

FREE PREVIEW

WHAT IF YOUR ONLY CHOICE IS TO TRUST A DEAD GIRL?



BOOK II OF THE DARK MATTER TRILOGY

DECEPTION

T E R R I T O R Y

It's all lies. Don't believe the lies.

SHAY, ONE OF THE RARE SURVIVORS of a deadly epidemic, has surrendered herself to the authorities because she believes she's a carrier of the disease. Along with other survivors, she unwillingly becomes a test subject in an effort to find a cure.

Meanwhile, a heartbroken Kai is determined to find Shay. He learns survivors aren't carriers, and Shay sacrificed herself for nothing. Teaming up with the beautiful Freja, one of the many survivors who are being hunted and persecuted, Kai races to rescue Shay before it's too late. Ghostly Callie, the true carrier of the epidemic, will help in the search while she continues to hide her dark secrets.

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DECEPTION

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Charlesbridge

TEEN

This is an uncorrected advance excerpt.

2019 First U.S. Edition

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The stages of deception—shock, outrage, examination, tolerance, and acceptance—inevitably lead to veneration.

Deception can serve truth
as well as truth can unseat deception . . .
it's all a matter of perspective.

—Xander, *Multiverse Manifesto*

PART 1



SHOCK

Even an ending must have a beginning.

—Xander, *Multiverse Manifesto*

CHAPTER 1

CALLIE

I PANIC WHEN I RETURN to the house and my brother, Kai, isn't inside. Has he vanished while I was searching for Shay? Have they both left me behind?

But I soon find him behind the house, standing on the cliff and gazing at the sea. His arms are crossed, his body rigid. He stares at the waves breaking on the rocks, far below, like he is thinking of joining them.

I'm afraid.

Don't leave me too, Kai. I need you. I say the words even though I know he can't hear me. Shay wasn't just Kai's girlfriend and my friend: she was also the only one who could see or hear me. Now that she's gone I'm powerless to reach him.

I place myself between him and the cliff's edge. If I move close to him, I feel a resistance, the same as if I push against anything—a person, a rock, a door. They all feel the same to me. I stare at

his eyes. They're hazel—almost green now in the sun—and are full of rage and pain. He is my brother, and there is nothing I can do to help him. Nothing I could do to stop him if he decided to step over the edge. I could go with him, fly down the cliff, watch his body smash on the rocks and break and bleed and die, but I would just go on and on.

It's hard to die when you're already dead.

But I'm hurting too. Shay left *both* of us. I want to tell him this, and the frustration of not being seen or heard makes me howl and wave my fists at the sea.

Kai looks towards me, his eyes startled. Did he hear something?

When I screamed in the underground institute at the techs who vacuumed up my ashes after Dr. 1 had me cured in fire, they jumped. Then later one of them whistled along when I sang. Maybe Kai *can* hear me, even if only a little?

Kai! I'm here! I shout the words out with all that I am.

He frowns, then shakes his head, and turns and walks back to the house.

Maybe he can sense me, at least a little, but he doesn't believe it. At least I've interrupted whatever he was thinking as he stared at the rocks and the sea.

Inside he paces back and forth. He reaches into his pocket and takes out a letter. It looks all crinkled, like he'd rolled it into a ball and then smoothed it out again. He looks at it but moves it around too fast for me to see what it says.

He stuffs it back in his pocket and flops on to the sofa.

"Callie, are you there?"

I'm here, I'm here! I want to cry when I hear his voice; when I hear him say Callie.

"Shay's left. She says she didn't take you with her, that you'd want to stay with me. That I should talk to you." He wraps his arms around himself like he's trying to hold something in.

"She's gone to turn herself in at the air force base, to tell them she's a carrier and that the epidemic started here in Shetland.

In case . . . in case that goes wrong, she says we shouldn't follow. We should leave the island and go back to the mainland. Tell everyone we can about the origin and spread of the epidemic and don't let them cover it up.

"She says that I should tell you that she's *sorry*." His voice is bitter with anger. "Like being sorry makes it all right!" He raises his hand in a fist, but then his body seems to collapse in on itself. "Shay, how could you?" he whispers. He fights it, but his shoulders are shaking.

