



A KINGDOM KEEPERS NOVEL

THE RETURN

BOOK TWO

LEGACY OF SECRETS

1

OPENING THE DOOR

FINN WHITMAN HELD THE DOOR for Charlene. A gymnast and high school captain of three sports, Charlene now had her telltale sun-streaked blond hair in tight curls, her eyelashes clumped with mascara, her full figure crammed into an aqua-blue-and-white summer dress with a crinoline skirt, white bobby socks, and black flats. Her girl-next-door face was caked in makeup.

Girls in high school had hated Charlene for her looks. But those who actually spoke to her, who took the time to get to know her, liked her. What would those same kids think now? she wondered. High school was three months in her past; the world beyond the door was a full sixty years in the past—1955. She laced her transparent fingers in front of her like a bridesmaid to keep her hands from shaking.

Her four friends about to follow her through this same door were time travelers—just like her. They'd been part of her life since seventh grade. That was when she'd auditioned and been picked to be one of the human models for computer-generated holograms that

would serve as personal guides through Disney World theme parks.

Finn addressed the remaining three teens. “We don’t know what form the Overtakers will take, or if they even exist in 1955, so stay alert.”

“And remember,” said Philby, the redheaded boy at the back of the line, “our holograms aren’t even holograms. They’re two-dimensional, low-res projections that will barely fool anyone. So keep moving and don’t stop to have conversations. The more movement, the less we appear two-dimensional. The brain will trick the eye—or maybe it’s the opposite, but you get the point. No stopping. This is dangerous ground, people.”

The five Kingdom Keepers had little opportunity to contemplate the strange set of circumstances that had delivered them to this door. Their collective focus was instead on several things, all at once. 1) They were currently in 1955, a time they knew little about; 2) their mission was to locate and steal a fountain pen owned by Walt Disney; 3) the creative legend, Disney himself, was alive on July 17, 1955, and therefore somewhere in Disneyland, just beyond that door.

As it turned out, so were seven thousand news reporters from around the world, a camera team from ABC TV, hundreds—perhaps thousands—of Disney Cast Members, politicians, VIP dignitaries, and guests.

Anaheim, California, had never seen anything like this. Today would change the course of history for the small orange-growing agricultural community. The Kingdom Keepers, being from the twenty-first century, knew all this. They were alone in this knowledge, as they prepared to crash the grand opening. If they failed to retrieve Walt's fountain pen, and find a way to ensure its discovery (by them!) nearly six decades hence, then years of battling the Disney villains, including the death of two close friends, would all have been for nothing.

"You'll have about twenty minutes," Wayne said, joining them at the door. "Mr. Disney's naps are very short, and he has a terribly busy day today."

Wayne was a few years older than they were—nineteen or twenty. They knew him better as a man in his eighties; a mentor; their advisor and confidant. Time travel was tricky.

"Napping?" Willa asked. Though Willa lacked the striking looks of Charlene, and the confident brashness of Philby—she was dark-haired, a little wide in the face, and reserved by nature—she had the brains of a wizard, the mind of a mathematician, and the calm of a lab scientist. "We're going to pick his pocket while he's napping?"

"It's the best opportunity you'll have," Wayne said. "Mr. Disney keeps his pen in the inside pocket of his

sport coat. He won't sleep in the coat, so unless one of you is an expert at pocket picking . . ."

"We've got this," Finn said. "No worries." He had every worry, but wasn't about to put them on display for all to see.

"That's way too cheerful, Witless." Terry Maybeck seldom withheld his opinions. He claimed that, as an African American kid interested in art, he'd always felt sidelined, bullied, or otherwise ignored. His parents had either abandoned him or died; he didn't talk about it. He'd been raised by a bighearted aunt who ran a pottery shop. She claimed that Terry had been a head taller than any other kid in his class since the third grade, and had been spoiled by all the attention his teachers gave him, and because of this, had never been shy about sharing his thoughts.

"Thanks for that, Maybeck," Finn said. "Charlene . . . let's go!"

Once they were out in the park, everything looked and sounded so different from what they knew. The five holograms moved through a Cast Member entrance leading from backstage into Town Square.

