando’s office was in its usual chaotic state. There were several desks dotted about the place covered in stacks of paper. Computers from different eras. Shelves heaving with books.

And standing in the midst of it all was Armando himself.

He turned and looked at Oliver, perplexed. “Can I help you?”

Oliver stared back, wondering if Armando recognized him. He couldn’t tell. And there was no time to dwell on it. He had to find the threat.

Oliver looked about frantically. There was nothing amiss. No sign of a trap. Nothing to suggest Armando’s life was in imminent danger at all. He couldn’t help but second-guess himself. Was this whole trip back a mistake? Had he sacrificed his beloved school for no reason?

Suddenly, Lucas burst into the office. “The guards are coming, you little pest!”

He lunged for Oliver but Oliver jumped out of the way. He looked about frantically, searching for the threat. He didn’t have long to save Armando’s life. What could it be?

“Get back here!” Lucas snapped.

Armando jumped back as Oliver rushed past him, sliding under his desk and right out the other side. Lucas reached him but the wide desk provided a barrier. He lunged for Oliver, knocking into the desk over and over in his frantic attempts to get hold of him.

That’s when Oliver saw it. A coffee cup on the side of the desk was being sloshed all over the place from Lucas’s movements. And Armando was now reaching for it to stop it from spilling. But there was a strange shimmery glistening on its surface.

Poison!

Oliver jumped up onto the desk and kicked out. The coffee cup went flying from Armando’s hands. It smashed onto the ground, a puddle of brown liquid pooling from it.

“What is going on?” Armando exclaimed.

Lucas got hold of Oliver's legs and pulled. Oliver fell, landing heavily against the desk.

"It's POISON!" he tried to cry, but Lucas was covering his mouth with his hands.

Oliver thrashed at the old man, kicking out, trying to get free.

Just then guards barreled into the room.

"Take this boy away," Lucas said.

Oliver bit down on his hand.

Lucas reared back and screamed out in pain. Oliver leapt from the desk and darted left and right in his attempts to evade the guards. But it was no use. They got hold of him, twisting his arms roughly behind his back. They started to shove him toward the door.

"Armando, please listen to me!" Oliver cried, digging his heels in. "Lucas is trying to kill you!"

Lucas was nursing his sore hand. He narrowed his eyes as Oliver was dragged to the door.

"Preposterous," he sneered.

Just then, Oliver noticed a small mouse had scurried out from the shadows in the corner. It sniffed the spilled coffee on the floor.

"Look!" Oliver cried.

Armando turned his gaze to the mouse. It licked the coffee spill. Then in an instant, its whole body went stiff and rigid.

It fell to its side, dead.

Everyone froze. The guards stopped dragging Oliver.

They all turned to Armando.

Armando stared at Lucas, and slowly, his expression changed. It became pained. A look of betrayal.

"Lucas?" he asked, his voice heartbroken, disbelieving.

Lucas's face flushed with shame.

Armando's face hardened, and slowly, he pointed a finger at Lucas.

"Take him away," he instructed the guards.

Immediately, the guards released Oliver and rounded on Lucas.

"This is madness!" Lucas screamed as they roughly pinned Lucas's arms behind his back.

"Armando! You'll believe this scrawny little boy over me?"

Armando said nothing as the guards dragged Lucas away.

The old man's face contorted with rage. He screamed, looking as deranged as Hitler had when Oliver had broken his bomb.

"This isn't over, Oliver Blue!" he yelled. "I'll get you one day!"

Then he was dragged through the door and disappeared from sight.

Oliver let out a deep breath of relief. He'd done it. He'd really done it. He'd saved Armando's life.

He looked up at the old inventor, standing there in the chaos of his office looking shocked and stunned. For a long moment, they held one another's gaze.

Then, finally, Armando smiled.

"I've been waiting a long time to see you again."

CHAPTER TWO

Malcolm Malice took aim with his crossbow. He steadied himself. Then he let it fly.

It sliced through the air at lightning speed before smashing into the bull's-eye. A perfect shot. Malcolm grinned.

"Great work, Malcolm," Coach Royce said. "I'd expect no less from my star pupil."

Filled with pride, Malcolm handed him back the crossbow and went to stand beside the rest of his classmates. They narrowed their jealous eyes at him.

"Star pupil," someone mimicked.

There was a smattering of laughter.

Malcolm ignored their teasing. He had more important things to think about. He'd only been at Obsidian's for a few months but already he'd leapfrogged kids who'd been here for years. He was a powerful seer. Atomic—the strongest kind, with a rare blend of cobalt and bromine.

So what if none of the other kids wanted to hang out with him? He'd been friendless before coming to Obsidian's. It didn't make much difference to Malcolm if it remained that way. He wasn't here for friendship anyway. He was here to excel, to become the best seer he could possibly be, so that when the time came he could crush those Amethyst losers into dust.

Suddenly, he felt something smack against the back of his head. It stung and his hand instinctively went to it. When he took it away, he saw a dead bee in his palm.

Someone had used their powers on him. He turned sharply, glaring for the culprit. Candice was barely hiding her smirk.

Malcolm narrowed his eyes. "You did that."

"It was just a bee sting," she replied sweetly.

"I know it was you. You have a biological specialism. If anyone did it, it was you."

Candice shrugged innocently.

Coach Royce clapped his hands loudly. "Malcolm Malice. Eyes to the front. Just because you can do this easily doesn't mean you can mess around while your classmates try. Show some respect."

Malcolm sucked his cheeks in. The injustice stung just as much as the bee had.

Malcolm tried to focus on his classmates as they took turns practicing their aim. It was a usual gloomy day at Obsidian's, with a light fog hanging in the air, turning everything misty. The large playing field stretched all the way up to the imposing manor house that was Mistress Obsidian's School for Seers.

Candice went up to take her shot. The arrow went flying over the top of the target and Malcolm couldn't help but smile at her misfortune.

"This is exactly the sort of skill you need to perfect," Coach Royce called out. "When it comes to fighting the Amethyst seers, it's this kind of mastery that really knocks them for six. They're so focused on their seer specialisms, they've forgotten all about good old-fashioned weaponry."

The corners of Malcolm's mouth tugged even further upward. Just the thought of kicking the sappy seers at Professor Amethyst's school delighted him. He couldn't wait until the day he was finally face-to-face with one of those losers. Then he'd really show them who was boss. Show them why Obsidian's was the better school. Why it deserved to be the one and only school for seers.

Just then, Malcolm noticed some of the kids from the second year coming out onto the playing fields, hockey sticks in hand. He noticed Natasha Armstrong amongst them. She was in the private study sessions he'd been attending at the library, the ones for gifted students like him. Though at twelve he was the youngest there, the others were kind to him. Natasha especially. She didn't tease him for being smart. And she shared the same hatred toward Professor Amethyst as he did.

Natasha looked over and waved. Pretty dimples appeared in her cheeks. Malcolm waved back, feeling his own cheeks growing warm.

Just then, Malcolm heard Candice's velvety voice whisper in his ear. "Aw, look. Malcolm's got a crush."

Malcolm kept his gaze ahead and ignored her taunts. Candice was only being mean because he'd rebuffed her advances. Her spite came from a place of jealousy—that an older girl, one as beautiful and talented as Natasha Armstrong, could be interested in him.

As the other class began their hockey match, Malcolm's gaze went up to the vast imposing Victorian manor house of Obsidian's School, all the way to the turret at the top. He could just make out the dark figure of Mistress Obsidian standing at the window. She was looking down at her students. Then her gaze fixed on him.

He smiled to himself. He knew she was keeping tabs on him. She'd hand-picked *him* for a special mission. Tomorrow, he would have a meeting with Mistress Obsidian herself. Tomorrow, she'd tell him all the details of his special mission. Until then, he could tolerate the bullies and teasing. Because soon, he would be their hero. Soon, the name Malcolm Malice would be known to every seer in every timeline. He'd be in all the history books.