And . . . and . . . he's crying. Kai—my big brother—is *crying*?

This is so *wrong*. It makes me twist up inside like I'm about to cry, too, but tears are something I don't have anymore. And, even worse: there is a horrible feeling gnawing inside me.

It's my fault. Isn't it?

It's my fault Shay left. She thought she was contagious; that everyone—including her mother—caught it from her and got sick and died. I let her think this; I didn't tell her the truth.

I didn't tell her that it was me who was the carrier all along. It never occurred to her, what with me being dead: who ever heard of a contagious ghost? But all the major centers of the epidemic—from the beginning when it spread from Shetland to Aberdeen, then to Edinburgh, and then to Newcastle and beyond—were places I'd been. The disease always hit soon after I was there: it had to be me.

Later, when Shay got sick and survived, she could see and hear me. She was the only one who could after I was cured—apart from the dying. After that, the disease did follow wherever she went—but only because I was there too. She'd never even been to Aberdeen or Newcastle. She'd explained that away by saying there must have been other survivors in those places, but I never found any when I was there.

She would never have left Kai and me if I had told her the truth, but . . .

No!

It's not my fault; none of it. Everything goes back to Dr. 1.

He's the one who did this to me. He's the doctor who gave me the illness in his lab underground. When I survived and changed, he cured me in fire and turned me into whatever it is that I am now.

It's his fault.

Everything I've done from the beginning—getting Kai and Shay to come to this house on Shetland to find the source of the epidemic, and then not telling Shay that it's me who is the carrier, not her—was all to get at Dr. 1.

I wanted to go with Shay. Once she tells them Dr. 1 is the one who started the epidemic, they'll hunt him down. I want to be there when they find him. That's why I couldn't tell her the truth—she wouldn't have turned herself in if she'd known she wasn't the carrier.

But she left without me.

Why? Why didn't she take me with her?

Kai cries, and the rage and heat inside me strengthens, grows—a fury that could destroy and swallow the world.

Dr. 1 must pay for what he's done.

CHAPTER 2

SHAY

BEFORE I CAN finally take off the biohaard suit that the solders made me wear, I'm locked in a small, sealed room. Even without the suit, the claustrophobic feeling of not being able to breathe fully is still there. One wall of the room is glass—very thick glass.

Dr. Morgan is on the other side of this transparent wall with two men—older ones, not the same ones who came out to get me earlier. All three are in uniform. They're talking, but I can't hear them.

I knock on the glass. They continue talking, but then a moment later Dr. Morgan reaches for some controls, and I can hear them clearly.

"Hello, Shay. Sorry about the barrier." She gestures at the wall between us. "Are you more comfortable without the suit?"

I shrug. "Sure. Yes."

She smiles, but there is an edge to it.

“Now, Shay, we’ve found out a few things about you.” She looks at a tablet in her hands. “Such as . . . you are wanted in connection with a murder. Also, it says here that you were reported as immune?”

“I didn’t kill anybody!” Then I realize that’s not true: many, many people have died because of me, haven’t they? I sigh and cross my arms. “I mean, I didn’t shoot that boy they say I did.”

She nods, a careful look on her face, disbelief in her aura.

No. *No way*. Are they not going to believe anything I say because I was framed by SAR?

I grip the edges of the table between me and the glass and lean forward. “Listen to me. You have to listen.”

“We’re listening,” she says.

“I had the flu. I thought I was going to die. My mother did die.” I push the pain away. “And we went back to Killin—”

“We? That’d be you and Kai Tanzer, currently also wanted after mysteriously going missing from a police cell in Inverness. Do you know where he is now?”

“No. Anyway, I said I was immune, like Kai. We helped at the hospital tent in Killin. Then this creepy lieutenant from SAR—”

“SAR?”

“Special Alternatives Regiment of the army.”

She half raises an eyebrow, and I can see it: she’s never heard of this regiment. How can that be? I know this is an air force base, not an army one, but I wouldn’t have thought they were so separate that they didn’t know the names of each other’s regiments.

“Anyhow, this lieutenant—Kirkland-Smith, he said his name was—came looking for me and said he knew I was a survivor and that SAR were taking me away to help study the epidemic, but he was lying. They wanted to kill me.”