"What's weird," Maybeck said, "is how completely different something can look."

"I hear you," said Philby.

Sapling trees surrounded Town Square. Grass sod had been laid, but it looked more like green carpet.

Flowers had been planted in neatly organized rows in front of stubby bushes. Only a few of the flowers held blossoms, which contributed to the naked look of the place. The park had the feeling of a model of Disneyland, not the real thing. Even the people were strange, in their white shirts, white dresses, and fancy shoes—the hair-sprayed hairdos of the women, the men’s greased haircuts; everything about everyone was so intentional and perfectly in place that it looked more like a wax museum display than a day in Disneyland.

“Listen to them! They speak so differently,” Charlene whispered to the others. “What’s with all the ‘gee whiz’ and ‘gosh?’”

“Don’t look now, but it’s 1955. ‘Heck!’ and ‘Darn it!’ are the closest they get to swearing. And look, they behave so differently!” Willa said. “Did you see that man tip his hat to that woman? So formal and polite.”

A pair of burly men dragging television cables into place each gave Maybeck an unpleasant look.

“I have a feeling,” Finn said, “that they probably believe differently as well!”

Disneyland had more of a weekend carnival feel than that of a theme park.

“This is way cool, by the way!” Maybeck said, ignoring the men. “We get to see the original Disneyland!”

“See?” Professor Philby repeated, questioning him.

Philby, always playing the academic. “Maybeck, we’re not just seeing it, we’re living it.”

* * *

The five Keepers had once helped to restore the Disney magic in Disney World by using Walt’s pen to draw on an old blueprint of the park. That transformation had reversed the darker magic of the Disney villains—the Overtakers—and had launched a long string of successful battles against their dark forces. Their purpose here in 1955 was to find the correct pen and make sure it would be in the Disney Hollywood Studios attraction One Man’s Dream, so that they could find it again fifty-odd years later, in the future.

As the moment approached, the five began moving in eerie resemblance to a well-rehearsed team of bank robbers or street thieves. Outside of the Disneyland firehouse, alongside the Emporium, while the four teens stood side by side, a fifth, Finn, moved through a solid gate. Finn, whose boyish charm had matured into an intriguing forbearance. He had wildly expressive, almost hooded eyes, a mane of brown hair, and square shoulders that added up to a kind of Knight of the Round Table look of nobility. Now he found himself in backstage Disneyland.

It was nothing like the backstage Disneyland of the

future. Carpenters, artists, craftsmen, and people from the television broadcast were so busy they were talking, walking, and banging into each other all at the same time. It looked like the world's busiest airport on the busiest day of the year. There were other inconsistencies: the sawhorses were wood, not plastic; the workers wore suspenders and heavy leather boots—not a running shoe to be seen. Not a single sports cap, either. These guys wore tams and berets.

Everyone smoked; cigarettes dangled from lips, were pinched between fingers. Unlit cigarettes were tucked behind ears, along with yellow pencils. There was not a bottle of bottled water in sight, nor aluminum cans. Finn saw some Coke bottles—greenish glass—a few glass milk bottles, and metal lunch boxes in the shape of small barns. Finn moved toward a carport that held four shiny new trucks. As he did, his DHI projection sparkled and flared like a flickering TV signal during foul weather. Once at the carport, his image stabilized.

Next through the wall was Willa, followed by Charlene and Maybeck. At last, Philby's flickering projection came backward through the closed gate like a ghost.

"No matter how many times I see that it still looks so strange," Maybeck said.

"I hear you," said Charlene, equally awed by the

metaphysical element of the projected holograms in action.

The five quickly split up, taking positions relevant to the scaling of the gray-painted staircase, which rose nearly two stories to an unassuming set of casement windows and a nondescript door. Charlene moved down the backstage lane and took up a guard position. Maybeck stood sentry at the bottom of the staircase, prepared to buy his friends time. Willa, Finn, and Philby moved their ghostlike projections through the metal chain strung across the staircase as a barrier. They climbed the stairs quickly, with as much confidence as they could muster. Moments later, they slipped through the exterior back door that led into Walt Disney's family apartment.

