



THE KNOWING

SHARON CAMERON

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SAMARA

Always I thought it would be my Knowing that killed me, when actually, it's going to be this rope.

I lower myself down, hand over hand, the sheered, sparkling rock of the cliff face slipping by at a pace that is agonizingly slow. I saw a boy from the Outside scaling a rope once, snatching fruit from the top of a spicemelon tree like he was running up a set of stairs. Down, I'd thought, would be so much easier. But I, Samara Archiva—the girl who is Knowing, who remembers so much—had no idea my body could feel so heavy. Or that rope could eat skin. My palms are tearing, muscles seizing, and I can't look down. I don't want to Know how far it is to the bottom.

And then the rope jerks and I drop, quick. If I didn't Know that rope could eat skin, it seems I was also unaware that rock can eat rope. Where my line hangs over the edge of a jutting stone, I can see the strands snapping, frayed ends lit by the lowering sun. I drop again, twisting, dangling in the air. Terror uncoils in my middle.

"Knowing," my mother always says to me, "is the pinnacle of human evolution and the birthright of the people Underneath. Doing is for those Outside." But when Nita's grandpapa is Outside with a ten-centimeter cut on his leg, then it seems to me that someone ought

to be out there actually doing what they Know. And so, instead of being where I was supposed be, ordering my mind in my bedchamber, I was climbing up an unused supply shaft. To the Outside.

And when Grandpapa's stitching was done, there was a group of supervisors in the old supply hut, standing around the boxes I'd used to cover the entrance to the shaft. I watched through the wall cracks as one of them picked up a thin scarf, beautifully dyed in blues and greens. What was supposed to be wrapped around my unbraided head when I slid back down to the city Underneath. And because Outsiders only wear undyed cloth, this was obviously a scarf of the Knowing, and because supervisors are the only Knowing allowed Outside, this was obviously a scarf that had been hoarded. Stolen. Held back from the requests of the city.

And then the supervisors were in the streets, metal-capped sticks breaking open doors, searching the houses of the dyers, and Nita was telling me to run. I did, hood pulled low to hide my face, flitting past furnace fires and workshops, carts, curtained windows, and cesspits, and up through five levels of harvested fields, terraced into the sides of the mountain. Across orchards stripped bare of fruit, and up again, pushing back the branches of thick, untended fern trees to the cliffs that separate what is Outside from what is not. To the rope I had hidden, dangling down a sheltered crack in the rock face, hung for just this sort of emergency.

It's really not a very good rope.

The rope jerks for the third time, and I loosen my grip and let myself slide. It doesn't just hurt, it burns. Enough to make me scream, ripping my hands, shredding my leggings. When I hit the ground, I hit it hard, pain shooting up my shins, air knocked from my lungs. I stare into the bowl of an empty purple sky, bruises spreading, hands bleeding onto the scattered stones. Amazed that I am alive. That I'm not in pieces. Amazed that I am not caught. Yet.

My breath comes back in a wheezing gasp. I get to my feet and stagger to a rivulet spilling down its own pale, encrusted path from

the cliff face. Salt water. I examine my palms. Bloody and blistered, each missing a wide strip of skin. I heard and therefore I Know every word of the recitations on wound healing—eighth week, second session of my physician training—and I won't be able to do any of it. Not in the medical rooms. Not without being seen. I grit my teeth and thrust both hands into the waterfall.

I yell with my mouth closed. A shriek inside my head. And the sound brings a memory pulling at my mind. A tugging weight. I Know what memory this is, and I don't want it. I close my eyes, breathe. Fight. But the memory yanks, dragging me downward. I sink into my mind, and then I fall . . .

. . . into the dark of a corner behind an open door. Someone is screaming. A deep voice. Full of pain. Adam. I don't understand. My father is crying in the corridor, but Mother says the Knowing never show what they feel.