“How did you know he was lying?”

“I just did.”

“I see. Try this, Shay. I’ll tell you two things—one a lie, and one the truth, and you tell me which is which.”

“Seriously? Aren’t there more important things to be—”

“Humor me. Please.”

I stare back at her, then shrug my shoulders. I’ll go along with anything, if it’ll help them believe me. “Okay, fine,” I say.

“All right. My middle name is Hannah. My middle name is Helen.” As she speaks, I study her aura: the waves of color that surround her, unique to her, change with her thoughts and feelings. When she says *Helen* there are ripples of silver blue, and I feel the truth within them. When she says *Hannah* her aura is disturbed, with slashes of mustard and green—it’s a lie.

“You lied about Hannah; your middle name is Helen.”

“That’s just a fifty-fifty guess,” one of the men says. They’ve been silent until now. “Try again,” he says and gives me a list of ten possible middle names for himself.

I roll my eyes. “Your middle name is Monteroy. Congratulations on middle name weirdness. Can we carry on now?”

He nods.

“Impressive,” Dr. Morgan says. “Okay, so let’s just assume you knew this lieutenant was lying. And then?”

“I ran away. They shot at me and hit me in the ear.”

“That wasn’t that long ago. I didn’t notice any injury?”

I shrug. “I healed it.”

“Really.”

“Oh, for . . . Look.” I bite my lip, hard. A trickle of blood runs down my face and the pain helps me focus, to keep my temper.

“See? I’m bleeding.” And then I close my eyes and *reach* for the pain, reach inside me; to the blood and tissue and their components, down to a cellular level, then molecular, and atomic. Atoms are made up of particles; particles that can behave as waves—waves that can be influenced and changed. I heal my lip and wipe off the blood from before. The cut is gone. “And now I’m not.”

Dr. Morgan frowns. “I don’t know what trick that is, but—”

“It’s not a trick. It’s part of being a survivor.”

Her aura shifts; she’s pleased. She’s pleased I confirmed this?

“All right, then,” she says, “let’s say you are a survivor. Now let’s get back to this boy you shot—”

“I didn’t shoot anybody! A soldier from SAR shot at me, and Duncan pushed me out of the way and saved my life. The *soldier* shot Duncan.”

“Really?” She doesn’t believe me. If she doesn’t believe that, how will she believe anything else?

After everything we’ve been through, after having to leave Kai—I push that pain away, too, to save it for later—could it come down to this? That they won’t believe me? I focus on Dr. Morgan; disbelief shimmers through her aura.

And on top of everything else, I’m tired, hungry, and getting more and more angry with these word games. “Now you three are going to sit there and listen. Not another word, all right?” Tendrils of my anger whip out and find the part of their auras that allows their free will to speak, to form words, to stand up or do anything really, and I hold it fast. All they can do is listen.

And I tell them *everything*. About SAR kidnapping Kai to try to trap me; about how I rescued him; how we got away. That I came to Shetland to trace the cause of the epidemic. About the boat trip across to the island and the plague ship. About Dr. 1 and the research institute underground and what he was doing there with a particle accelerator: making and extracting quantum particles of some kind and using them as a biological weapon. He tested whatever he created on subjects and killed people. That it got out, and this is how the epidemic started. And then I tell them everywhere I’ve been and when as the epidemic followed me across country about a day behind. I leave out that Callie and Kai came here with me, but I tell them everything else.

When I finally stop talking, I’m exhausted—both from reliving the tale and from the effort of influencing all three of them at once. I release them.

“What did you do to us?” Dr. Morgan asks, her eyes round.

“You wouldn’t listen. I made you listen.”

There is fear on their faces, clear enough without even looking at their auras. They get up and almost run out of a door on their side of the glass.

At least they listened.

Uneasy, I wrap my arms around myself. Maybe that display wasn’t such a good idea. Maybe I’d have been better off keeping the things I can do to myself. But I didn’t plan to do that. I was angry, and it just sort of happened.

Too late to second-guess it now.

Someone comes to the door just as I’m falling asleep in the chair. He’s in a full biohazard suit and goes through the double airlock into my small room.

“Hi, Shay. I’m here to help you put on your suit.”