Each Kingdom Keeper had learned over the years to discipline his or her thoughts and to control his or her emotions. Everything they believed, everything they felt, affected the quality and abilities of their projections. Fear instilled limits; no fear opened up possibility. Entering Walt Disney's apartment uninvited while he was supposed to be napping felt criminal to each of the three. It took every ounce of confidence and patience they'd learned over the past few years to keep their composure.

Philby, the most analytical of the five, showed little

outward reaction. Willa, who in high school had excelled past Philby in some academics, was less courageous. She looked ready to melt into the plush carpeting underfoot. Finn wanted to project confidence while not seeming pushy. He found himself the unofficial leader of the Keepers, but was occasionally challenged by Philby for that role.

The three communicated by hand signal. With everyone “talking” at once, it looked as if they were trying to flap their wings to fly.

When Willa slapped her hand over her mouth and stifled a squeal, Finn spun to see a fully dressed man asleep on the short red couch, his dress shoes indenting the armrest. Finn stared in awe. He’d seen so many videos, photographs, posters, and statues of Walter Elias Disney that seeing him in the flesh seemed so otherworldly he couldn’t move.

Walt Disney snorted and began snoring softly.

Willa relaxed her hand. Philby placed his projected arm around her, and she leaned her head against his projected shoulder. Finn stuck his projected finger down his projected throat, indicating how he felt about the touching moment between the two. Philby stuck out his tongue and then laughed silently.

Finn took in the many items and pieces of furniture in the apartment, noting the differences between the

real apartment and the restored version sixty years hence. Foremost was the brass fireman's pole mounted through a hole in the floor. The artwork on the walls was different as well: more photographs, fewer paintings. A suit valet stood by the end of the couch that wasn't there in the present.

As planned, Philby and Willa searched the closet. Finn inspected the suit valet and Walt Disney's sport coat, which hung there. The valet tray held U.S.-minted dimes, quarters, nickels, and pennies unlike any Finn had ever seen. The dollars clasped inside a silver money clip looked fake—in small letters they read "Silver Certificate." Finn reached to look inside the suit jacket, but his hologram hand passed through the fabric.

The easiest way for him to achieve the materiality that would lend his projection human substance was to allow fear into his thoughts. But that was risky—once mortal, he couldn't move through walls. Worse, weapons or fists wouldn't pass through him—they would injure him. Equally important: once fear sank its talons in and took hold, not only was it sometimes impossible for Finn to find his all clear projection again, but any harm that came to him in this condition would linger.

Leaders, Finn thought, didn't sit around thinking and stewing. Leaders led. He allowed himself to think about trespassing and attempting to steal something

from one of his personal heroes. If caught, he'd be mortified. If caught, then fifty-odd years into the future, there would be no pen to save the Magic Kingdom. The Disney villains known as the Overtakers would face one less obstacle in their objective to crush the Disney magic.

Finn's body tingled. He knew the feeling well: he was losing all clear. He was going mortal. More human than projected light. Allowing it to grow stronger—warmer—he waited for the pins and needles to excite his fingertips. At that point, he fingered the fabric of Walt Disney's sport jacket, and the jacket came open.

A knock came from somewhere behind him. Finn froze, the fountain pen within reach.

The sleeping giant stopped snoring and startled awake.

* * *

Willa and Philby, in the midst of conducting a blind search of the few clothes hanging up in the dark closet, heard a knock. They paused. A second knock. "Maid service!" Another knock.

Philby stepped toward the closet door, but Willa held him back. Anxiety stole most of the all clear from her projection. She placed her ear against the cool door, catching the voices mid-conversation.

“I’m telling you, if Mr. H says there’s something here, then there’s something here.”

“And we’re going to steal it?” said the other, her voice edged with uncertainty. Both voices were female; both sounded young. “Golly, Gina! Doesn’t that seem wrong?”

Mr. H. . . . Hollingsworth? Willa wondered. She knew the name somehow. Her study of Disney history? Hadn’t a man going by that name been fired from Disney and ended up suing the man and the company for unlawful dismissal? Were these women working for the same man?