I creep out from the corner. This is Adam's room. But it doesn't feel like Adam's room, and when I tiptoe across the rug, push onto my toes to peek over the edge of the bed, what I see is not my brother. This Adam is sweating, frothing. Broken. His fingers twist in the wrong direction. Then he opens his mouth, his back arches off the bed, and he screams and screams . . .

. . . and I shove the memory away, cache it back to a high shelf in the darkest corner of my mind. I'm beside the salty waterfall, on my knees with burning hands.

"To cache is to organize your mind," the tutor said, "and is the special privilege of the Knowing. Visualize a place to put your memories, a place far away and inaccessible. When you cache a memory there, it may only be retrieved when you choose to retrieve it. Cache both the very distressing and the very happy. The first is unpleasant, the second addictive, and both may interfere with daily functions . . ."

I was three years old when I heard these words, on my first day in the learning room. I was terrible at caching then. I'm terrible at it now.

And I Know what's going to happen to me next. I close my eyes, and pain rips through my chest, tearing, slicing, cutting its way through my insides. Like needles. Like knives. This is separation from my brother, the grief I felt when I first understood that he was never coming back to me. And it is agony.

I lift my eyes, panting, my gaze sliding down the grassy slope to the tamed trees and the empty, shaded groves. The cliffs are over there, much higher than the one I just came down. A long drop into nowhere. Aunt Letitia went that way. And Grandfather Archiva was so afraid of the memory of helplessness from his infancy that he threw himself into the River Torrens rather than grow old. He could not cache, my mother said, and that was the end of him. It may be the end of me. The absence of pain, the absence of memory, sounds a lot like peace. And then the idea that death is the only way to peace makes me mad. Because it isn't. There is another way.

But for all my Knowing, I am not supposed to Know about that.

I push myself upright, wipe my cheeks with the back of a burning hand, and peel away the undyed shirt of the Outside, trying not to bleed on the embroidered blue-green tunic I'm wearing beneath it. The matching leggings are a little torn from the rope, but Nita's clothes have taken most of the damage. If I keep to the shadows, to the lesser-used corridors, I may escape some notice. But I'll still have to pass through the Forum, full of the Knowing, and I will be spotted, with my loose hair and injured hands, and this is a twelfth year. A year of Judgment. When the Council weighs our accumulated sins. When the worthy of the Knowing are kept, the unworthy condemned and . . . removed.

I'm as unworthy as they come. But most of what makes me unworthy the Council doesn't Know about.

Unless they catch me today.

I hide the torn clothes behind a clump of bluing grasses, sidestepping down the slope and into the upland parks. The parks are a table of land cut off, like the Outside, sheltered by the mountain on one side

and the long drop over the cliffs on the other. The one place the Knowing are allowed to go open air but don't. Mother thinks the parks are beneath our dignity. That to stand in the presence of the sky is to act like an Outsider.

I wonder what she'd think if she knew where I really spent my time.

I Know what the Council would think. And I Know what they would do.

The air dims, cooling in the shadow of the mountain, and then I am slipping through an arched door cut into a smooth face of shining rock. I leave the light and enter the dark, feet tapping down winding stairs of black stone, taking me to the Underneath. The temperature drops, hanging lamps making shadows, the spiced perfume of the city inside my nose. It's quiet, the stairway deserted. Until Level Twenty-Two, where I see Nita on the landing, beckoning to me, frantic, her blue eyes bright against the undyed cloth, a sky-purple scarf trailing from one hand. Nita has been our family's help for seven years now, since I was eleven and she was fifteen, and I think she's just risked a flogging to bind my hair. This is not our level, and she is definitely out of bounds.

"I used your note and came in through the gates," she whispers. "Your mother's come back! Turn around . . ."

Mother never comes back before the middle bell. This is her time to order her mind. Like I was supposed to be doing in my chamber. My stomach sinks.

"Oh, Sam, you're a mess," Nita says, gathering up the mass of my hair, long, black spirals hanging halfway to my waist, wrapping it all up quickly in the scarf. "Where are your shoes?"