“And then what?”

“We’re flying you to England, to talk to some experts there about the Aberdeen flu.”

The knots inside me loosen. Did they believe at least part of what I said?

I get up and he holds out the suit; I step into it. Again I have to fight the automatic urge to push it away, to stop his hands doing up the seals.

“I’ll just adjust the ventilation,” he says and does something to the top of the suit before snapping it closed over my head. I’m so distracted by not wanting to be closed up inside of this thing that by the time I notice the deception in his aura, it’s too late.

There’s a funny taste and smell inside my suit. My head spins.

“What . . . what have you . . . done?” I manage to whisper the words, but the world is lurching—I’m falling. Like he was expecting this, he’s there, ready, and I feel his hands through the suit catching me.

Everything goes black.

CHAPTER 3

CALLIE

THE NEXT MORNING Kai has Shay's letter out again, but this time he uses it to copy the username and password to log on to a website. It's JIT, the one set up by Shay's best friend, Iona, who blogs about all kinds of weird stuff that she thinks may be news. Shay had said that Iona wants to be a journalist and JIT stands for journalist-in-training.

At the top of the blog list there is a draft post, the sort you can only see by logging in; it won't be public on the internet. Its title is "Shay??"

He clicks on it

Iona: Shay, answer me! Don't do this—it's too dangerous.

And how can you be sure you're a carrier? Shay?

Jealousy surges through me. Shay said she was my friend, but she left without me; she left without even saying goodbye. But she told Iona everything, didn't she?

Kai sighs and clicks "edit."

Kai: Iona—this is Kai. It's too late. She's gone. He saves it. Waits a moment. Is Iona online? He hits "refresh," and a new edit appears.

Iona: no no no. Is she all right? How could you let her go?

Kai: I didn't let her do anything. She left when I was asleep. Left me a letter with the login for JIT. Told me not to follow her, to go back to mainland Scotland and spread the word about the cause of the epidemic.

He hits "refresh" again. And again. Finally:

Iona: She makes sense. But . . .

Kai: Maybe. I don't care if it is sense. It's wrong.

Iona: What are you going to do?

Kai: I'm going to go to the air force base. I've thought all night and I have to find out if she's all right or I'll go insane. I wanted to tell you so somebody knew, in case . . . well. You know.

Iona: Okay, I understand. Get in touch when you can. Be careful.

Kai washes quickly, dresses. Eats some crackers and canned fruit out of the cupboards. There's not much left here; he'll have to leave soon no matter what as there will be nothing to eat.

Yesterday's sunshine is gone. Dark clouds scuttle across the sky, and it's drizzling. As he walks across this untouched part of the island, then over the sand to the burned wasteland that is most of the rest of it, the rain comes down harder. He keeps walking.

I'm scared. What will they do to him when he gets there?

What did they do to Shay?

Maybe when I was searching the island for her I couldn't sense her because . . . because . . . I was too late. Maybe they shot her like that SAR lieutenant tried to do before.

The air force base is miles away. By the time we get there, Kai is soaked. The base is quiet; there aren't any people moving around like there were when I came here the day before to look for Shay.

Kai walks up to the gate. That's odd: there isn't anyone on guard duty like there was yesterday either.

Kai peers through, looks around, then opens the gate. He walks across the road to the first temporary building.

He knocks, opens the door. "Hello?" he calls out. There's no answer.

It's as if they've all left, or—

I stop when it hits me. Yesterday I searched the whole base for Shay, didn't I? There were people everywhere then, people I went up close to. I was so focused on trying to find Shay that I didn't even think about what I was doing or what might happen to them.

Kai continues on to another, larger building. When I follow, that is when I start to hear it: the pain.

It is here.

He hesitates, like he can hear it too. Then he goes in.

This is where everyone is. There are the cries and the silences—the dying and the dead, and I'm full of horror. *I did this.* I've done it before, many times, many places, but that was before I had worked it out—before I knew that I was the carrier. That I was the one who made people suffer and die.

Kai, horror in the set of his face, hesitates by the door. Some of the ill are with it enough to notice he is there, to turn and stare.

"Leave," one says, in a weak voice. "Before you catch it."

Kai walks over to his camp bed and kneels down.