Soon, he would be known the universe over as the one who'd destroyed the School for Seers once and for all.

CHAPTER THREE

Relief coursed through Oliver's body. Armando remembered him after all. Despite all his actions in the past changing this timeline, somehow his hero had not forgotten who he was.

"You... you remember me?" Oliver stammered.

Armando walked over to him. His gait was straighter, his chin tipped higher. He was better dressed, in dark slacks and a shirt that gave off an air of self-assurance. This was not the same Armando who'd given Oliver refuge the night of the storm; the hunched, scruffy, secretive man who'd spent decades living under the label of "zany." This was a man who held his head high with pride.

He patted Oliver's shoulder. "I remember years ago, in 1944, you told me it would all make sense in seventy years' time. And now it all does. Lucas has been going against my back for years." He looked away with a troubled expression. "To think he wanted me dead."

Oliver felt a pang of grief. Armando had trusted Lucas and Lucas had betrayed him in the worst way imaginable.

"But that is in the past now," Armando replied. "Thanks to you."

Oliver felt a surge of pride. Then he remembered his conversation with Professor Amethyst. It wasn't over yet. There was more work to be done. The work of a seer was an endless task. And his destiny was intertwined with Armando's. He just didn't know in what way.

Thinking of Professor Amethyst sent a shard of pain into Oliver's heart. He touched the amulet with his fingers. It was as cold as ice. Returning to the School for Seers was not an option. He'd probably never return. Never see his friends again: Walter, Simon, Hazel, Ralph, and Esther. He'd never play switchit again or walk the corridors held up by the kapoc tree.

Armando gave him a kind smile. "Since we've never technically met, perhaps I ought to introduce myself. I'm Armando Illstrom, of Illstrom's Inventions."

Oliver snapped out of his sad reverie. He shook Armando's hand, feeling warmth spread through his whole body.

"I'm Oliver Blue. Of..."

He paused. Where did he belong now? Not the School for Seers, nor the factory in this new reality where he and Armando had never met. And most definitely not his home in New Jersey with the Blues, who he knew now were not his real parents.

Sadly, he added, "Actually, I don't know where I belong."

He looked up at Armando.

"Perhaps that is your real mission, Oliver Blue?" Armando said in a soft, firm voice. "To find your place in the world?"

Oliver let Armando's words sink in. He thought about his real parents, the man and woman who appeared to him in his visions and dreams. He wanted to find them.

But he was confused.

"I thought my mission in returning was to save you," he said.

Armando smiled.

"Missions are multilayered," he replied. "Saving me and finding out who you really are—the two are not mutually exclusive. After all, it is your identity that led you to me in the first place."

Oliver pondered that. Perhaps he was right. Perhaps his return in time was not as simple as one mission; perhaps it was fated for a number of reasons.

"But I don't even know where to begin," Oliver admitted.

Armando tapped his chin. Then his eyes suddenly lit up.

He hurried over to one of his many desks, clicking his fingers. "Of course, of course, of course."

Oliver was puzzled. He watched curiously as Armando rummaged in a drawer. Then he straightened up and turned to Oliver.

“Here.”

He walked over and placed a circular bronze object in Oliver’s hands. Oliver inspected it. It looked ancient.

“A compass?” he asked, raising one eyebrow.

Armando shook his head. “On its surface, yes. But it is something much more. An invention I’ve never been able to decipher.”

Oliver stared at it in awe, at the myriad dials and strange symbols on its surface. “Then why do you own it?”

“It was left on the steps of my factory,” Armando said. “There was no note to explain where it came from. My name was on the package but I realize now I was not the intended recipient. Look on the other side.”

Oliver turned the compass over. There, etched into the bronze, were the letters O.B.

Oliver gasped and almost dropped the compass. His gaze snapped up to meet Armando’s.

“My initials?” he said. “How? Why? Who would send you something intended for me?”

Armando took a deep breath. “I was supposed to be a guide for a seer, Oliver. You. I got it wrong at first, thinking it was Lucas. But when you arrived in 1944 and showed me your powers, I realized my mistake. I was cautious after that, waiting for a seer to come to me. Oliver, this compass was left on my doorstep eleven years ago. On December second.”

Oliver gasped. “That’s my birthday.”

Armando delivered the final blow. “I believe now that this was left by your parents.”

Oliver felt like he’d been punched. He could not believe it. Was he really holding a little piece of them in his hands? Something that had belonged to them, that they had sent on to Armando for safekeeping?

He whispered under his breath, “My parents?”

Surely it was a sign. A gift from the universe herself.

“What makes you so certain it was from them?” Oliver asked.

“Look at the dials,” Armando told him.

Oliver’s gaze tipped down. He saw that amongst the dozen or so dials, only one was pointing directly at a symbol. The symbol reminded Oliver of Egyptian hieroglyphics in style, scratchy black line drawings. But what it was depicting was clear. A man and a woman.

Oliver was in no doubt now. This was definitely a sign.

“What else do you know?” he demanded of Armando. “Did you see them leave the package? Did they say anything? Say anything about me?”

Armando shook his head sadly. “I’m afraid I know nothing more, Oliver. But perhaps this will help guide you in your quest to find out where you truly belong.”

Oliver’s eyes fell to the compass again. It was so strange, covered in symbols and dials. He may have no idea how to decipher it, but he knew it was important. That somehow, it would be a part of his mission to find his parents. To find out who he was and where he came from. Just holding a part of them in his hands gave him strength to search.

Just then, he noticed that one of the dials was moving. Now it was hovering over three squiggly lines that made Oliver think of water. He reached forward and rubbed his thumb against the symbol. To his surprise, as the dirt lifted, he saw that the symbol beneath was colored. The water lines were made in the most vivid, brilliant blue.

“I know where to start,” Oliver said decisively.

Blue. The Blues. His so-called parents. The man and woman who’d raised him as their own. If anyone had any answers about where he came from, it would be them.

And besides, he had a score to settle.

It was way past time to finally put Chris in his place.

CHAPTER FOUR

In the dark and stormy evening, Oliver headed out of the factory and along the streets of New Jersey. Debris from the storm lay strewn across the sidewalks, blowing in the wind that still blew strongly.

As he walked, Oliver was shocked to see that although everything was the same in terms of the buildings, roads, and sidewalks, nothing looked as it had before. The whole area had been transformed. It looked newer, cleaner, more affluent. There were shrubs and flowerbeds in the front yards rather than broken down washing machines and beat up cars. There were no potholes in the asphalt, no rusted, abandoned bikes attached to the street lamps.

Oliver realized that the fact that Illstrom's Inventions had not closed down meant many local people had kept their jobs. The knock-on effects of his actions in the past seemed very far reaching. Oliver felt somewhat overwhelmed by the enormous responsibilities that came with being a seer. Just one change in the past seemed to affect everything in the future. But he also felt a sense of pride because things had changed for the better.

Oliver waited at the bus stop, its sign shiny now instead of rusted. The bus arrived and he climbed onboard. This one didn't smell of onions and greasy fries like the one of his old timeline, but of lingering aftershave and polish.

"Aren't you a bit young to be out this late?" the driver asked.

Oliver handed him some money for the fare. "I'm just heading home now."

The driver looked concerned as Oliver took his seat.

Even the drivers are nicer than in my old timeline! Oliver thought.

As the bus pulled away, Oliver tried to remind himself what moment in time it was that he'd be returning to. As far as Mr. and Mrs. Blue were concerned, Oliver had failed to return from school on the bus during the storm. It was such a strange thing to wrap his head around. For Oliver, he'd had a whole adventure. He'd gone back in time and come face-to-face with Hitler, played a crazy game on the back of a genetically spliced creature from the year 3000, and made friends with kids from all different eras. And most important of all, he'd learned that he had a mom and dad, real ones, not the mean Blues. As far as *they* were concerned, Oliver had failed to come home from school during the storm and he doubted they'd even be relieved to see him back in one piece. They'd probably just complain about the worry he'd caused them.

