

Charlene, concern in his eyes. "We're going into Disneyland, a place where some of us have never been, trying to find an old dude who may not be there. We can't control when we arrive or when we leave, and the best clue we have is a bunch of demons who nearly smoked us the other night?"

"Well," Finn says, "yeah."

Maybeck nods. "Well, good. Glad to hear it. I'm in, by the way. Have a magical evening." He pushes his chair back and heads for the commissary doors.

FINN AWAKENS AS A HOLOGRAM ON Central Plaza beneath the statue of Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse. For an instant, the experience feels so familiar, he thinks he's in Disney World. But the castle—Sleeping Beauty's castle, not Cinderella's—alerts him to his surroundings: *Disneyland*. Beauty's castle is pink; it's considerably smaller, oddly wider, and its roofline is less sharp and pronounced. Central Plaza itself feels smaller, the area around it more compact than the corresponding locale at Disney World.

If all this isn't enough, the night sky would give it away. Walt Disney World's sky can be dark, even starlit. Disneyland's glows sepia, the megawatt lights of Southern California seeping into the marine haze layer and obscuring the heavens.

Finn lifts his arm and feels a wave of nostalgia wash through him when he sees the thin blue line that shimmers at the edge of his DHI. Software version 1.6. He wants to find a mirror and see what his face looked like when he was three years younger. There's a body of water in front of the entrance to Frontierland. Finn kneels and looks down, studying his glow.

"Mirror, mirror?" Maybeck's voice, coming from behind. Finn spins, realizing anew how much his friend has matured through high school. Two different kids.

"Whoa! You should see yourself," Finn says. His voice sounds . . . odd. Mechanical and distorted.

» Finn stands there transfixed at the sight of Maybeck's

partial DHI. This crossover is like none before. A dull hum fills the air, making Finn feel as if he needs to clean his ears. A grainy image of Maybeck sputters in and out, rimmed by a blue line characteristic of v1.6. Philby tried to upload as much data as possible onto the thumb drive, but clearly his scheme isn't perfect. Finn stretches his arms out and they briefly disappear, then re-form.<sup>18</sup>

There's a slight lag in Finn's actions; it's like he's trying to move through syrup. He wonders if all of the Keepers' functions have been slowed as a result of rollback to their incomplete version v1.6.<sup>19</sup>

"What the—?" Maybeck sounds troubled.

"We'll have to wait for Philby to see this. My guess? Some of our movements uploaded okay. Others, maybe not."

"Well, that makes it interesting," comments Maybeck.<sup>20</sup> "Now you see me, now you don't!" He laughs as he hops back and forth, his DHI unable to keep up to speed.

Finn shakes his head. No use in yelling at Maybeck to cut it out, seeing as his own voice currently sounds like Rice Krispies cereal in a bowl of milk.<sup>21</sup> "Bizarre, isn't it?" Finn says.

"Crazy!" It's Charlene, approaching from behind Maybeck.

Willa appears to Charlene's left. "Philby? Anybody seen Philby?"

The Professor is curiously absent.

"He might have been too wired to sleep," Maybeck says. "Of all of us, he was the one who had the most work to do."

"Or maybe he stayed behind to try to help us return," Finn says, whispering. "Here's what we do."

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<sup>18</sup> Visitors\_Brave

<sup>19</sup> Imagineering\_Sorcery

<sup>20</sup> Visitors\_Brave

<sup>21</sup> Amanda\_Hologram

The other Keepers collect around him.

"In case we were overheard or something—which would mean we have hardly any time—I suggest we divide into two teams. Willa and I will take Ariel's Undersea Adventure because she has a history with Ariel. Maybeck, you and Charlie will take Haunted Mansion. Reconnaissance. That's all we're after. If we can spot either the demons or wraiths without them seeing us, maybe we can follow them to Wayne. Maybe Ariel knows something."

"And if she's got nothing on Wayne," Maybeck says, "what then?"

"We don't know," Willa said, coming to Finn's defense. "But we have to start somewhere."

"There's Walt's apartment." Charlene is quick to side with Maybeck. "Wayne had that place above the Firehouse. So maybe in Disneyland he lives in Walt's apartment or something."

"We can't go all over the place," Finn says. "There will be other nights. Our time is limited."

Willa walks back to get a good look at Central Plaza, obviously bothered by Philby's absence. The other Keepers follow.