"I'm immune. I can't catch it."

"Lucky you."

"Maybe you can help me, though. Someone I know—a girl, Shay McAllister—came here, and—"

"That bitch," he says, and Kai recoils. "She did this to us. All of us. They put her in a suit, but it mustn't have been soon enough to stop it spreading." His face screws up with pain, then clears. He stares at me. "Who are you?"

I'm Callie. Tell Kai I'm here!

His eyes move from me to Kai and back again. "Callie says she's here."

Kai is shocked. "You can see her?"

It's because you're dying.

"Yes. Callie says it's because I'm dying. What a surprise."

"Where is Shay?" Kai says. "What have you done to her?"

"Nothing. But if I'd only known, I would have shot her myself. They flew her off Shetland before this hit."

"Where did they take her?"

"I don't know—I heard it was to some secret air force base out of the quarantine zone. Wherever it is, they're in trouble."

The whole time he talks to Kai, he stares at me. "What are you?" he finally says, still staring.

I stare back at him and move closer. He's on the very edge of death now.

Don't talk about Shay like that. I'm your worst nightmare, not her. I spread the disease that is killing you.

I see the understanding register in his eyes just as the blood starts to come out of them. And then he's still. Dead. After what he said about Shay, I don't even care.

Kai looks around the room, shakes his head. Walks for the door, fast, as if he wants to run away from what he has seen and heard.

"Come on, Callie," he says. "There's nothing we can do to help them now. At least we know Shay isn't here anymore and we can leave Shetland."

Anywhere is good, so long as it is off this island. I hate being here. But if we leave, will what happened to me here always stick to me like filth, inside, wherever I go? Filth that spreads out and causes suffering all around me.

"So, we have to go back over the sea," Kai says. "Just like Shay told us to do." He swears under his breath and starts striding out, putting distance between us and the dead and the dying.

Kai pauses on the top of the hill, turns, and looks back. "Did they really catch that from her?" His face is pale.

"Oh, Shay," he murmurs under his breath. "What now?"

CHAPTER 4

SHAY

THERE IS SOMETHING more than the nothing that came before it. Some awareness, some sense of my body, that I'm breathing deep and even, and I'm completely, deliciously relaxed. I push these sensations away; I don't want them. I want to go back to floating in nothingness. In nothing, there is no pain, no loss, no decisions to make or actions to carry out. I want to stay there.

There is a dim sound; a click.

I swallow. My mouth is dry, tastes funny, and—

Awareness floods back. Was I drugged? Where am I? I struggle to move, to open my eyes, but even my eyelids are heavy.

Instead, I *reach* out to what is around me without using my ordinary senses.

Nothing.

Nothing? How can there be no life of any sort around me?

Panic gives me the energy to open my eyes, to stir. I swallow again and cough.

I'm in a small room on a narrow bed. There's a toilet in the corner, a sink, a blanket over me. And that is it.

There is *nothing* I can reach: no humans or animals or insects, not even a solitary spider.

I struggle to sit up. My head is pounding, and I'm thirsty. There's a plastic cup on the side of the sink. I reach out, turn on the tap, and fill it. My hands are a little shaky and water slops as I drink, leaving a cold trail down my front.

I reach down to brush at the water I spilled on myself, and there is a further shock: I'm wearing some sort of shapeless gown, like from a hospital, and nothing else. Someone took off my clothes and put me in this while I was unconscious?

My skin is crawling. I feel sick. I wrap my arms around myself, but that isn't enough. I grab the blanket and wrap that around me too.

I have this creepy-crawly sensation like there is someone watching me, even though I can't sense anyone there. My eyes hunt around and every wall looks even, solid—the ceiling and floor too.

That's when I realize there are no windows or doors; at least, none that I can see. There must be: how else did I get in here?

That weird feeling of being watched is still on my skin, as if eyes leave fingerprints I can feel. Could there be a hidden watcher?

I swallow again.

"Hello?" I say, tentative. My voice feels rusty, like I haven't used it for a while.

I try again, and this time it is stronger: "Hello? Is there anybody there?"

My voice seems to echo off the bare walls, ceiling, and floor before bouncing back to my ears.

No one answers. Can't anyone hear me?