As the bus jostled Oliver, he took Armando's gift out of his pocket. It filled him with awe to look at. The brass was burnished and it was in need of a good polish. But other than that, it was a remarkable instrument. There were lots of arrows and dials and at least a hundred different symbols. With a sense of wonder, Oliver tried to imagine his parents with the compass. What had they used it for? And why had they sent it to Armando?

Just then, Oliver realized he'd reached his stop. He jumped up and rang the bell, then hurried to the front of the bus. The driver pulled over and let him out.

"Careful, kid," he said. "The winds might start up again any second."

"I'll be fine, thank you," Oliver told him. "My house is just there."

He hopped off the bus. But the scene that met his eyes took his breath away. It was not what he expected at all. The once rundown neighborhood looked much nicer than when he'd left. It didn't look like the sort of place his parents could afford. He was suddenly struck with the fear that perhaps this was no longer his home at all.

Quickly, he consulted the compass. The dials were still pointing to the sketchy image of a man and woman, as well as the wavy blue lines. If he was reading it correctly, then this was the right place. This was still his home.

Heart beating with apprehension, Oliver opened the garden gate and went up to the front door. He tried his key and was relieved to find it fit the lock. He turned it and walked inside.

It was very dark in the house, and very quiet. All Oliver could hear was the ticking of a distant clock and soft snoring. He realized it was nighttime so everyone would be asleep.

But as he walked into the living room, he was startled to discover both his parents inside. They were sitting on the couch, both their expressions pale. They looked disheveled, like neither had even attempted to go to bed.

Mom leapt to her feet. "Oliver!" she cried.

Dad dropped the telephone he'd been clutching in his hands. He looked at Oliver like he was seeing a ghost.

"Where have you been?" Mom demanded. "And what are you wearing?"

Oliver didn't have an explanation for the blue workman's overalls. But that didn't matter because he didn't get a chance to speak. Dad launched into a tirade.

"We've been worried sick! We called all the hospitals! Called the headmaster at Campbell Junior High to give him an ear-lashing! We even called the press!"

Oliver folded his arms, remembering the newspaper article in which they'd appealed for financial aid. It had happened in a different timeline but that didn't mean if Oliver had not returned home this evening, it wouldn't have happened in this one too.

"Of course you did," he said wryly.

"Why weren't you on the school bus?" Mom demanded. "Chris managed to catch it. Why didn't you?"

"I think I know," Dad interjected. "Oliver's head was so far in the clouds he didn't even think to. You know what he's like, always lost in his imagination." He sighed heavily. "I'll have to call the school in the morning to apologize. Do you know how embarrassing that will be for me?"

Mom tutted and shook her head. "Where have you been? Wandering the streets? Aren't you cold?" Then she folded her arms and huffed. "Actually, I hope you are cold. At least that way you might learn your lesson."

Oliver listened to his parents' tirades silently. For the first time their words bounced right off him. Their angry faces no longer made him tremble. Their harsh words didn't sting.

Oliver realized how much he had changed. How much the School for Seers had changed him, not to mention discovering that the Blues were not really his family. It was like becoming a seer had wrapped an invisible bulletproof coat around his shoulders and now nothing could hurt him.

He stood before them confidently, waiting patiently for a pause in their rambling anger.

But before he got a chance to say his piece, thundering footsteps came from the staircase behind him. And there was Chris.

"What are you doing here?" he bellowed. "I thought you died in the storm."

"Chris!" Dad scolded.

For a brief second, Oliver thought maybe his parents were going to stand up for him. Stand up to their bully son. But of course, they did not.

Oliver folded his arms. He wasn't scared of Chris anymore. His heart rate hadn't even increased.

"I was hiding. From you. Remember how you chased me down with your friends? How you threatened to beat me up?"

Chris pulled an incredulous expression. "I didn't do that! You're a liar!"

Mom buried her face in her hands. She hated arguing but never did anything to stop it.

Oliver just shook his head. "I don't care if you call me a liar. I know the truth and so do you." He folded his arms. "And anyway, none of that matters. I came here to tell you I'm leaving."

Mom's head popped up from her hands. "What?"

Dad glared at Oliver with horror. "Leaving? You're eleven years old! Where are you going?"

Oliver shrugged. "I don't know yet. But the thing is, I know you're not my real parents."

Everyone gasped. Chris's mouth fell open. The whole room went silent.

"What are you talking about?" Mom cried. "Of course we are."

Oliver narrowed his eyes. "No. You're not. You're lying. Who are they? My real mom and dad. What happened to them?"

His mom looked like she'd been caught out. Her eyes darted all over the place, as if searching for an escape.

"Fine," she suddenly blurted. "We adopted you."

Oliver nodded slowly. He thought her words would be hard to hear, but really it was a relief to get even more confirmation that the two people from his vision were his parents, not these awful people. That Chris wasn't his real brother either. The big bully looked like he was about to faint from shock at the revelation.

Mom continued. "We don't know anything about your real parents, okay? We weren't given any information about that."

Oliver felt his heart sink. He'd been hoping they would provide a piece of the puzzle of his identity. But they knew nothing.

"Nothing?" he asked sadly. "Not even their names?"

Dad stepped forward. "Not their names, not their ages, not their jobs. Adopted parents don't get to know that stuff. It's luck of the draw, you know! You could be the offspring of a criminal, for all we know. A lunatic."

Oliver glared at him. He was certain his parents were neither of those things, but Mr. Blue's attitude was still horrible. "Why did you even adopt me in the first place?"

"It was your mother," Dad scoffed. "She wanted a second. I've no idea why."

He sank onto the couch beside Mom. Oliver stared at them, feeling like he'd been punched in the gut. "You never actually wanted me, did you? That's why you treated me so awful."

"You should be grateful," Dad muttered, not meeting his eye. "Most kids get lost in the system."

"Grateful?" Oliver said. "Grateful that you barely fed me? Never gave me any new clothes or toys? Grateful for a mattress in an alcove?"

"We're not the bad guys here," Mom argued. "Your real parents abandoned you! You should take it out on them, not us."

Oliver listened without reaction. Whether his real parents had indeed abandoned him or not, he had no evidence either way. That was another mystery for another day. For now he would take Mom's words with a grain of salt.

"At least the truth's finally out," Oliver said.

Chris's mouth finally shut. "You mean to say that pipsqueak isn't my brother after all?"

"Chris!" Mom scolded him.

"Don't speak like that," Dad added.

Oliver just smirked. "Oh yes, Christopher John Blue. Since we're on a truth mission. Your darling son—your real, biological one—is a bully. He's bullied me my whole life, not to mention other kids at school."

"That's not true!" Chris bellowed. "Don't believe him! He's not even your son. He's... he's nothing! No one! A nobody!"

Mom and Dad looked at Chris with appalled expressions.

Oliver just smirked. "I think you've revealed the truth all by yourself."

Everyone fell silent, deflated by the revelations. But Oliver wasn't finished. Not quite yet. He paced back and forth, commanding the room and the attention of everyone in it.

"Here's what happens next," he said as he marched. "You don't want me. And I don't want you either. I was never meant to be here. So I'm leaving. You will not look for me. You will not speak of me. From this day forward, it will be as if I never existed. As for my end of the bargain, I won't

go to the police and tell them about the years of torment, about sleeping in an alcove and having my food rationed. Do we have a deal?”

He looked from one pair of blue eyes to the next. How silly, he thought now, that with him having brown eyes he'd never guessed before.

“Do we have a deal?” he said again, more firmly.

With great satisfaction, he saw they were all trembling. His mom nodded. Chris did too.