"He's okay," Finn says.

"We don't know that," Willa replies.

"We don't know otherwise." Finn wraps an arm around her and gives her shoulders a reassuring squeeze. "He may have had to cross us over manually. Maybe he had to hide in the Crypt after installing the thumb drive. Maybe he got locked in there for the night."

"Maybe he drank a Mountain Dew and can't get to sleep," Maybeck says, winning a laugh.

Finn catches Charlene studying her outstretched hand.

“Isn’t it strange how 2.0 makes all of this feel so retro?” she says.

“Keep free of fear,” Finn says, reminding the group of the devastating effect fear can have on their DHIs; fear triggers their temporary transformation into a partially or even entirely solid material state, and therefore makes them more susceptible to harm. “Remember, in v1.6, we don’t have nearly the same control. We get too sideways and we can’t even grab hold of stuff. We’re a lot more limited. Things can get sketchy.”

“Talk to me.” Like all of the Keepers, Maybeck got into his fair share of trouble as a 1.6 DHI—kidnapped, locked in Sleeping Beauty Syndrome. His SBS-induced coma kept his aunt on a round-the-clock vigil.

“Just remember,” Finn warns, “we all have fewer skills and abilities. We’re more vulnerable.”

“And we can’t pick when to return,” Willa says. “But we need to be together when we do. Here, in the Plaza. Ninety—more like eighty-five—minutes from now.”

Version 2.0 makes returning easier too. Willa’s reminder shakes Finn. “We’re going to return when we return,” he says.

“Profound,” Maybeck says.

Finn makes eye contact with Charlene. “Good luck with that.”

She grins. “I’ll get him back on time.”

“No heroics,” Finn says.

“Yeah, yeah,” Maybeck says.

Finn addresses Maybeck. “I wasn’t talking to you.”

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The simple act of walking helps Finn settle into his 1.6 skin. It’s funny how being inside an empty, darkened park affects him so strongly each time he crosses over. It’s as if he’s never

experienced this before; though technically, because they’re in Disneyland, he has not. Finn’s reaction is mainly triggered by the overall impression of the empty park’s grandeur, shadowed by a cloud of mystery.

“Do you miss her?” Willa asks. No need to elaborate on whom.

“It’s not like we’re married,” he says.

“It’s a simple enough question, Finn, jeez.”

“Yes, I miss her. Okay? But don’t read too much into it. She helps us out. She and Jess both. So I miss her on several fronts.” He wonders if she’s fishing. “Are you worried about him?”

“A little. Of course.”

“Me too,” Finn admits.

“But you said . . .”

“Comes with the job.”

“He’s okay,” Willa says. “You said he’s okay and I’m going with that.”

They are careful to take the long way around—holding close to the park’s perimeter before crossing and avoiding the open terrace that separates the entrance to Disneyland from the one to Disney California Adventure.

Once inside the sister park, Finn and Willa start to jog. If asked, they would claim they’re trying to make the best of the precious minutes remaining; in fact, their unfamiliarity with the park breeds fear of every shadow. And there are many shadows.

Willa is panting as she speaks. “Can’t forget about how fear affects us.”

“It’s not exactly like we can all clear.” By mentioning the condition, Finn reminds them both that he’s the only Keeper who has perfected the ability to all clear in real life, transforming from a normal kid into a DHI. The process is different

when a Keeper is already in DHI form—it amounts to keeping fear away. He casts a glance over his shoulder at Willa. She'll be okay.

They jog past the rising mountain wall that composes the back of Grizzly River Run. The entrance to Radiator Springs appears on their left. Some restaurants. Water. As they arrive at a circular plaza with a tower in its center, Willa points out the entrance to The Little Mermaid—Ariel's Undersea Adventure.

"How will we find her, do you suppose?" Finn asks.

"I have a feeling it will be like that time she rescued me in the Studios. Remember? I was drowning?"

He does remember. But he doesn't like leaving things to others. Maybe, he thinks, that's what defines a leader.

They slip through the entrance and into the attraction, hurry through the empty waiting line, and reach the loading walkway with its clamshell people movers. Finn leads Willa by the hand through one of the oversize clams onto the edge that runs alongside the track. They pass a silent Scuttle, perched on a nest of sea grass.

Then the tunnel they've entered goes belly-of-the-beast black. A few glowing LEDs offer the only waypoints. Several times, Finn smacks into one of the upright clamshells or bangs a shin. Willa tightens their grip each time he collides.