Trying to focus wasn’t easy. As with the others, Willa had a great deal on her mind. How college was likely to separate her from Philby, whom she liked a lot. How the best years of her life seemed destined to come to an end. How friendship was like some kind of puzzle: just when you thought you understood it, there turned out to be deeper, undiscovered levels.

Willa had kept her excitement to herself when Finn proposed this final effort to recover Walt’s pen. Secretly, she’d been brimming with joy. This would keep the five of them together, even if it was just for a few moments longer. Her thrill at being in Disneyland on Opening Day was like sunshine wanting to burst from behind a cloud. Everything was clean and fresh, like a brand-new

house whose front lawn hadn't grown in yet. She wanted to dance her way down Main Street.

One of the women spoke. "Remember: anything unusual. A wand, in particular."

Willa heard the instructions, but her mind was back on the name: Hollingsworth. What could a man sixty years in the future have to do with Opening Day at Disneyland?

"You hear that?" Willa whispered to Philby.

"His snoring stop? You betcha I did!"

Willa wanted to correct him, to explain what she'd heard the maid say. But he was right: Walt's snoring had stopped. Finn!

"Right," she said, trying to remain calm. "We'd better get out of here."

* * *

Finn had just taken hold of the suit coat's lapel when the napping Walt Disney rose up on one arm. He looked in the direction of the knocking.

At that moment, Willa and Philby stepped through the closet door and into the narrow hallway behind Finn.

With Walt distracted, Finn focused and directed his prickling fingers to the valet's tray table. His first effort to pick up one of the pennies failed. But he pushed,

gathered his full concentration, and managed to make himself solidly physical enough to manipulate matter. In an instant, Finn had flung the coin toward the small table at the window looking out onto Town Square, which held a replica gas lamp. The coin clinked as it landed.

The groggy man whipped his head toward the sound.

Finn peeled open the sports coat, snatched a fountain pen, which had been clipped inside the chest pocket, and headed for the back door, a step behind Willa and Philby, who moved, ghostlike, through the solid wood. Finn clutched the pen tightly in his hand. As a material object, it wouldn't pass through the door like his projection. He was reaching for the dead-bolt lock when an eerily familiar voice called out, "Hello?" It was a voice Finn knew from DVDs and YouTube. It was as powerful to him as the Wizard was to Dorothy.

It was Walt Disney.

Finn dove for the fireman's pole. He slid down the brass pipe and landed on a hissing cushion shaped like a doughnut. Except for a single silhouetted figure standing in the open bay door, the firehouse stood empty.

Finn tried to catch his breath. The air was hot and smelled of sawdust and pine. Being a projection, Finn didn't actually breathe, but to him he felt he did. If you

asked Finn Whitman, he sweated, breathed, ached, and itched, just like his human, solid self. And he maintained that illusion. By agreement, the Keepers kept their projections secret. There would be far too many questions to answer if found out. Now he just needed to get past this man without incident.

“And just where did you come from?” the man’s thin, almost cartoony voice asked. It had no place in one so tall and formidable. Finn wanted a better angle, a chance to see the man’s face.

Finn had to think quickly. “I run errands for Mr. Disney. I’m an errand runner.”

“Is that so?”

“I like taking the pole. Makes me feel like a fireman.” Even without seeing the man clearly, Finn could tell he didn’t believe him. He could think of several reasons why that might be the case—first and foremost, Finn was a lousy liar. But another possibility was that the man had expected someone else to come down the pole.

Finn heard the muted sound of feet coming quickly down the stairs. The silhouette heard them as well. The stairs led to Walt’s apartment, but Willa and Philby—who wouldn’t make clunky sounds—should have already made it down.

“Mr. Hollingsworth!” the voice of a young woman

called. The man spun. Finn saw his face in profile: a Roman nose and cleft chin, wide eyes—brown?—and big ears. Plain looking, not handsome, Finn thought.

The name meant something to Finn—he'd heard it from Philby, maybe.