Panic is rising up inside, waves that build and build, and I'm shaking. Where am I? I don't want to be here.

"Let me out of here! Let me out!"

I say it loud, and louder again, until I'm screaming.

CHAPTER 5

CALLIE

KAI'S HANDS ARE SHAKING as he types an edit on JIT for Iona.

Kai: Everyone I saw at the air force base had the flu or was already dead. They think they caught it from Shay. One of them told me she was flown off Shetland last night before they started getting sick.

He hits “save,” and has a long drink from a bottle of red wine that he found in the back of a cupboard.

Iona: So . . . she was right? She's definitely a carrier?

Kai: It looks that way. Her reasoning before was sound too. I just didn't want to believe it.

Iona: Me neither. Any idea where they may have taken her?

Kai: The one I spoke to said it was to a secret air force base outside the quarantine zone, but he didn't know where it was. It could be anywhere.

Iona: Okay. I'll do some research, see if I can narrow that down a little. What are you going to do now?

Kai has another drink from the bottle.

Kai: Leave Shetland, like Shay said. I have to try to find her. And the doctor who is responsible for all of this.

Iona: How will you get back here?

Kai: The people on the boat that brought us said to return to the cave they hide in during the day and wait for a ride back. But that boat didn't make it: they all died of the flu.

Iona: I know. Shay told me.

Kai: But I'm sure they said there's more than one boat that goes there, so I'll go and wait, see if one shows up. I don't know what else to try.

Iona: Okay. If that doesn't work, let me know; I'll see if I can find out anything about other ways off Shetland. But there's just one problem.

Kai: Only one?

Iona: I was going to suggest destroying the laptop you are using, or throwing it in the sea—to make sure if the owner returns that they can't trace what you've done on it and track us down. But you can't do that if you might need to use it again.

Iona starts giving Kai detailed instructions for erasing history off the computer once they're finished, and I drift away.

My original excitement that Kai knew for sure I'm with him has faded. He still can't hear me; he seems to have forgotten to talk to me since we left the air force base, even though that guy told him I was there.

I go outside. The sun is low in the sky, though it isn't dark, not really. Shay said this far north in the summer, it doesn't get dark—just dim. The summer dim, she called it.

The rain has stopped—not that I care—and I stand on the cliff where I'd found Kai yesterday. I can't feel the wind but I can see it is there in the fierce shaking of the long grass, the white froth of the angry sea below.

On impulse I dive off the cliff, down, down, down . . .

Then I stop and hang in mid-air, just where the waves break on the rocks. Spray flies all around me.

In the thin light, I can see my hands if I hold them up: an outline of darkness. Water splashes through them as if they're not there, and I can't even feel it.

I'm weighed down with not being able to touch, to feel. I drop lower and slide into the water. Rocks under the waves stretch out from the cliff, and they stop me going down further; the water doesn't. It should be cold but there is no feeling of that either.

If I could dive off a cliff like Kai could and have everything just stop—would I?

Darkness. Death. That's all I am. I could stay here alone forever and who would care? Kai only knew I was here because Shay told him; if I left now he wouldn't even know the difference.

Without Shay there to tell her, my mom didn't know I was there either. I had to leave her to go with Kai. The loss is an ache that stretches on and on.

And my father? I can't even remember him. I know his name, from things Shay and Kai said—Dr. Alex Cross. He was Kai's stepfather, and Kai hates him. Kai thinks he had something to do with what happened to me, though Shay and my mom didn't seem to agree. But what does that matter if I don't even remember anything about him?

I have nothing.

But there is one thing more that I am; something that I know will pull me away from this place and off the island. It still feels hot inside me even though the cold of this water and the warmth of the sun are things I can't feel any more.

Hot, red, and strong:

Anger.

There is a distant crash up above.

Kai?

Panic has me blur back up to the top of the cliff and into the house.

He stands there in the front room, red spreading on the light carpet, splashed against the wall, but he's all right—it isn't blood. It's wine. Broken glass is scattered from one side of the room to the other. He must have thrown what was left of that bottle of wine against the wall with a lot of force to make as much mess as this.

His fists are clenched, and even though he can't feel me I stand next to him, hold my fists next to his.