Neither speaks.

They should be used to this: an attraction in the dark, no music, no projected images. But it's as disconcerting as ever. Finn's spooked. He wishes he knew the ride better.

They reach the first Animatronic of Ariel, wondering if somehow she'll come to life. The Animatronic is only somewhat visible, illuminated by a stray light source Finn can't pinpoint. He can make out her mermaid tail and her flowing red hair. The rest of the scene is lumpy with shadow.

"That's creepy," Willa says.

"Sure is." After a few more difficult steps, Finn stops.

"This is the big room," Willa says.

But the abundance of small LEDs has revealed that already. It's half the size of a gym, filled with an octopus, clams, dancing fish, musical fish, coral, and seaweed.

"No fear," Willa whispers.

Easier said than done.

"Ariel?" Willa calls out. Nothing.

Finn points ahead through the sea of creatures and coral formations. "If she's in here, she'll be someplace the guests don't go."

"That can apply to OTs as well." Willa looks around and shivers. "We're going there, aren't we, Finn?" Willa sounds terrified.

"We are."

"Because we're insane."

"Because we need to find her. We need to help Wayne." He adds, "Why don't I go and you stay here as lookout?"

"Because we're not letting go of each other."

Finn leads Willa into the scene, stepping carefully. The v1.6 DHIs glow brighter than the v2.0s, which is a real help given the ride's darkness. Finn navigates using his own glow.

"We're like anglerfish," Willa says. "Phosphorescent, so we can see our prey."

"Show-off," Finn says, hoping to lighten the mood. The deeper he leads them into the vividly painted scenery, the higher his level of anxiety rises.

Willa whispers. "What are we supposed to do if we actually encounter OTs? Run?"

"We keep away the fear, maintain clean DHIs, and we see if we can find Ariel." He pauses. "Or if she can find us."

"That's it? That's the plan?"

"I'm open to suggestions."

Finn continues to step gingerly through the set because his DHI is not all clear. He's guessing Willa's isn't either. And if they're not pure projection, a material part of them remains, making them vulnerable to attack and susceptible to injury. They reach the back of the set, and Finn ducks behind staging that holds a waving turtle. His hologram casts a bluish light into the void.

Finn kneels, trying to concentrate his projection. Cold whips through him.

"Look at your arms," Willa says.

Finn's left arm looks chopped off; it's degraded by DHI shadow, as the projectors don't reach behind the staging. His right arm is grainy and half-disintegrated because of the limitations of the outdated software being run on up-to-date servers.

"DHI shadow," she whispers.

"That could help us," Finn says, "if it turns out we've got the wrong kind of company." He sweeps his arm about, trying to gauge the degree of degradation of his DHI; the closer to the backdrop of the set, the fuller the DHI shadow and therefore the more invisible they are. "If we get into trouble, we make for this wall. We'll disappear. Move in that direction." He points deeper into the darkness. "Away from the projectors. No talking. When we bump into each other, we'll know the other is safe and we'll move on from there."

"Got it," she says softly.

It feels good having some sort of fallback plan in place. Finn takes a deep breath. "We need to separate now, spread apart, so we don't make for an easy target."

"I don't like that word," she says.

"Just remember the plan," he says.

"Yeah. I got it. I still don't like that word."

Finn lets go of her hand, but Willa fights to stay connected as long as possible, her fingertips tickling his palm, then the tips of his fingers.

He doesn't like it. If he's ticklish, it means he's feeling. And if he's feeling, then he still isn't pure DHI.

And if he isn't pure DHI . . .

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"I've never been a big fan," Charlene says. Hidden behind a table in the Mint Julep Bar across the open expanse of terrace from the Haunted Mansion, she moves closer to Maybeck so that their arms touch. He doesn't seem to notice.

"It's so different," Maybeck says, his artist's eye at work. "The tall columns. The whole New Orleans antebellum look. It looks like a plantation home."

"Same as Florida."

"Not at all. In Florida, it looks more like a museum. It's brick and up on a hill. This is just . . . creepy."

"That's the point, I think."

"You're funny." But he's not amused. The hologram of his arm is partially degraded and sparking. His left side from his hip down is much the same.

"You don't look so hot," she says.

"You're missing half your face, Sleeping Beauty."