“We have a deal,” Dad stammered.

“Good. Now let me pack my things, and I'll be out of your hair for good.”

He could feel everyone's eyes on him as he walked over to the alcove. He grabbed his suitcase, still filled with bits of his inventions, and put the inventors book inside it.

Then he took the compass out of his pocket and placed it on top.

Just as he was about to close the suitcase, he noticed the dials on the compass had moved. One was now pointing at a symbol that looked like a Bunsen burner. A second was hovering on the symbol of a single female figure. A third pointed at a graduation cap.

Oliver put all the pieces together in his mind. Could it be that the compass was guiding him toward Ms. Belfry? The Bunsen burner could represent science, which she taught. The single female figure was self-explanatory. And the graduation cap could represent a teacher.

It must be a sign, Oliver thought with excitement. The universe was guiding him.

He closed his suitcase and turned to look at the Blues. They were all watching him in complete shock and silence. It was very satisfying to see the looks on their faces.

But then Oliver noticed that Chris was squeezing his hands into fists. He knew well enough what that meant—Chris was about to charge.

Oliver had only a split second to react. He used his powers to quickly tie Chris's shoelaces together.

Chris launched himself forward. He tripped over his knotted laces immediately and fell in a heap on the floor. He groaned.

Mom let out a squeal. “His laces! Did you see his laces?”

Dad went pale. “They... they tied themselves together.”

From a heap on the floor, Chris glared up at Oliver. “You did that. Didn't you? You're a freak.”

Oliver shrugged innocently. “I have no idea what you're talking about.”

Then he turned on his heel, suitcase in hand, and stormed out of the house. He slammed the door shut behind him.

As he walked down the path, a smile spread across his lips.

He'd never have to see the Blues again.

CHAPTER FIVE

Oliver stood outside Campbell Junior High. The playground was as noisy as ever, filled with kids running, shouting, and throwing balls like grenades.

Oliver felt a knot of anguish in his stomach. It wasn't that he was scared of the kids—or of crossing the playground filled with flying basketballs—it was because he would soon be seeing Ms. Belfry again.

As far as his favorite teacher was concerned, he'd been sitting in her class just yesterday. But for Oliver, it felt like a lifetime ago. He'd been on a whole, tumultuous adventure back in time. It had changed him, matured him. He wondered if she'd notice the changes in him when they came face to face.

He crossed the playground, ducking beneath the flying balls, then headed straight up the corridor to Ms. Belfry's science class. It was empty, with no one inside. He'd hoped Ms. Belfry would be there early so he could talk to her. But soon, his classmates started to file in. There was no sign of Ms. Belfry yet, so Oliver had no choice but to take a seat. He went for one at the front beside the window.

Oliver looked out at the playing fields, at all the kids playing different sports. He marveled at how odd it felt to pretend to be a normal student again, to be around normal people rather than seers with extraordinary powers.

More kids entered the classroom. Amongst them was Samantha, the girl who'd mocked Oliver every time he'd answered one of Ms. Belfry's questions. She took a seat at the back of the class. Then Paul came in. He was the one who'd thrown screwed up paper at the back of Oliver's head.

Seeing the kids that teased him again made Oliver feel uncomfortable. But the memories of them bullying him were already fading, the sting of their words holding much less power over him. Thanks to the School for Seers and the friends he'd made there, Oliver felt like those old wounds had healed. He'd moved on. His bullies could no longer hurt him.

The class filled up and everyone laughed and chatted loudly until the moment Ms. Belfry hurried through the door. She looked flustered.

"Sorry, I was running late." She dumped her teaching materials onto the table. Amongst them was a shiny red apple. "Today we're discussing forces." She picked up the apple and dropped it to the floor. "Who can guess what we're learning about today?"

Oliver immediately put his hand up. Ms. Belfry nodded at him.

"Gravity," he said.

Right away, Oliver heard Samantha's mimicking voice coming from behind him. It was swiftly followed by the smattering of laughter from her friends.

Oliver decided it was time to get some revenge. Nothing too mean, just a little bit of payback for her actions.

He glanced behind, making direct eye contact with her, then used his powers to waft a jet of dust straight up her nose.

Immediately, Samantha sneezed. A huge booger exploded from her nose. All the kids around her burst out laughing and pointing.

Ms. Belfry shoved a tissue in Samantha's direction. Samantha quickly cleaned up her mess. Her cheeks had gone bright red.

Oliver smiled at her then turned back to face the front.

Ms. Belfry clapped her hands to get everyone's attention. "Gravity. The force that keeps our feet on the ground. The force that makes all things fall toward the earth. Tell me, Oliver, how did you know that we were discussing gravity today?"

Oliver spoke in a strong, confident voice. “Because Sir Isaac Newton discovered the law of gravity when he saw an apple fall. Not on his head, mind you. That’s a common mistake.”

Just then, Oliver felt something hit him in the head. A pencil clattered to the floor beside him. He didn’t even need to look behind him to know the missile had come from Paul.

Try throwing pencils with no hands, Oliver thought.

He turned around and locked eyes with Paul. Then he used his powers to stick Paul’s hands to the desk.

Paul immediately looked down at his hands. He tried to move them. They were stuck fast.

“What’s going on?” he yelled.

Everyone turned around and saw Paul’s hands stuck to the table. They began to laugh, clearly thinking he was joking around. But Oliver knew the look of panic in Paul’s eyes was real.

Ms. Belfry looked unimpressed. “Paul. Gluing your hands to the desk isn’t the most sensible idea you’ve ever had.”

The class descended into raucous laughter.

“I didn’t, Ms. Belfry!” Paul cried. “Something weird is happening to me!”

Just then, Samantha let out another huge sneeze.

Smiling to himself, Oliver turned back to the front of the class.

Ms. Belfry clapped her hands. “Everyone pay attention. Sir Isaac Newton was an English mathematician and physicist. Does anyone know when he founded the law of gravity?”

Oliver’s hand went confidently into the air again. It was the only one. Ms. Belfry looked at him and nodded. She looked pleased that he was no longer reticent to raise his hand. Before, she’d had to coax the answers out of him.

“Yes, Oliver?”

“1687.”

She beamed. “That’s correct.”

Just then Oliver heard Paul mock him again. Clearly sticking his hands to the table wasn’t enough to stop him. Oliver needed to close his mouth too.

He turned and narrowed his eyes at Paul. In his mind, he visualized a zip closing Paul’s lips. Then he pushed out the image. And just like that, Paul’s mouth zipped closed.

Paul started to make a muffled, panicked noise. Students turned around and started to squeal at the strange sight. Ms. Belfry looked alarmed.

Immediately, Oliver knew he’d gone too far. He quickly reversed what he’d done to Paul, freeing his mouth and hands. But it was too late. Paul glared at him and raised a finger.

“You! You’re a freak! You made that happen!”

As the children began to hurl insults at Oliver, he looked to Ms. Belfry. There was a strange look of confusion behind her eyes, as if she were asking a silent question.

As a chorus of “Freak!” rang out behind him, Ms. Belfry clapped her hands.

“Everyone quiet down! Quiet down!”

But Oliver’s classmates were in a frenzy. They were all crowding around Oliver, pointing and shouting, calling him names. He felt hounded, belittled. It was awful.

He wanted them away from him. He closed his eyes and pushed out with his powers. Suddenly, everything went silent.

Oliver opened his eyes again and saw kids grabbing their throats and mouths. They were still shouting at him but there was no noise coming out. It was as if Oliver had simply turned off their voice-boxes.

People started to stagger back from him, toward the door. Soon, they were running out of the room. But Oliver wasn’t done. They needed to learn not to bully people, not to call people names or point in their faces. They needed to really learn their lesson.

So as they hurried into the corridor, Oliver conjured a storm cloud. It rained down on the kids as they went, soaking them as thoroughly as the sprinkler system.