He can't hear me, he can't see me, but we are in this together.

Anger isn't a big enough word to cover how Dr. 1 makes me feel. He made this illness that changed Shay and me; he cured me, too—burned me in fire to make me what I am now.

Together, Kai and I will find him and make him suffer.

PART 2



OUTRAGE

Human emotions and reactions in response to given stimuli are often predictable; human actions frequently are not. They are rarely governed by the rules of logic or evolution.

—*Xander, Multiverse Manifesto*

CHAPTER 1

KAI

IT IS BETTER TO MOVE. The rain is good, too—being cold and wet gives me something else to feel.

The tight feeling across my chest is still there, but when I'm walking fast like I am now, I have to keep breathing to keep moving; my heart must keep beating.

I won't fail again. I *can't*.

Shay, I will find you.

And then? What then?

Then can wait. Find her—find her first.

My feet falter when I reach the grassy place above the cliffs where Shay fell asleep against my shoulder in the sun after we climbed up from the beach.

I can feel her body, warm and curled against mine, and smell her hair, still damp from the waterfall—she was just here.

Move. Keep moving.

I start to climb straight down the cliff; not the easier way we came up. The rain has stopped now, but my foot slips on wet rock.

My hands and feet scabble against rock and one hand slams into a crevice. There is sharp pain in my palm but I hold on. My feet search side to side, find a toehold so I can ease weight off my hand. And there's an *almost sound*, like an echo of a shout in my mind, like I thought I heard on that cliff behind the house yesterday.

"Is that you, Callie?" I say. "Don't worry, I'm all right."

I take more care, reach the bottom, then inspect my hand. Just a cut in the fleshy part—a little blood. It's nothing.

Though if Mom were here, she'd be grabbing disinfectant and a bandage. Then I'm remembering cutting myself on Callie's broken glass teddy bear in her room, and Mom cleaning and bandaging it. She said she wished all my hurts were so easy to fix. But they just get worse and worse, don't they?

The tide is farther out than it was when the rowboat left Shay and me here, but the sea isn't as calm. I could wait see if it improves? Undecided, I stare at the water.

Keep moving.

I take off my T-shirt and jeans—wrap them in plastic and put them inside my backpack with the last of the food and bottled water I could find at the house.

One foot in the water, I curse under my breath—it's so bloody cold. Quick in is best, isn't it? I take a few steps to deeper water and dive in.

The shock chokes my breath for real now, and it's hard to reach out with my arms and swim when it is telling me to get out, to wrap something around myself and get warm.

I swim, hard, to try to get some warmth into arms and legs that feel clumsy and numb. The cove is soon behind me and the rocks cleared; the water is getting deeper. Now it's much rougher. The cave is along the coast to the left, but when I try to head in that direction the current fights against me, pushing me across to the

right. Instead, I head further out to sea, away from the island—just edging to the left gradually in ever-rougher water.

Each stroke is getting harder. Spots dance in my vision.

Exhausted, I close my eyes to rest for a moment, floating, letting the swirling cold water take me where it will. My thoughts are jumpy and scattered. Shay and Mom and Callie's faces flit in and out, and . . .

NO!

I jump, open my eyes. That was less of an echo and more of a shout.

“Right, Callie. On we go.” I make myself start swimming harder across to the left. The undertow is less now I'm further out and I overshoot the cave on purpose, then start to cut back in to the island. The current strengthens and drags me to the right once again as I swim for the shore.

Gradually the sea quiets. In the shadow of cliffs, I swim for the dark gap in the rocks.

CHAPTER 2

CALLIE

KAI PULLS HIMSELF UP on a rock near the entrance of the cave, breathing heavily, not moving.

I feel like I'm breathing as hard, my heart thumping as fast. He kept going further out, then just stopped—floating in the water, eyes shut, being dragged by the sea away from the island.

He definitely heard me that time. When I screamed at him to swim to the shore, he actually jumped. Then I was really scared: people only hear me if they're about to die. How close was he to giving up?

I'm so focused on Kai, on watching the movement of his chest as he breathes, that at first I don't see it.

Farther inside the cave behind us.

It's a boat. It's nothing like the one we came here in, not at all. It's white, sleek, and pretty while the other one was rough and heavy. The sails are down now, but that is what it is: a sailboat.