"What?" Charlene takes great pride in her looks. People have been telling her how pretty she is for as long as she can remember. There's a mirror behind the bar.

"Don't you dare," Maybeck says. "Take my word for it: You look like the mayor in the second Batman movie."

"The guy with the rotting face? Oh, way to help out!"

"We'll fit right in," he says. "We look like zombies, right?"

She looks him over. "I see what you mean."

"We're perfect. Trust me."

"I do trust you."

She wins Maybeck's attention. For a moment he seems to be on the verge of saying something serious to her—a rare event for him. But what comes out is, "You look so disgusting."

She wishes he wasn't so predictable, but then again that's what she finds reassuring. You never know what's going to come out of his mouth and yet you can count on it being sarcastic and amusing. "I guess if we're going to do this . . ."

Maybeck follows her as she hugs the wall of the train station and cuts through the cemetery. Charlene ducks under a waiting-line tape.

"What's up?" Maybeck says.

"In Disneyland the stretching room is actually an elevator. It won't be turned on. We have to go around."

"How can you possibly know all that?"

"I do what's impossible for you: I read."

"Ha-ha." He's not laughing.

She hurries up the small rise through the trees and around the house, cutting in to the exit. They enter the ride from this side, walking the mansion backward. This approach means they start out in the hitchhiking ghost tunnel, dodging their way through the frozen Doom Buggies, before entering the climax of the attraction: the graveyard. Charlene, in the lead, slows down, walking tentatively.

There's no music and virtually no light beyond the glow of their DHIs. Before them are crooked gravestones (some topped with carved heads), freestanding tombs, cobwebs, skeletons, and corpses. Nothing moves. There's not a spit of wind or a click of sound. It's as if the world has died and they have walked into the gray heart of it.

"This is freaking me out," she says.

"Yeah, okay." He sounds concerned. "There!" he says, causing Charlene to jump.

"Terry!"

"A tomb." He points out a square stone structure low to the floor. "Check out the stones. The coloring."

Charlene steps closer. "How'd you see that?"

"Because I respect the artwork that goes into these things. Wouldn't mind being a Disney artist someday."

He's spotted a feathering of black soot spread in long fingers across the stones. The fat ends of the flares form a straight line where the stones intersect. Charlene studies the pattern more closely.

"It's like a wind or something."

"Or . . . a door," Maybeck says. "Something came out of there with a wind behind it. A strong wind that carried the dust." He wipes his fingers on the stone, cutting a line through the feathered soot as if he's dragging a finger through colored writing on a white board at school. "A trapdoor."

"A hidden door," she whispers.

"Agreed." Equally soft.

"As in: maybe we leave it that way."

"Maybe not," Maybeck says. He eases her aside. Their imperfect DHIs sputter and turn grainy and transparent.

"I—am—not—liking—this," Charlene says.

Maybeck hoists his one decent hand. It moves more slowly than he intends, making the motion awkward and unpredictable. He opens his palm—slowly—against the tomb's stacked stones and feels for a hidden trigger to unlock the door.

All at once the ride turns on: lights, motion, music. Charlene lets out a yip of terror. Maybeck falls back and bumps into a gravestone. It's the bumping he doesn't like—the shock



and associated scare of the ride coming alive knocks him out of pure v1.6 DHI and into the mix of human and hologram that makes v1.6 so dangerous.

An eerie song blares from unseen speakers. A row of ghost heads sings. The explosion of action and noise makes it difficult for Maybeck and Charlene to recover.

“Terry! The—”

“Trapdoor!” Maybeck says.

Add to the music the sound of grinding stone.

The tomb door is coming open.

\* \* \*

Finn hears what sounds like wind through branches. But there are no trees here, no breeze.

“Finn!” Willa calls breathlessly.

“I hear it,” he says. Whatever it is, it’s coming toward them. “Don’t let it scare you.”

“Oh, sure!”

Not a wind. Not exactly. More like . . . *slithering*.

“Version 1.6,” he reminds them both. “Keep yourself pure.”

Finn calms his thoughts. As a projected image, no harm can come to him. But in the back of his mind lurks a more virulent thought: they are not fully 1.6. Philby managed to cross them over, but with obvious design flaws, improperly rendered movement, and lower resolution. What if these inherent problems with their current projections also prevent them from being fully transparent? What if, no matter how hard they try for all clear, it’s an unattainable condition?