Hollingsworth shot a final look in Finn's direction. Though he remained silent, something shouted to Finn: "Watch yourself!" Then Hollingsworth turned and caught up to the two young women, both of whom were dressed in maid uniforms. The three vanished into the overwhelmingly thick crowd.

Feeling threatened and afraid, Finn ran for backstage. He couldn't get there fast enough.

It would be the last Finn ever saw of the two girls.

2

LOST CAUSE

THEY MET IN THE SHADE of a pair of orange trees beyond the Shooting Gallery, near the Pack Mules ride. Their projections were caught by the dappled sunlight cast down by the overarching limbs and leaves, making the teens into virtual checkerboards. Wayne sat in a crouch, up on his knees like a runner on the blocks. He checked around for eavesdroppers, and then hastily unrolled a blueprint that showed the construction plans for Main Street USA.

“Here you go!” Wayne said. He spoke nervously, his voice hushed, even though no one nearby appeared interested. “You’re saying the pen will change this, right?”

“Strengthen it,” Finn said. “I know it sounds ridiculous, but we’ve seen it . . . in the future. I just touched the pen to the paper and it was magic! Magic happened!”

“Gee whiz!”

Finn uncapped Walt’s pen, glad to have at least some control over his projection. “You’ll see! Watch this!” he said excitedly. The other Keepers joined them, surrounding the blueprint. Finn touched the fountain

pen's bulbed nib to one of the darker lines on the plans. He pulled the pen's lever, spilling a drop and making sure the ink flowed. The blob of ink just sat there. "That's weird."

"Maybe that page doesn't need any magic," Charlene hypothesized. "Or maybe it only responds to certain people. Like Jess for instance."

"Who's Jess?" Wayne asked. "Golly! Are there more of you?"

"Jessica is a friend of ours," Philby said. "There are two others, her friends, Amanda and Mattie. Special girls. You'd like them. Jess has a particular artistic skill. If she drew something with that pen, we'd know if it's the right one."

"No offense," Wayne said to Willa and Charlene, "but I'm not sweet on any girls. I like my job too much to get all distracted."

Everyone laughed, including Finn, who considered Amanda more than a friend. He thought of her all the time; he talked to her inside his head. He missed her. Was there a word for how he felt?

The smile fell from his face amid the laughter. He hurt inside.

Philby spoke. "This pen is identical in appearance to the pen we came looking for. It has Walt Disney's name engraved on the side, just like the one we're after. It's

black with a silver ring on the cap. That fits. All I can say for sure is that it looks exactly like the pen we need.”

“But it can’t be the right one if it doesn’t do anything,” Finn argued. “Nothing happened.”

“So maybe he has more than one pen,” Maybeck suggested. Since he was the only real artist in the group, his opinion carried weight. “If I had a special pencil, I sure wouldn’t carry it around with me all day. I’d keep it near where I draw. I’d keep it safe so there was no chance of ever losing it. Whether it was magic or superstition, Walt Disney must have believed in his pen.”

“He’s still alive at this point, let’s not forget,” Wayne interjected. “I don’t like you talking about him that way.”

“Right. Sorry. He believes in this pen,” Maybeck said. “So why risk it?”

“Terry’s right,” Wayne said. “If the pen is as important as you all say, Mr. Disney won’t make it easy to find. He’s a careful man. He probably has several of these monogrammed pens. But the one you’re looking for, the powerful pen, is clearly different, maybe enchanted. And if it’s special, then it’s probably old. Oswald the Rabbit, Mr. Disney’s first animated character, came early, right after the war. Did you happen to know Mr. Disney trained to drive and repair ambulances in the Great War? He didn’t ship out until after peace was

declared, but he served six months in France.”

“So . . . what?” Maybeck said bluntly. “What does that have to do with anything?”

“Gypsies!” Wayne said. “Mr. Disney has a great love of magic. I’ve always wondered where that came from. And I have a theory.” He stopped, awaiting their interest.

“Okay,” Maybeck said impatiently. “Let’s hear it.”