Hidden beneath the stack of boxes that had supervisors all around them. I'm still wearing Nita's sandals from the Outside.

"Here, use this to cover up." She whips a cloak of dark, shining purple around me and fastens it at my neck. "I'll try to distract your

mother so you can get through the door. And do something about your hands!”

“What happened to the dyers?” I ask, but Nita’s already shoved me forward, disappearing back through the doorway. She must have an agreement with the Outsiders in this level’s kitchens. I wish I did. The way would be much shorter.

I hurry down the black stone stairs, Level Eighteen, Seventeen, passing more doorways and landings without seeing another soul. No one ever comes this way, because the Knowing never go open air. Except for me. Of course, the Knowing never break the law to put on undyed cloth and dress the wounds of their help, either. Except for me. And they definitely do not consider their help family. Except for me.

When I’m not so afraid, I feel good about my unworthiness.

Fifteen levels down, I duck through the arch on my right, into the dull, flickering lamplight of the medical section. It’s as empty and quiet here as in the stairwell, and that, I think, is at least one thing I do exactly like the rest of the Knowing: Never get sick.

There’s a door open on my left, a storage room, with shelves of boxes and bottles on one side, and on the other a back, a male back, in a sleeveless green tunic, brown hair braids hanging past his shoulders, injecting a clear liquid into tiny glass vials. He has ten scars on each of his arms, one for every year of his life. Reddix Physicianson. The sharp scent of our wellness injections springs to my nose.

I take one silent step inside, reach up for a roll of bandages, and Reddix says, “Can I get something for you, Samara?”

I glance back. He hasn’t turned or twitched or even stopped filling his vials. But he Knows it’s me. I snatch the bandages with my fingertips. “No, I don’t need anything.” My hands are hurting enough to make tears well in my eyes. Or maybe that’s Adam.

Reddix’s voice is low. Composed. “Then I suppose I’ll be seeing you later.”

I dart out the door. There's a shadowed corner on the landing at Level Eight where I stop to bind my hands, wincing while I do it, ripping the cloth with my teeth, uneasy. I can't think of one reason why Reddix would be seeing me later. When I'm done, I run down seven more levels, through a short tunnel, and then I straighten my back, adjust the cloak to hide my feet and my hands, and enter the noise of the Forum.

Water gushes from a high black arch in the cavern wall, the River Torrens, rushing down a channel that winds through a mirrored floor of dark and glossy rock. Seven bridges span the channel, water echoing against sporadic columns of blue-black stone, natural features now honed and polished, rising to a ceiling I cannot see. But there are lamps up there, glittering, hanging from terraces and balconies like the stars I've seen Outside. In the long stretches of the dark days. When the sun is gone.

I slow my walk to something calm and unconcerned as I cross the first bridge, edging along the fringe of the crowd, cloak held together, trying to blend with the sea of bright fabric and elaborately pinned braids. I want to run. There's a platform on the far side of the cavern, a high piece of rock hugged on three sides by the Torrens, bare and smooth on its top. Where we will be Judged. And reclining on its carved steps is my father, Sampson Archiva, skin and eyes a rich brown, hair twisted into ropes strung with red. Waiting for someone.

A mural rises beyond my father's head, meters high and stretching the length of the cavern wall, images shifting as I weave through the columns. The first section is titled "The Legacy of Earth," green mountains and an impossibly blue sky fading into a smoking, flattened land. Then the color blends to pale, into the circular walls of a city of white stone, a silver-white sunrise sparkling above it. This is "Canaan. The Cursed City." And to the right of that, reaching to the curve of the wall is "Journey to New Canaan," showing a long line of beautiful people

on a road to a black mountain, the white city in the distance, each with a hand extended to a smaller, stunted figure with a blank and empty face.