Eels! The oddly colored pinprick eyes of Flotsam and Jetsam penetrate the dark. The twins are *on land*, moving like a combination of python and cobra.

The eels move closer. Easily four feet long and thicker

than Finn’s arm, the two creatures look perfectly comfortable out of water. Finn never liked them in the movie; in the flesh, he realizes they were given a makeover for film. They’re green skinned, reminding him of Maleficent, but scars and poorly healed wounds cover their slimy hides. They’re mouth breathers; their ugly lips turn down in disgusted frowns to reveal rows of spiked narrow teeth, sharp as needles. Their eerie, serpentine movement is deceptive and hypnotic.

Finn imagines himself in deep space: no sound, no gravity. He tingles all over, suggesting all clear. He’s safe—for now. He steps forward, putting himself between the eels and Willa.

Flotsam strikes at Finn’s ankle, deceptively fast, his jaws opening wide. The eel chomps down, with a clap of teeth as they bite into nothing but light.

Willa lets out a shriek.

For Finn, the trick is control: when to be transparent, and when to solidify to grab or touch or . . . *kick*. Flotsam works to make a second attack on Finn.

Willa’s high-speed brain computes Flotsam’s course. She kicks the eel as if it were a lawn hose and sends it flying.

Faced with fight or flight, Jetsam flows the short distance across the floor, aiming himself at Willa. Finn turns to intercept it, but too late. The green moray unlocks its jaw, aiming for Willa’s knee. She hasn’t had time to make sure she’s pure hologram. She’s going to lose her leg from the knee down. Worse: injuries sustained as DHIs typically transfer back to bed with you. If she loses her leg here . . .

The eel’s teeth mere inches from Willa’s knee, Jetsam’s head slams to the floor with a loud report. Willa has sagged, nearly fainted with fear, but Finn catches her.

The bent tines of a trident pin the eel’s head to the ground.

Finn follows the shaft of the trident to a girl's hand, the hand to an arm.

"Storey!" he whispers with such gratitude that the name sounds worshipful.

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*Wraiths!*

The ghostly aliens flow from the opened tomb like smoke. The music, lights, and ghoulish sounds overwhelm Maybeck and Charlene, who are briefly transfixed.

The smoky trail coils high above, circles, and turns. The lead wraith dives for the Keepers.

In a flash, Charlene scoops up a pile of cemetery soil and tosses it high into the air, blinding the lead wraith. Its dreadful screech is louder than the attraction's theme song. Maybeck pivots and pulls on a smaller tombstone, heaving it forward and back until it's dislodged. Lifting it in both hands like a swimming pool paddleboard, he swings it with perfect timing. The lead wraith loops overhead and dives; Maybeck connects. It vaporizes into black dust. He takes out the second wraith with his backhand, and the third with another forehand strike.

Charlene remains collected and strains to pull the tomb's stone door further open. Despite his early successes, Maybeck is losing the battle behind her; the wraiths separate and attack from all directions. One attaches to Maybeck's back; his DHI drains of color. Charlene picks up a brick and lays into the hooded head of the parasite, clobbering it and winning a glass-shattering cry. It lets go of Maybeck and thrusts its skull face out of the shadow, smack into Charlene's face.

She screams, swings, and splits its skull with the brick. It decomposes to powder and rains down on her like charcoal ash.

"In here!" she hollers, widening the gap in the door with one heroic tug.

"You—have—got—to be kidding!" Maybeck vaporizes two more wraiths, but it's a losing battle.

Charlene grabs Maybeck by the arm and hauls him through the square black hole. She hears him land a good distance below. With a mighty heave, she pulls the tomb's trapdoor shut. Sudden silence. They can hear nothing but the dull thumping of the music.

"Terry?"

Her foot catches on a ladder's rung. She climbs down.

Maybeck's glowing DHI lies prostrate on the cellar floor.

"If I'd been fully myself," Maybeck says, "I'd have broken my neck with that fall, and you would have killed me."

"If you'd been fully yourself, that wraith on your back would have killed you, and I'd have been hauling your corpse through that door."

They're both out of breath. Charlene wipes sweat from her eyes.

"I always thought this place was haunted for real," Maybeck says.

"We're in the cellar of the old house."

"Yep."

Stacks of antiques clutter the whole space. Civil War artifacts, tintypes, hat stands, and a boar's head are piled in heaps beneath the rusted pipes suspended from the overhead floor joists. A pale light bleeds from a rectangular shape—a doorway?—a good distance away.