The final child ran out of the room. Then it was just Oliver and Ms. Belfry.

He looked at her and gulped. There was no doubt now. Oliver had revealed his powers to her.

Ms. Belfry ran to the door and closed it firmly. She turned to look at Oliver. There was a deep furrow between her eyebrows. "Who are you?"

Oliver felt a tightness in his chest. What would Ms. Belfry think of him? If she was scared or thought him a freak like his classmates, he'd feel crushed.

She paced toward him. "How did you do that?"

But as she came closer, Oliver realized that her expression was not one of shock or fear. It was a look of wonder. A look of awe.

She pulled up a chair beside him and sank into it, looking at him intently. Her eyes sparkled with intrigue. "Who are you, Oliver Blue?"

Oliver remembered the compass. It had directed him here, to Ms. Belfry. It was a sign from the universe that she was someone he could trust. Someone who would help him on his quest.

He swallowed his nerves and began to speak.

"I have powers. Power over the elements and the forces of nature. I can travel through time and change history."

Ms. Belfry was completely silent. She stared at him and blinked several times. Finally, she spoke.

"I always suspected there was something different about you." The tone in her voice was one of awe.

Oliver was shocked. Ms. Belfry didn't think he was a freak at all. His heart leapt with joy.

"You believe me?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yes. I do." Then she shuffled a little closer in her seat and looked at him intently. "Now. Tell me everything."

So Oliver did. He started right at the beginning, from the day of the storm. For Ms. Belfry, it had been last night, but for Oliver days and days had passed.

He told her about Armando Illstrom and Lucas. About his meeting with Ralph Black and their journey to the School for Seers. About how the school itself sat between dimensions and could only be accessed through a special portal in 1944. He told her about the classes, Doctor Ziblatt, and the interdimensional portals. He told her about the food court and the rising table, about Hazel Kerr, Simon Cavendish, and Walter Stroud the amazing switchit player. He told her about the Orb of Kandra and Professor Amethyst's office with zero gravity, the sleep pods and the test that determined his seer type. Then he told her about his date with Esther Valentini and the attack on the school. He talked her through the events in Nazi Germany with Lucas's bomb. He showed her the amulet Professor Amethyst had gifted him, the one that would warm up if he were ever near a portal that could lead him back to the School for Seers. And finally, he told her about his parents, about how the Blues were not his real family and how he wanted to find his real mom and dad, the people in his visions.

Finally, his story complete, Oliver stopped talking.

Ms. Belfry looked stunned. She just slowly nodded as her eyes scanned back and forth. It looked as if she were trying to process everything he had just told her. It was a lot to take in all in one go, Oliver thought. He hoped her brain wouldn't explode from it all.

"Fascinating," she said finally.

She leaned back in her seat, her eyes on him. They were filled with curiosity and wonder.

Oliver waited, his stomach squirming with anticipation.

Finally, Ms. Belfry tapped her chin. "May I see this compass of yours?"

He took it from his bag and handed it to her. She examined it very slowly. Then she became suddenly very animated.

"I've seen one like this, once before..."

"You have?"

"Yes. It belonged to Professor Nightingale, of Harvard. An old teacher of mine. The most brilliant man I've ever met."

Her excitement was palpable. Oliver watched as she leapt out of her seat and hurried to the bookcase. She pulled down a textbook and handed it to him.

Curiously, Oliver looked at the book. He read from the front cover. "*The Theory of Time Travel*." He gasped and his gaze snapped up to meet hers. "I... I don't understand."

Ms. Belfry took her seat again. "Professor Nightingale's specialty was physics—with an emphasis on time travel."

Oliver's head spun. "Do you think he could be a seer? Like me?"

He'd thought there were no other seers in his timeline. But perhaps this Professor Nightingale was one. Perhaps that was why the compass had guided him to Ms. Belfry in the first place.

"Whenever he taught me about a new inventor, he talked as if knew them personally." She held a hand to her mouth and shook her head in disbelief. "But now I realize he actually did. He must have traveled through time to meet them!"

Oliver felt overwhelmed. His heart began to beat wildly. But Ms. Belfry rested a hand on his, giving him comfort.

"Oliver," she said gently, "I think you are supposed to meet him. I think the way to your parents, and to your destiny, lies through him."

No sooner had she said it than Ms. Belfry gasped.

"Oliver, look."

Just then, Oliver saw the dials on his compass were moving. One pointed to the symbol of an elm leaf. The second pointed to a symbol that resembled a bird. The third remained on the image of a graduation cap.

Oliver's eyes widened with surprise.

He pointed to the elm leaf. "Boston." Then to the bird. "Nightingale." And finally to the cap. "Professor." He felt a huge surge of excitement in his chest. "You're right. I have to go to Boston. Meet Professor Nightingale. He has the next clue."

Ms. Belfry quickly scribbled something into her notebook and then tore the page out. "Here. This is where he lives."

Oliver took the paper and looked down at the Boston address. Was this the next piece of the puzzle in his quest? Was Professor Nightingale another seer?

He folded the paper carefully and placed it in his pocket, suddenly eager to begin his journey. He jumped up.

"Wait," Ms. Belfry said. "Oliver. The book." Professor Nightingale's time travel book was lying on her desk. "Take it," she added. "I want you to have it."

"Thank you," Oliver said, feeling touched and grateful. Ms. Belfry really was the best non-seer teacher he'd ever had.

He picked up the book and headed to the door. But when he reached it, he heard Ms. Belfry call out.

"Will you ever come back?"

He paused and looked at her. "I don't know."

She gave him a sad nod. "Well, if this is goodbye, then all that's left to say is good luck. I hope you find what you're looking for, Oliver Blue."

Oliver felt a deep sense of gratitude in his heart. Without Ms. Belfry, he'd probably not have survived those miserable first few days in New Jersey. "Thank you, Ms. Belfry. Thank you for everything."

Oliver ran out of the classroom, eager to get the first train to Boston to meet Professor Nightingale. But if he was leaving New Jersey forever there was one thing he needed to do first.

The bullies.

It was lunchtime.

And he had one more wrong to right in the world.

*

He hurried down the steps, the smell of greasy fries wafting up from the lunch room. He and Ms. Belfry had been speaking so long, it was now lunchtime.

Perfect, Oliver thought.

He headed to the lunchroom. It was full of students and extremely noisy. He saw Paul and Samantha, his tormentors from science class. They looked over at him and started pointing and whispering. Other kids turned too, all laughing at Oliver. He saw the kids who threw balls at him in the playground. The kids from Mr. Portendorfer's class who reveled in the grouchy old teacher's insistence on calling him Oscar.

Oliver scanned with his eyes until he found his target: Chris and his friends. These were the kids who'd hounded him during the storm. Who'd chased him into a garbage can. Who'd called him a freak and a weirdo and all number of horrible names.

They noticed him, too. The mean girl who wore her hair in severe braids started to smile. She nudged the lanky, freckled boy who'd watched with glee as Chris had Oliver in a headlock. As far as they knew, yesterday they'd chased Oliver through a storm, forcing him to hide in a trash can. Seeing them grin at him made him grit his teeth with a sudden wave of anger.

Chris looked up, too. Any hint of the fear he'd shown toward Oliver back in their living room had disappeared, now that he was surrounded by his bully friends.

Even from across the lunchroom, Oliver could lipread Chris's words as he said to his friends, "Oh look, it's the drowned rat."

Oliver focused all his attention on their table. Then he tapped into his seer powers.

Their trays began to float up off the table. The girl jumped back in her seat, completely terrified.

"What's going on?"

The freckled boy and the chubby boy leapt up too, looking just as fearful, making scared noises. Chris jumped out of his chair. But he didn't look scared. He looked furious.

All around the table, other students started to turn to see what the commotion was about. When they saw the trays rising into the air as if by magic, they all began to panic.