The beautiful ones are supposed to be my ancestors, 379 years ago, the Knowing, the people of memory, leading those without it to a refuge safe from the destruction of a coming Earth. Only there is no Earth. Earth is a myth. A story to make us afraid. To make us think we're special. To keep the Outsiders out and the Knowing Underneath. Adam told me that.

And he was right. Because I Know the real reason we left the Cursed City. And it has nothing to do with a myth . . .

Memory grabs at my mind, heavy, trying to drag me downward. I struggle. I cannot do this here. I will not. I've stopped walking, heads turning to stare as I dam the flow of people like a stone in a stream. The memory pulls. Hard. I pull back. And then it wrenches me down and I plummet . . .

. . . into a room of gray pine, herbs drying in bunches from the ceiling, yellow flame from a heating furnace showing me the face of an old man drinking tea from a mug. Cyrus Glassblower. Nita's grandpapa. I sip from my own mug, hugging my knees, on the floor at his feet. There are sixteen scars on my arms.

"Nita tells me you're writing the truth in a book," Grandpapa says. "That's good. Memories last when they're written. They can be given to someone else. So here's a truth I want you to write. I can't remember being a child. I just opened my eyes one day, and the memories were gone . . ."

I hesitate. "So different from . . ." I'm looking for words that aren't "different from the way you usually forget." Outsiders don't have memory, and I don't want to be insulting. I want him to like me. Grandpapa smiles.

"It's a natural thing, little girl, to let a memory fade. Like chiseling stone. If the carving is shallow, then the picture just wears itself away.

And even if it is chiseled in good and deep, the edges still smooth out, soften. Time has a kindness like that. That's as it should be . . ."

Meaning that we of the Underneath are not as we should be. I watch Grandpapa's forehead fold up like cloth.

"But this wasn't the same. This was like the mason had never picked up the tools. My life was Forgotten. Nita's grandmama, she had to tell me my name, tell me hers. I had to pretend I knew my own mother. And we never told, because there have been others. Even a supervisor, once. And they whisked him belowground fast enough. But the Outsiders, now they just disappear. And then we see the smoke, coming out from Underneath . . ."

Three moons are rising, shining white light through the window-panes. How could a supervisor, one of the Knowing, Forget his own name? And how could I not Know about it? I couldn't Forget a face if I tried. If one of us had gone missing, I would Know. Grandpapa puts a hand on my head.

"But you, little girl," he says. "You Know. You remember. And you could do something about it . . ."

. . . and I go soaring, up through my mind, and my eyes snap open, blinking at the bodies moving through the Forum. At Thorne Councilman, our Head of Council, now standing next to my father on the steps to the platform. The one who will be Judging me, standing where I will be Judged, his black-eyed gaze making a straight path to mine. Fear stabs inside my chest. There's a jerk inside my mind, and I plunge, down . . .

. . . into the Forum of twelve years ago, full of the Knowing in their finery. It's dark. Silent. Judgment. And Ava Administrator has just been condemned. My father holds my hand, a rare gesture, and I watch a blank sort of shock steal over the serenity of Ava's face. Thorne Councilman reads her transgressions: funneling the best of the goods to her own level, numbers that do not rectify, an improper relationship.

And then Thorne condemns Ava's bloodline, all three of her children, because her oldest, a rebellious thirteen-year-old, has been refusing to cache. My father's hand slips up to my face, covering my eyes so I will not remember the sight, but I can hear the children cry, and Ava's soft protest of "No." And a louder "No." And then, "No!"

. . . and I rise through my mind, and this time when I open my eyes both Thorne Councilman and my father are staring at me from across the Forum. As are others. Because I have just shouted the word "No," the echo still bouncing back and forth between columns. And then someone screams, and it's not me. I look up.

A body is falling, down through the dark of the Forum, legs and arms outstretched, hair fluttering in the wind. And while my eyes track the descent of a long silver dress, all I can think is that I want to be like Grandpapa Cyrus.

I want to be cursed like the people of Canaan.

I want to Forget.