"Suppose that leads outside?" he asks.

"Worth a look."

Charlene helps Maybeck to his feet. He takes the lead, breaking some cobwebs for her. The two pass an antique



vanity with an oval mirror. On the vanity, a pair of scissors glints in the light. There's an ivory-handled hairbrush, a box of face powder. A collection of pearls and other jewelry hangs from an ornate stand. Along the wall is an army cot, and next to it an old steamer trunk.

Charlene approaches the vanity. Touches the hairbrush. She pulls a strand of hair away.

"It's black."

"Save the estate sale shopping for another time."

"That would be Leota."

"Who?"

"In the Haunted Mansion. The story. Madame Leota was in love with Master Gracey. She killed Constance, his blond bride, and stuck her in a trunk in the attic, hoping that with Constance gone, Master Gracey would love her instead. But it backfired. Gracey hanged himself. People think Leota died of old age and returned to haunt the mansion."

"Don't talk like this is real."

"Because?" Charlene asks. "It's obvious a bunch of kids can't become holograms. A bunch of Disney villains couldn't possibly be responsible for *killing Dillard Cole*."

"Okay . . . okay! Sorry."

"There's no dust on the vanity. The mirror has been wiped clean."

"Listen to you! You're trying to freak me out—and *it's working*."

Charlene points to the trunk. "That's a trunk. It's big enough for—"

"Now you're just being mean," Maybeck says.

A woman's laugh coos out of the dark. It grows to a cackle.

Charlene whispers hoarsely, "What if the wraiths *wanted* us down here?"

"What if ghost stories are real?" comes the voice from the dark. "You clever girl."

"I know that voice!" Charlene says in a hush. "It's Madame Leota!"

Maybeck's DHI stretches out, reaching for what was once a wall decoration of two crossed Civil War sabers. He concentrates, allowing his DHI to physically grab the handle of one of the swords and wrestle it free of its scabbard. He hoists it two-handed, prepared to do battle.

An emaciated form with an ancient, withered face appears out of the dark. The deeply creased skin is sucked back over high cheekbones like fruit left too long in the sun. The eyes are the gray-blue of lake ice, the nose withered to a black hole beneath what appears to be a shriveled red chili pepper. The specter's cracked lips have been smeared with red greasepaint, forming a hideous cavity absent of teeth but occupied by a black tongue that ticks back and forth like a clock's pendulum.

"That's . . . her." Charlene can barely speak.

With fingers like her former nose and a neck like a turkey's, Madame Leota is the single most hideous human, female or male, the two have ever seen.

"Wait! He didn't want to marry *her*?" Maybeck says to Charlene. "Go figure."

The ancient Leota glides forward. "We always have room for two more."

"Get some original material," Maybeck says.

Charlene is apoplectic, unable to move. She stares at Maybeck in awe. Grunts, but cannot speak.

Seeing this, Leota turns toward the girl.

"No you don't, sweetheart." Maybeck swings the sword down. It swipes right through the ghost's arm and clangs onto the stone floor.

Leota reaches out for Maybeck while stepping toward the paralyzed Charlene. The ghost's arm passes through Maybeck's DHI. Leota looks at him, puzzled.

"You ain't the only ghost in the kingdom, gorgeous," Maybeck says.

Leota's jaw disconnects as her chin drops to her collarbone. She shrieks and directs herself at Charlene, only inches from the girl's face.

After several seconds, Charlene's hair begins to blow back; Maybeck realizes she's lost her DHI.

"Dance with me?" he says, closing his eyes and running his entire DHI body through Leota's ghost. Leota spins twice before Maybeck steps out of her. It takes her only a fraction of a second to reorient herself.

In that time, Maybeck reaches for Charlene, who's gone ashen white—Leota has scared the life out of her. Her DHI fades to gray, pixelating and beginning to lose form. Charlene is melting before his eyes.

"All clear, Charlie." Maybeck says the words as warmly as he's ever spoken two words in his life.

Leota is in his face, wailing her tortured cry. He feels himself slipping. He feels cold but to accept the cold is to welcome death.

He has no idea where it comes from—abject fear, a lack of doubt—but he returns Leota's cry with an agonized howl of his own that blends in an eerie harmony with hers. But as his shriek bends downward at the end and begins to clash with her sound, Maybeck sees Leota tremble. So he slides his pitch down further into a dark, grating dissonance, making her shudder. *No fear!* he chides himself.