Oliver moved the trays higher and higher and higher. Then, when they were about head height, he tipped them.

Their contents came raining down on top of the bullies' heads.

See how you like to be covered in garbage, Oliver thought.

The lunch hall erupted into pandemonium. Kids started screaming, running all over the place, shoving each other in their haste to get to the exit. One of Oliver's tormentors—covered head to toe in mashed potato—slipped in the beans that had been spilled. He skidded to the floor, tripping another as they ran.

Through the chaos, Oliver saw Chris standing at the other end of the hall, his narrowed eyes locked on Oliver. His face turned red with anger. He puffed out his huge bulking frame to make himself look more threatening.

But Oliver did not feel threatened at all. Not even slightly.

"You!" Chris bellowed. "I know it's you! I always have! You have weird powers, don't you? You're a freak!"

He barreled toward Oliver.

But Oliver was already two steps ahead. He pushed outward with his powers, covering the floor beneath Chris's feet with thick, slippery oil. Chris started to wobble, then stagger, then slide. He couldn't keep his balance and fell flat on his butt. He slid across the floor, careening toward Oliver as if he were on a water slide.

Oliver pushed open the exit door. Chris slid straight past him and straight through it, screaming the whole way. He slid into the courtyard then onward, riding Oliver's invisible slide of oil, until he disappeared into the distance.

"Bye!" Oliver called, waving.

Hopefully, that would be the last he'd ever see of Christopher Blue.

He slammed the doors shut and turned on his heel.

Head held high, Oliver picked his way through the messy lunch hall and strolled confidently through the corridors of Campbell Junior High. He'd never felt better. Nothing could top this feeling.

When he reached the exit, he pushed the double main doors open with both hands. A gust of clean, cold air hit him. He took a deep breath in, feeling rejuvenated.

And that's when he saw her.

Standing at the bottom of the steps looking up, stood a solitary figure. Black hair. Emerald green eyes.

Oliver couldn't believe it. His heart leapt, suddenly beating a mile a minute in his chest. His brain began to spin as it desperately tried to work out how... why...

His palms became clammy. His throat turned dry. A shiver of excitement ran up his spine.

Because standing there before him was a vision of beauty.

It was none other than Esther Valentini.

CHAPTER SIX

“Esther?” Oliver exclaimed.

He held her by the shoulders, drinking in the sight of every bit of her. He couldn’t believe his eyes.

“Oliver.” Esther’s face broke into a smile. She threw her arms around him. “I found you.”

Her voice was so sweet, like honey. It sang into his ear. Oliver held her close. It felt so wonderful to wrap his arms around her. He’d thought he’d never see her again.

But then he moved out of her embrace, suddenly alarmed. “Why are you here?”

Esther flashed him a mischievous smile. “There’s a time machine at the school. Hidden within the kapoc tree. I noticed a small X carved into it and since there’s an X on every entrance that only teachers are allowed to use, I figured that must mean there was an entrance within it. So I did a bit of snooping, saw a few teachers disappear, and realized there must be a time machine inside. Strictly forbidden for students to use, of course.”

Oliver shook his head. Of course the brilliantly talented Esther Valentini would find a hidden time machine. But no one would travel through one without a very good reason, especially not into a timeline in which one did not belong! From what Oliver had learned at the School for Seers, spending any significant amount of time in the wrong timeline put a real strain on the body. Indeed, he’d felt rather odd just traveling back to his own.

And that’s not even mentioning the sacrifice. There was no guarantee of ever returning. Leaving the School for Seers had broken Oliver’s heart and he’d only done so to save Armando’s life. So something must have driven Esther to come here. A quest, perhaps. A mission. Maybe the school was in danger again?

“Not how?” Oliver said. “*Why?*”

To his great surprise, Esther smirked. “You promised me a second date.”

Oliver paused, frowning. “You mean you came here for me?”

He couldn’t understand it. Esther might never get back. She may be trapped in the wrong timeline forever. And she’d done it for him?

Her cheeks went pink. She tried to shrug it off, becoming suddenly shy. “I figured you’d need some help.”

Though he couldn’t understand it, Oliver was grateful for the sacrifice Esther had made. She may well be trapped in the wrong timeline forever and she’d done it for him. He wondered if that meant she loved him. He couldn’t think of another reason why someone would put themselves through that.

The thought made him feel warm all over. He quickly changed the subject, feeling suddenly shy and bashful.

“How was the journey through time?” he asked. “Did you get here unharmed?”

Esther tapped her stomach. “I was a little sick. And it gave me a terrible headache. But that’s all.”

Just then, Oliver remembered the amulet. He pulled it out from beneath his overalls. “Professor Amethyst gave me this before I left.”

Esther touched the amulet with her fingers. “A portal detector! They go warm when you’re near a wormhole, right?” She smiled breezily. “That might just guide us back to the School for Seers one day.”

“But it’s been ice cold ever since I got here,” Oliver said glumly.

“Don’t worry,” she told him. “We’re hardly in a rush. We have all the time we want.” She smirked at her own joke.

Oliver laughed as well.

“I have a new quest,” Oliver told her.

Esther’s eyes widened with excitement. “You do?”

He nodded and showed her the compass. Esther gazed at it in wonder.

“It’s beautiful. What does it mean?”

Oliver pointed to the dials and the strange hieroglyphic symbols. “It’s leading me to my parents. These symbols represent certain places or people. See, those are my parents.” He pointed to the dial that had never moved, the one that remained fixed on the image of a man and woman holding hands. “These other dials seem to move depending on where I need to go next.”

“Oh, Oliver, how exciting! You have a mission! Where is it leading you next?”

He pointed at the oak leaf. “Boston.”

“Why Boston?”

“I’m not sure,” Oliver replied, sliding the compass into the pocket of his overalls. “But it’s related to finding my parents.”

Esther slipped her hand inside his and smiled. “Then let’s go.”

“You’re coming with me?”

“Yes.” She smiled shyly. “If you’ll have me.”

“Of course.”

Oliver grinned. Though he couldn’t quite fathom how Esther was so calm about the fact she may be trapped in the wrong timeline forever, her presence did lift his spirits. Suddenly, everything seemed much more hopeful, much more like the universe was guiding him. His quest to find his parents would be much more enjoyable with Esther by his side.

They headed down the steps, leaving Campbell Junior High behind them, and went in the direction of the train station, walking side by side. Esther’s hand in Oliver’s felt smooth. It was so comforting.

Though it was a chilly October day, Oliver couldn’t feel the cold at all. Just being with Esther kept him warm. It was so good to see her. He’d thought he never would again. But he couldn’t help worrying she was a mirage that might disappear at any second. So as they walked, he kept glancing at her just to make sure she was real. Every time, she’d give him her sweet, shy smile, and he’d feel another burst of warmth in his chest.

They reached the train station and headed to the platform. Oliver had never actually bought a train ticket before, and the ticket machine looked very intimidating. But then he reminded himself he’d defused a bomb so he could certainly figure out how to work a ticket machine.

He bought two tickets to Cambridge in Boston, selecting the one-way option since he had no idea whether he’d ever return to New Jersey or not. The thought worried him.

The train to Cambridge was to take just over four hours. They watched it pull into the platform and then boarded it, finding a quiet carriage where they could settle in for the long journey.

“How is everyone at school?” Oliver asked. “Ralph? Hazel? Walter? Simon?”

Esther smiled. “They’re fine. We all miss you, of course. Walter a lot, actually. He says switchit just isn’t the same without you.”

Oliver felt a sad smile tug at his lips. He missed his old friends a lot too.

“And the school?” he asked. “It’s safe? No more attacks?”

He shuddered at the memory of when Lucas had led the rogue seers in their attack on the school. And though he’d thwarted Lucas in this timeline, he had a feeling he hadn’t seen the last of the old, evil man.

