

Ch 1: We, With the Wings

Confetti erupted from the crowds gathered at the harbor. Bright-colored strips of paper, painted and ripped up by hand, rolled through the warm sea breeze. There were shapes in the salted air. I could feel it in my long red hair. It didn't only blow through the strands but swirled them to and fro in front of my eyes. The other girls, not women (whose hair was braided into stiff plaits), had undulating hair to match. None were red though, nor were their eyes as light green as jade as mine and my father's. I glanced up at him, nervous and confused and wondering, and he smiled down at me, his large rough hand giving mine a gentle reassuring squeeze. I couldn't yet see *our* girl yet. *Our* girl, he said, would be one of many without parents. I didn't have a mother. I could relate to that but no dad, too? I could do without a mom — after all, I'd barely known the woman — but a *dad*? It seemed excessively tragic.

She'd have a name tag sewn to her lapel: *Donatiya*. It was a pretty name. Not as pretty as mine, though. I'd tell her my name straightaway and she'd say *wow what a pretty name!* And I'd tell her, *thanks! I like yours, too. Let's be the bestest of friends.* And soon we would be like sisters. I never had a sister. I had a brother, once. For a little while, barely a fortnight. He had cute chubby cheeks and round blue eyes but that's all I remember of him.

Father told me Donatiya had both, once. A sister and a brother! She'd have been lucky if she still had them and could show them off to me. I'd have been so excited to meet them, but unfortunately for us both she had neither anymore. What a letdown. But it was okay, really, because there were *lots* of kids on the ships without their brothers or sisters, too. They could also relate. Father told me that even though we might have some things in common, I needed to know that it wouldn't be all that many things. I thought that was silly. Most of them spoke our language and many of us spoke theirs. We even shared similar names, first middle and last.

Our people looked pretty alike too, although I thought maybe we had larger noses while their features were a bit sharper. I wasn't sure what exactly "sharper" meant but I'd heard Papa use it sometimes before he died. He liked sharp-featured men and (like Nana) soft-faced women. His father had a cold angular face, and he hated him. He didn't often describe people by their personalities but by their looks. Appearances were of most import to him, he'd tell me, because they *convey* personalities more than words often can. People could hide ill-intent behind their honeyed words, but rare was a person who could control their body language and facial expressions well enough to conceal it. Only some could escape his keen eye and attention to detail. Father said he could never get away with nothing as a kid.

Donatiya was around my age, about eleven and a half. I couldn't believe my luck that I'd have a friend I could play with all day *and* night. I'd introduce her to all my other daytime-only friends and we'd have the best of times. We'd make believe together, share our dolls, write and draw in the sand, run through the sand dunes and collect sea shells and sand dollars. Nana said I'd be getting too old for such play soon. It'd be time to start thinking about the *future* she'd say pointedly to Father, who would also pointedly ignore her back. *The future is a long, long while away*, he'd tell her, *let my little girl be just that: a little girl*.

In time I'd add plaits to my hair, too, and keep them in at all times except at wash days, where the women of the village would gather at the baths and link in pairs to wash and comb and then braid each other's long, never-cut hair. Their hair was intertwined with gauzy silky ribbons, the color chosen to match the shade passed down by the mother's side of each family. Ours was a deep maroon — I would've preferred green, to go with my eyes, but it wasn't up to me or anyone else but our ancestors. In any case it wasn't yet time for my ribbons. I was still allowed to wear my hair down free and unencumbered by tradition.