He moves himself to feel no ill will, to push away his desire for vengeance and a sense of disgust. In all the noise, he finds

quiet. The pixelated particles pushed by the ghost's bellowing draw back into his projected form and he feels stronger. Louder.

Leota backs up a step.

"Duck!" shouts Charlene, and he obeys, having forgotten about her. For a few moments, until he forced himself to wake up, Leota owned him.

Maybeck drops to the floor and looks up to see Charlene holding the vanity's oval mirror up to Leota's face.

The screeching stops in that instant. The ghost's eyes narrow and flare. She swoons at the sight of the horrid face looking back at her. Emitting a series of pitiful groans and complaints, Leota sheds black tears and slowly backs up, returning to the shadows. Maybeck has never heard a sound so miserable and heartbroken, so full of grief and loathing at the same time.

"She hates herself," Charlene says before Maybeck can ask. "Hates what she did to Gracey. Hates what she's become."

"But how could you poss—"

"I'm a woman, Terry! That's something you're going to figure out one of these days."

He stares at her, dumbstruck.

Charlene grabs his hand and pulls him toward the beckoning light.

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"I thought that was you!" Storey Ming says to Finn. She seems to ignore Willa entirely.

The Keepers met Storey aboard the Disney *Dream* cruise ship during the Panama passage. An elusive girl the Keepers believe is allied with Wayne, she came to their aid on multiple occasions. Finn has come to rely upon her. Charlene, Willa,

and Amanda are less generous; they claim that there's something "off" about Storey and believe she's after Finn. He thinks back to their kiss on the *Dream*, but immediately pushes the thought away.

"What are you doing here?" he gasps instead, looking down at the writhing Jetsam.

"Me? I headed here the minute we docked. This is it. The ultimate destination. Disneyland. Where it all started. Where it all ends . . . if *they* have their way."

"How did you find us?" Willa asks.

It seems to take Storey a great deal of effort to turn toward Willa. "You found me," she says.

Storey squats to address Jetsam. "We've had our run-ins before, haven't we, you ugly green leech?" She wiggles the bent trident, choking down on the eel. "Now, get back into your scene and stay away from this area, or I'll skewer you and roast you for supper." She pulls a fragment of a sandwich from her pocket and throws it far into the dark, then lifts the trident. With one shake of its tail, the eel vanishes into the dark. A moment later they can hear it feeding.

"I've been hiding in here the past few days—since that newspaper story about the earthquake down in Mexico." Storey motions them deeper into the dark. There's a mattress on the floor, a bowl of water, and a wrinkled face towel. "Staying out of the park because of the security cameras. Luckily, there's a Dumpster backstage and plenty of perfectly good food is thrown away with all the ugly stuff. I remembered what you said about how dangerous the parks could be at night. I've been hoping to see you all. And here you are!"

"Here we are," says Willa. "Oh, joy."

"You saved us," Finn says.

"I think of those two as rats with very long tails," Storey

says. "All they're after is food. So I carry some around." She empties another pocket to reveal a chicken wrap. "Pretty harmless once they eat, as long as Ursula isn't here to order them to do stuff."

"Speaking of which: have you seen any OTs?" Willa asks.

"Have you seen Wayne?" Finn says, adding enough emphasis to make it sound like the more important question.

"Two sides of the same coin," Storey says. "Wayne and the Overtakers. No, on both accounts. That is, I don't know exactly which characters qualify as the bad guys. I haven't seen anyone from the ship, if that's what you're asking." She hesitates deliberately and lowers her voice in a conspiratorial manner. "There was this guy. Older. Could have been a Cast Member. Like cleanup crew or something."

"Go on." Finn's eyes tick to Willa. On a balcony deck aboard the *Dream*, there had been an older Cast Member working near the Keepers who turned out to be—

"I saw him . . . just a silhouette, a shadow on the wall *inside* the opera house."

"Main Street," Willa says, easily slipping into Philby's professorial role.

Storey nods, her first real acknowledgment of Willa. "I can't say for sure, but it felt . . . mysterious. I don't know how else to put it. And whoever it was didn't come out. I stuck around to make sure."

"That's Wayne!" Finn says. "I've had that same feeling about him. Mysterious, like you said."

"Wayne's here?" Storey sounds intrigued. "Here, in Disneyland? Where?"