“I’ve often thought a European witch or conjurer had something to do with Mr. Disney’s love of magic. Maybe one enchanted him. Once he came home from the war, everything started going great for him.”

“That’s . . . an interesting theory,” Willa said, kindly. She considered mentioning what she’d heard in Walt’s apartment, but decided to tread carefully. The fact that the two girls were looking for a wand—Mickey’s wand?—interested her. “Does anyone think we should be looking for Mickey’s wand instead of Walt’s pen?”

“Mickey doesn’t have a wand,” Wayne said. “A tail, but no wand!”

“He does in *Fantasia*,” Philby said, reminding him.

“You mean his conductor’s baton?” Wayne said. “True enough. I hadn’t thought of that one.”

Maybeck turned to Wayne. “Where does Walt do the most drawing? His favorite place?”

“He always seems to have a pen or pencil in hand. But a pen like that?” Wayne shook his head. “If I were

him, I'd want to be able to use it when I needed it, but keep it safe, too, put it someplace where I wouldn't lose it."

"But someplace easy to get at," Maybeck said, "if he still uses it, that is."

"There is something else to consider," Wayne said. "He'd have to make sure that Lillian, his wife, would be able to find the pen if anything happened to him. Mr. Disney travels a lot. Airplanes. Trains. He's a practical man. He'd want either Lillian or Roy, his brother and business partner, to be able to find it. Maybe both."

"Which leaves us where, exactly?" Finn asked.

"We're toast." Maybeck shook his head.

"Toast?" Wayne asked.

"An expression," Willa said. "We have a lot of strange expressions. It means we're cooked—we're in trouble."

"Ah! Well, I like toast," Wayne said. "Buttered, with cinnamon." He licked his lips. "Gee whiz, that made me hungry!" He looked out at five dumbfounded expressions. "What I'm trying to say is that I doubt very much if Mr. Disney would leave any mention of such a special pen in any kind of will or note or legal thingamajig. No lawyers or stuff like that. Gosh, the person he'd trust the most to get the pen to Lillian would be Roy. Mr. Disney trusts Roy with everything. Rumor is Disneyland

wouldn't have been built if it weren't for Roy believing in Walt. His own board of directors didn't want Mr. Disney to build this place."

"Where's Roy's office?" Charlene asked.

"At the studio in Burbank," Wayne answered.

"I don't mean to be Mr. Negative," Philby said, "but given that our projections seem to barely work inside the park, I don't see how the five of us are going to get to Burbank to search an office."

"He also has a day office above the Story Book Shop on Main Street USA. And I can drive. I could go to Burbank and snoop around for you."

"We can't ask you to do that, Wayne," Finn said immediately. Then he caught himself. "It's super-duper nice of you to offer," he added, trying to sound like young Wayne, "but if you got caught, if you lost your job . . . well, let's just say it's incredibly important you keep this job for a very long time. It's probably more important than the pen."

Wayne whistled as the five others nodded. "Golly, that's a nice thing to say, Finn."

"It's the truth," Philby told him. "We need to protect you, Wayne. If anyone's going to snoop around, it's got to be the five of us. You have to keep doing your job like always."

"We could look in Roy's office here," Charlene said.

“Walt does all his real work at the studios,” Willa said. “I don’t know about Roy.”

“Roy, too,” Wayne said. “Though his office here is more convenient in a lot of ways, I’m sure.”

“Walt might keep it here,” Maybeck said, “to help with construction plans. It must have taken more than a little magic to get something like this started.”

“You can say that again,” said Wayne. “Just look around, would ya?”

They did, and Willa saw a Disneyland so different from the one she knew that it made her catch her breath. It was, in many ways, like looking into the eyes of a baby. All the sparkle and promise of great things to come. Sure, the flowers and trees needed time to grow. There were great gaps between attractions that new ideas would fill. But the streamers and flags made it so American and wonderful. And authentic. The signs were hand-painted wood. The music was from real bands, not recordings. Disneyland on opening day looked a little like an Old West town with carnival attractions, raw and ready for the years of growth that lay ahead.

“All this, despite the problems,” Wayne said, innocently enough.

