

NOW

I'm not dead.

But I'm . . .

not breathing.

Chest shudders, heaving. Panic pushes me back down into
darkness.

I float up toward light.

wisps of thought . . .

can't catch . . .

Noise. Booming, rhythmic.

Light. Color.

Chest full, swollen, something inside—doesn't belong.

Body flips over, out of control, heaving chest—in and out.

Hot liquid gushes out of me, again and again and again.

Splutters, gasps, soreness in my throat.

Whistling in and out.

Air.

My thoughts stutter. Warm relief. Confusion.

Something happened to me. I've forgotten, I've been—my brain is—hurt.

I can't see.

Solid surface beneath my shoulder, hip, ear. I lie on my side panting, mind trying to grasp on to—I can't remember.

I'm so heavy, so sleepy . . .

Come on, think. I'm alive, that's a start. There's a problem with my memory.

My eyes want to blink, but there's something over my eyelids. I raise myself on one elbow, fumble and peel off sticky patches, wincing at the drag on my lashes.

Blinding light. My hand springs up, shielding, then I narrow my eyes as they get used to the glare. The swishing sound is constant; I have heard it before.

My breath catches, and when I cough there's a bittersweet taste in my mouth.

Head too heavy for my neck, I narrow my eyes. Sparkling white below, hot blue above, and turquoise in front . . .

Sand. Sky. Sea.

Beach.

I'm on a . . . beach.

Alone? It's too bright, I can't see any distance, can't see any . . . one.

I'm alive and that's a surprise. I can't remember why. *Track back*. What is the last thing—?

Cool whiteness.

Memories spool into my mind.

The mist. My hand on the door handle, frantic twisting. It wouldn't open.

Poppy. She was in my arms. Blood rushes in my ears, throbs at my temples.

Where is my sister?

I pull myself into a kneeling position.

"Poppy!" My cracked whisper is swallowed by the soft scrape of the sea.