"It's possible," Willa says. "But we don't know where."

Storey swipes her hand through Finn's DHI. "That is

so cool.” She jokes, “I couldn’t hold on to you if I wanted to.”

“That would be Amanda’s deal, anyway,” Willa says.

Finn can practically hear the cats hissing.

Storey says, “Glad you’re here. I haven’t had anyone to talk to.”

“We’re on a mission here,” Willa says testily.

“Well, pardon me! Sorry if I inconvenienced you *by saving your lives!*”

“We’re holograms. We weren’t in any danger.”

“Didn’t look that way to me.”

Finn intervenes. “We’ve got to go. But it’s good to know where to find you.”

“I’m around,” Storey says, making sure to direct her words at Willa. “Don’t go stepping on any eels.”

Finn and Willa both jerk their heads down to look at their feet.

“Gotcha,” Storey says. And they all laugh, releasing pent-up tension.

\* \* \*

“Well, if we’d hoped to spot the wraiths,” Maybeck says, “then you can consider our mission a success.” He looks at Charlene sympathetically. “But we didn’t exactly follow them to Wayne, if you know what I mean. . . .”

“And we didn’t find Ariel,” Finn says, “but Storey Ming was there and basically—”

“Saved us.” Willa purses her lips and nods. “Seriously.”

“The OTs are certainly active,” Finn whispers. He and the three others are hunkered down in shrubbery on an island of landscaping between the Astro Orbiter and the castle. Technically they’re on Central Plaza and believe they will

therefore be returned when Philby’s server stops whatever process he described. Waiting for the return is unnerving compared with having the fob in hand and controlling the process themselves.

“We could spend a long time in here and never find Wayne,” Maybeck says. “Talk about a needle in a haystack.”

“Better idea?” Finn asks.

“You know the skywriting they do at Disney World?” Maybeck suggests, to the others’ amusement. “‘Wayne, please call—’”

“Shh!” Willa reminds them as they all laugh more loudly. “Let’s remember we’re trying to hide.”

“So, we return, and then what?” Charlene asks.

The resulting silence brings all their attention to Finn, whose stony face is caught in mottled light.

“Philby works to improve our DHIs. We try to figure out why the Cryptos want us out here, yet seem so desperate not to allow us to do anything. We keep trying to find Wayne, because he’ll tell us what’s really going on.”

“Maybe we should ask to go home,” Charlene suggests. “Maybe then the Cryptos will include us more.”

“I wouldn’t count on it,” Maybeck says. “I think that could backfire.”

“I hate just sitting around,” Willa says.

Everyone nods in agreement.

“We got stuff done tonight,” Finn reminds them. “Storey’s here. She can help us.”

“We’ve also confirmed that the wraiths came from the Haunted Mansion,” says Charlene.

“So the attack on the Archives was organized here in Disneyland,” Willa says. “That’s got to be important.”

“Wayne’s here somewhere,” Finn says softly. “I can feel—”

But before he completes his sentence, their holograms dissolve and vanish.

**Y**OU UNDERSTAND THE RISKS? Charlene remembers Philby asking after she volunteered to be his guinea pig. She remembers it again as she opens her eyes beneath the Legends statue—it’s just like the night of the wraith attack. She was alone then and she’s alone now, despite Finn’s vehement attempts to pair her with another Keeper.

Philby’s counterargument was simple enough: “If I get it wrong, it’s better to limit the damage.”

“Then let me be the one,” Finn had replied nobly.

“Charlie’s our jock. She’s the best to test it because she can move at speeds and in ways that will put the tweaks I’ve made in the source code to the test. We need better modeling than you guys had inside the park. There’s a bunch of stuff to accomplish, Finn, and if it messes up and we trap Charlie in SBS for a day or so, we’ll find ways around that. If we trap you, *oh fearless leader*, then we’re in trouble. Besides,” Philby said with added emphasis, “if you get hurt, everyone will think I did it on purpose so I could take over. And believe me, that is *not* my intention, my wish, or my desire.”

“So what happened to all the paranoia over the Cryptos watching us so carefully?”

“Technology,” Willa said. “Philby and I hacked the hallway camera feeds and replaced them with iPhone videos of empty corridors. That’s all the Cryptos or Security will see.”

Maybeck couldn’t hide that he was impressed.

The mission objective was for Charlene to cross over—