“No more glowy-eyed bat attacks,” she said with a grin.

Oliver thought about that horrible moment during their date together. They’d been walking through the gardens—Esther telling him about her own life and family, about growing up in New Jersey in the 1970s—when the attack had interrupted them.

Oliver realized now they'd never finished their conversation. He'd never had the chance again to really find out who Esther Valentini was before she'd entered the School for Seers.

"We're from the same neighborhood, aren't we?" he asked her.

She seemed surprised that he remembered. "Yes. Only about thirty or so years apart."

"Isn't this strange for you? To be in a place you know so well but to see it how it is in the future?"

"After the School for Seers, nothing strikes me as strange anymore," she replied. "I'm more worried about running into myself. I'm sure that's the sort of thing that could cause the world to implode."

Oliver pondered her words. He remember how old Lucas had been poisoning the mind of young Lucas to make him do his bidding. "I think it's okay as long as you don't realize it's yourself, if that makes sense?"

She crossed her arms tightly about her middle. "I'd prefer not to risk it."

Oliver watched her face turn serious. There seemed to be something hidden behind her eyes.

"Aren't you curious though?" he asked. "To see your family? To see yourself?"

She shook her head suddenly. "I have seven siblings, Oliver. All we ever did was fight, especially since I was the freak. And all Mom and Dad ever did was argue about me, about what was wrong with me." Her voice was low and filled with melancholy. "I'm better off out of it all."

Oliver felt bad for her. As terrible as his own home life and upbringing were, he had deep compassion for anyone who'd had a tough time.

He thought about how all the children at the school had been alone, taken from their families to train. At the time, he'd wondered why none of them appeared lonely or homesick. Perhaps it was because none had come from happy homes. Perhaps there was something about being a seer that set them apart from the rest, that made their parents wary, their homes unhappy.

Esther looked up at him then. "Your real parents. Are you sure they'll accept you as you are?"

Oliver realized then that he hadn't even thought about it. They'd given him up in the first place, hadn't they? What if they'd been so terrified of their peculiar baby they'd dumped him and ran?

But then he remembered the visions in which his parents had come to him. They were warm. Kind. Inviting. They'd told him they loved him and that they were always with him, watching, guiding. He was certain that they'd be pleased to be reunited.

Or was he?

"I'm sure," he said. But, for the first time, he was not so sure. What if this entire quest was ill conceived?

"And what will you do once you find them?" Esther added.

Oliver pondered her words. There had to have been some good reason as to why they'd given him up as a baby. Some reason they'd never come to find him. Some reason why they weren't currently in his life.

He looked at Esther. "That's a good question. I honestly don't know."

They fell into silence, the train gently rocking them back and forth as it cut through the landscape.

Oliver looked out the window as the sight of historic Boston came into view. It looked wonderful, like something from a movie. A swell of excitement overcame him. Though he may not know what he'd do when he found his real Mom and Dad, he couldn't wait to find them.

Just then, the announcer's voice came over the speaker.

"Next stop: Boston."

CHAPTER SEVEN

As the train pulled into the station, Oliver felt his chest leap with excitement. He'd never traveled before—the Blues never went on vacation—so being in Boston felt very exciting.

He and Esther alighted from the train and headed into the very busy station. It was grand-looking with marble pillars and sculptures dotted about the place. People in business suits whizzed around speaking loudly into their cell phones. It all felt rather overwhelming for Oliver.

“Right, it's two miles to Harvard University from here,” he explained. “We need to head due north and cross the river.”

“How do you know?” Esther asked. “Does your compass give directions too?”

Oliver chuckled and shook his head. He pointed to a large brightly colored map hanging against the station wall. It showed them all the tourists spots, including Harvard University.

“Oh,” Esther said, blushing.

As they left the station, a gentle autumn breeze stirred the fallen leaves on the sidewalk and there was a hint of gold in the sky.

They started to stroll in the direction of Cambridge.

“It looks very different than in my era,” Esther commented.

“Really?” Oliver asked, recalling how Esther came from the 1970s.

“Yes. There's more traffic. More people. But the students all look the same.” She smirked. “Brown corduroy must be back in fashion.”

There were indeed many college students walking along the streets, looking purposeful with their books in their arms. It reminded Oliver of the kids at the School for Seers, who were always rushing some place with serious, studious expressions on their faces.

“How do you think everyone is back at school?” he asked. “I miss them.”

He thought of Hazel, Walter, and Simon, the friends he'd made at the School for Seers. But most of all he missed Ralph. Ralph Black was the closest he'd come to having a best friend.

“I'm sure they're doing just fine,” Esther replied. “They'll be busy with class. Doctor Ziblatt was just starting her astral projection classes when I left.”

Oliver's eyes widened. “Astral projection? I'm sorry to be missing that.”

“Me too.”

Oliver heard a hint of melancholy in Esther's voice. He wondered again what had propelled Esther to follow him here. He felt like there must be more to the story, something she wasn't telling him.

They reached the bridge that crossed over the Charles River. It was bustling with college students. In the water below they could see rowboats, canoes, and kayaks. It seemed like a very lively and vibrant place.

They started to walk across the bridge.

“Has your compass changed at all?” Esther asked.

Oliver checked it. “No. It's still showing those same four symbols.”

Esther held her palm out and Oliver handed it to her. She inspected it with a look of awe. “I wonder what it is. Where it came from. I'm surprised Armando didn't know, since he's an inventor.”

“I think it's seer technology,” Oliver said. “I mean, only the universe knows the timelines and can guide someone along them, so it must be.”

Esther handed it back to Oliver, who placed it carefully into his pocket.

“I wonder if Professor Nightingale will know,” she said. “You did say he was a seer, didn't you?”

Oliver nodded. He was curious about the compass, and even more curious about meeting Professor Nightingale.

“Do you think he'll know anything about your parents?” Esther asked.

Oliver felt a little lump form in his throat. He swallowed. "I don't want to get my hopes up. But all the signs are leading me here. So I'm optimistic."

Esther grinned. "That's the spirit."

They reached the end of the bridge and headed along the main road. The traffic was very busy here, so they took one of the many side alleys that ran parallel to it.

They were only halfway along the alley when Oliver noticed a group of boys, a little older in age than him and Esther, lingering together in the shadows. He felt an instant stab of danger.

As he and Esther got closer to the group, the boys suddenly looked up and fixed their eyes on them. They began to nudge each other and whisper, clearly talking about Oliver and Esther. Their mean glares made it obvious they weren't friendly.

"Uh-oh, looks like trouble," Esther said, clearly having spotted them as well.

Oliver recalled the bullies he'd dealt with back at Campbell Junior High. He didn't feel anywhere near as daunted approaching the kids as he once would have been. But he felt Esther draw closer to him. She seemed intimidated.

"Nice overalls!" one of the boys sneered.

The others began to laugh.

"What are you?" chimed in the next. "A chimney sweep or something?"

Oliver kept his eyes averted. He hurried his pace. Beside him, Esther did the same.

"Hey!" the first boy shouted. "I'm talking to you!"

Suddenly, the group surrounded them. There were five boys in total, forming a circle around Oliver and Esther. Esther looked extremely stressed by the situation.

"Please," she whispered to Oliver under her breath. "No fighting. I don't think my shield is strong enough for five."

But Oliver was calm. He'd seen Esther's strength. And he had his powers, too. Between the two of them, no one could hurt them. No mortal, anyway.

Oliver kept his chin high. "Excuse me," he said, politely. "Please let us through."

The main boy, the tallest of the bunch, folded his arms. "Not until you empty your pockets. Come on." He held his palm out. "Cell phone. Wallet. Hand it over."

Oliver stood his ground. He spoke in a cool, determined voice. "I don't have a cell phone or a wallet. And even if I did, I wouldn't give them to you."