“Problems? What problems?” Philby asked. All the Keepers leaned in slightly toward Wayne, collectively aware of what problems in the parks often implied.

“The stuff Mr. Linkletter didn’t tell the people watching TV.”

“Such as?” Willa inquired.

“Well, for one thing, in case you didn’t notice, the place was packed. You want to know why? Mr. Disney invited seven thousand members of the press from all around the world. That’s what today’s opening was supposed to be: reporters, radio people.”

“And?” Charlene said.

“Are you kidding? There were over twenty thousand guests today. Twenty, not seven! No one was prepared. Food service, you name it.”

“How’d that happen?” Philby asked.

“I heard it was counterfeit tickets. Fourteen thousand counterfeit tickets. The public outnumbered the press two to one. It was a nightmare.”

“It seemed all right to me,” Willa said.

“Well, that’s good, isn’t it? That’s the way Mr. Disney wants it. But it could have gone very badly. Very, very badly. And think of the reviews we’d get if it had.”

The five kids looked back and forth between them. Finn spoke for the group. “So the counterfeiting could have sabotaged the park, made it look bad, hurt its reputation.”

“It could, still. We haven’t read the reviews yet. And there’s tomorrow to think about. Opening Day for the

public, and a VIP reception at the Golden Horseshoe. That had better be Fat City.”

The idea of a world without CNN and Twitter and Instagram, without instant news and constant feedback, took some getting used to. “But it was on live TV. The biggest live show ever telecast,” Philby said.

“The newspapers come out in the morning. Mr. Disney may get copies later tonight. I have no idea. My fingers are crossed for good reviews.”

“You said ‘problems.’” Willa’s voice was barely above a whisper. “Plural. We know of some of them, but can you refresh our memories, please?”

“Well, gee whiz! There was the drinking fountains!” Wayne shook his head. “The water union went on strike late last night. They cut our water supply in half. At 7:30 in the morning, Mr. Disney had to choose between water in the toilets or water in the water fountains. He picked the toilets, thank goodness. Think of the reviews we’d get with no working toilets! And then there’s the asphalt.”

“The asphalt,” Charlene said.

“We hit a whole bunch of delays. A lot of the asphalt wasn’t laid until late Friday, and we’ve had very hot days. Did any of you happen to see the women getting their high heels stuck in the asphalt? Thank goodness most all of the reporters are men or we’d really

be in trouble.”

“You mentioned delays. What other kinds?” Philby asked. He saw in the faces of the other Keepers the same concern he felt: sabotage. Someone had tried to ruin opening day for the press—it couldn’t all be put down to coincidence and bad luck.

“I’ll clue you in: the company kept telling us they couldn’t deliver the asphalt.”

“So, to recap,” Finn said, catching Philby’s eye, “someone counterfeited and gave away fourteen thousand tickets; the water union just happened to go on strike the night before the park opened; and the asphalt company had repeated ‘delays’? Is that about it?”

“Can anyone spell ‘Overtakers’?” Maybeck asked.

“I beg your pardon?” Wayne said.

“I think,” Willa said, “that it’s time I share something.” Her calm tone won everyone’s attention. “When Philby and I were stuck in Walt’s closet, I heard two maids mention that they were searching for a wand.”

“A wand?” Wayne asked. “That’s an oddball thing to say.”

“Mickey’s wand,” Maybeck muttered. “Like you said earlier.”

“They were following orders, these two,” Willa said. “The OTs, or a force like them, are already here. They’re after the magic. They want to control it.”

“A man named Hollingsworth met up with them.” Finn felt unreasonably small, like the air around him was suddenly heavier.

“Hollingsworth?” Wayne said. “That can’t be right. He was fired by Mr. Disney. He’s been nothing but trouble for the company.”

“Guys,” Willa said, “Disneyland opened today for the first time. That means as of today, the Disney villains are no longer just movie characters or fairy tales. Today—”

“—They’re for real,” Philby finished her sentence as his projection went pale.

“They have purpose,” Willa said ominously. “They have a place, a way to get organized. And I’m afraid that whoever—whatever—is behind them is just getting started.”