From beside him, Oliver heard Esther's voice, barely above a whisper. "Oliver. Don't provoke them."

The main boy barked out a laugh. "Oh really? Then I'll just have to get them myself."

He went to lunge for Oliver.

"I wouldn't do that," Oliver said.

Immediately, Esther cast out one of her shields, providing a barrier around them. The boy slammed into it. He looked confused. He tried again, lunging forward. But the impenetrable barrier stopped him, like bulletproof glass.

"What are you waiting for, Larry?" the third boy goaded. "Get him!"

"I can't," Larry stammered, looking increasingly confused. "There's something in the way."

"What are you talking about?" the fourth boy asked.

He, too, launched himself forward. But he slammed into Esther's barrier and let out a grunt of pain.

Oliver looked over at Esther. She was doing brilliantly, but he could see the strain on her face as she tried to hold the barrier in place. He needed to do something to help.

Oliver retreated into his mind, visualizing the wind whipping through the fall leaves, turning them into tornados. Then he pushed the image outward.

At once, the fallen leaves began to swirl. Columns of wind went up into the air, twirling into tornados. Oliver conjured five, one for each of the boys.

“What’s going on!” Larry yelled, the wind making his hair fly wildly all over the place.

Oliver concentrated. He strengthened the winds with his mind, then pushed outward.

In an instant, the boys were battered by the flurry of leaves. They attempted to bat them away, swatting with their arms as if they were being attacked by a swarm of bees, but it was no use. Oliver’s tornadoes were far too strong for them.

They turned and ran for it. The winds were so strong, they tripped more than once.

Oliver grabbed Esther’s hand. She was giggling.

“Come on. Let’s take a different route.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

Harvard University was an impressive-looking place. The architecture was beautiful, with lots of tall red brick buildings and turrets. There was a large grassy yard, surrounded by cafes, bars, and bookstores.

“How will we find Professor Nightingale?” Esther asked. “This place is huge!”

Oliver fetched the book Ms. Belfry had given him. He turned to the author bio on Professor Nightingale and read aloud.

“Professor H. Nightingale is a fellow of Harvard University’s Physics Department, where he conducts experiments in the Science Center’s historic Farnworth Laboratory, along with his small team of brilliant PhD students.”

Esther pointed ahead to a building on the other side of the yard. “There. That’s the Science Center.”

Oliver put the book away. They hurried across the grass and headed up the steps toward the building. Standing at the top was a security guard.

“Visitor ID?” he said brusquely, holding out his palm.

“Visitor ID?” Oliver repeated. He started to pat his overalls pocket. “Oh... hmmm. Now where did I put that?”

“Here!” Esther suddenly said.

Oliver watched as she took something from her pocket and handed it to the guard. He realized she must have used her powers to alter something to look like a pass. He hoped she’d done a convincing enough job.

But the guard looked at it with an unimpressed expression before handing it back to her.

“A real one, missy,” he said. He sounded very bored, like a couple of kids trying to sneak into a library was little more than an inconvenience to him. “Not this fake thing.”

Oliver racked his brains. Esther’s attempt to create a credible-looking ID card had failed. He’d have to think of another plan.

He glanced about for inspiration and saw a trash can just the other side of the steps. Quickly, he used his powers to make smoke come from it.

“Oh no! I think the trash can is on fire!” he cried.

The guard quickly ran to attend to it. Oliver and Esther took their chance and ducked inside the building.

“Good thinking,” Esther said as they hurried through the corridor.

It was a bit like a maze inside. It reminded Oliver of a hospital rather than a laboratory, other than the strange chemical smell, of course.

They stopped beside a sign that showed which floor each of the different disciplines occupied.

“Physics Department,” Oliver said, pointing. “Top floor.”

They trudged up the staircase. A long corridor stretched ahead of them. Gold plaques with the names of professors and lecturers were affixed to each door. They began to walk along the corridor, reading the names.

“Here he is,” Esther said.

Oliver turned to see her standing by a door. *Professor H. Nightingale*. His heart began to race. Was he about to get the answers to his questions?

Oliver swallowed his nerves and knocked.

Nothing happened. It remained completely silent. He tried again.

Again, there was no answer. Oliver looked over at Esther. She shrugged and boldly tried the handle.

“It’s not locked,” she told him.

She pushed the door and it swung all the way open. The room was completely empty.

Oliver gasped. “Oh no. He must not be here anymore.” He felt a horrible leaden sensation in his stomach as disappointment gripped him.

“Don’t worry,” Esther said. “We’ll track him down.”

In the corridor behind them, a professor was walking past. Esther turned.

“Excuse me. Do you know where we might find Professor Nightingale?” She pointed to the plaque on the door.

The man didn’t even slow his brisk pace. But he did reply, speaking over his shoulder as he hurried onward. “Nightingale? He hasn’t worked here for years. Not since he was kicked out.”

CHAPTER NINE

Oliver and Esther exchanged a glance.

“Kicked out?” Oliver repeated, his heart sinking. “I’ll never find him now.”

Esther shook her head. “We’re not giving up that easily. Come on.”

Esther marched across the yard and into one of the coffee shops that surrounded it. There were computers at the back. She took Oliver right over to one.

“Um, Esther, I think you’re supposed to buy something? You can’t just come in and use the computers for free.”

“Okay. A chocolate brownie would be nice.” She took her seat and grinned up at him. “Thanks.”

Oliver went to the counter and bought them a brownie to share. By the time he made it back to Esther, she was already scrolling through a website of local people.

“N... Night... Nighting.... Here. Nightingale!” She grinned at Oliver. “There’s only one in Cambridge. It must be him!”

She quickly scribbled the name and address down. “Told you we weren’t giving up.”

Then she stood, grabbed the brownie from the plate, and marched to the door.

Head spinning from the speed with which Esther worked, Oliver blinked at the crumbs lying on the plate.

“Oliver!” she called from the door. “Come on!”

Oliver dumped the plate on the counter and hurried after her.

*

The address Esther had found led them to a quaint side road right beside a quiet park. The streets were cobblestoned, looking like they belonged in the Victorian era. The houses were more like country cottages—all made of brick and built in a long row, with stone facades.

They stopped opposite the house. It had a wooden door with green paint that was peeling, and an overgrown rose bush growing up beside it. Just behind the branches and flowers, a faded sign read *Professor H. Nightingale*.

Esther and Oliver exchanged a glance.

“Here goes nothing,” Oliver said.

He knocked.

A muffled voice called out, “Coming.”

Oliver glanced at Esther nervously. She gave him a reassuring nod.

They heard the sound of a latch clicking, then the door slowly creaked open.

A figure shuffled into view. He was very old with a wiry white beard. His eyes appeared to be misted over. He was wearing a brown corduroy cardigan.

“Yes?” the man asked in a raspy voice.

Oliver’s throat felt thick with nerves. “My name is Oliver. This is my friend Esther. We wondered if we might be able to ask you some questions.”

“Questions?” the old man asked. “Not another survey. I’ve already answered enough of those.”

He went to close the door on them. Oliver held his palm out to stop it from being closed. He spoke with a voice that sounded far more confident than he felt.

“It’s not a survey. I’m looking for someone. Someones, actually. My parents.” Oliver took a breath to steady his nerves. “I have reason to believe you might know them.”

The man’s eyes searched Oliver’s face. Oliver could tell he didn’t have good vision by the way he squinted.

“Your parents?” he said in a croaky voice. “What makes you think I’d know anything about that?”

“I’m a seer,” Oliver blurted.

The old man paused. “A seer?”

“We both are,” Esther added.

The man looked from one to the other. “Both of you, eh?”

They nodded in unison.

The professor reached for the watch on his wrist. He unhooked it with shaking, wizened fingers, then turned it over and held it out to Oliver. There was an inscription on the back. A ring with three eyes.

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