It's quiet. Is anyone there?

Kai is stirring behind me now. He sits up on the rock, still breathing hard, and his eyes must have adjusted to the darkness by now. He sees it, he must see it. He turns towards it. His eyes widen.

The water inside the cave is almost still. Kai slips back into it and swims the few strokes to where the boat is tied. He clammers on to rocks next to it.

"Hello?" he says.

There is no sound.

He's shivering even more violently now, goose bumps standing up on his arms and legs. He takes off the backpack and gets his clothes out, then struggles to pull them on as they stick to his wet skin.

"Hello?" he says again, then covers his nose and mouth with his hand like something smells bad.

I slip into the boat.

It doesn't take long to find them.

Three red-haired children. A woman with long red hair, lying next to them. Their eyes are open, staring; dark, dried blood around them. They've been dead a while.

And sitting next to them? A man. Alive. He would be tall if stretched out, but he is folded in on himself on the deck. His arms are wrapped around his knees, and he's humming quietly, eyes closed, his body rocking back and forth.

Can you hear me? I try. No flicker of response, so either he's ignoring me or he's not dying himself.

Kai climbs up the short ladder by the rocks and looks into the boat. His white face goes even paler.

CHAPTER 3

KAI

I CLEAR MY THROAT. “Hello. Can I come aboard?”

No answer. The only sounds are the gentle lapping of the water and bird calls, muted, from outside the cave. And the tuneless humming from the man who ignores me. Eyes closed, he rocks slightly back and forth next to what must be his family—they were his family. I try to avert my eyes, but they are drawn again and again.

I’ve seen the dead—bodies of all ages, shapes and sizes that I carried to the pyres, first in Newcastle, then in Killin. I could close myself off to what they were and do what had to be done, but they always came back to haunt me at odd moments—lurking in corners of my mind, appearing in my dreams late at night.

But not like this. He’s arranged them together at his feet, on the deck, and they’ve been there for some time. There is decay, and the particular horrifying smell of rotting flesh, and my senses

are imprinted with things I know will stay inside in places I don't want to visit but will again and again.

This boat is a mausoleum, and I want to back away.

But I can't leave him. He's not got sick in however long they've been like this; he must be immune like I am. To leave him would be for him to starve and die slowly, alone with their ghosts.

I climb into the boat. Stepping away from them and focusing on him, I keep my eyes on his thin shoulders, dark hair. His head is turned down.

"What's your name?" I say.

He doesn't look up. There's no answer, but there is a small break in his humming. It resumes again.

"I'm Kai."

This time his head moves a little. His eyes flick up to me, then slide away.

I maneuver myself to sit down next to him and lean against the railing, with him between them and me. "Were they your family? I'm sorry."

No response. He hums a little louder as if trying to block me out.

"Do you need a drink?" I get a water bottle from my pack, hold it out, and then touch the man's shoulder. He flinches and looks up.

"Here." I hold the water bottle by his mouth and angle it back a little so it splashes his lips. He licks his lips, tilts his head back, and I hold up the bottle so he can have a proper drink. He swallows, coughs, and then turns his head away from the bottle.

"This is wrong," he whispers. "I'm waiting to die. That won't help."

"You're not sick, though, are you?" He shakes his head slightly. "You must be immune like me."

No answer. His arms are wrapped back around his knees, his body still rocking.

I lean back against the side of the boat. There is nothing I can do to help him; nothing I can even imagine about the pain he is in

right now. And then my blood is rushing, my muscles clenching, and I'm *angry*, full of red-rage fury—at what has happened to this man's family, to Callie, to so many people—all the bodies I carried to the pyres. Now, back in England and the rest of Scotland, it's probably even worse.

And somebody did this. It's not an accident of nature, some flu mutation or new virus caught from a mosquito or a monkey in a forest—somebody *made* this happen.

I swear loudly.

He turns, looks at me. His humming stops.

I do it again, even louder, and slam my hand down hard on the deck. "It's wrong that this happened to your family. To you. To me. To the world! It's not fair!"

"It's my fault," he says. "Sally wanted to leave ages ago." His voice is hoarse, and I hold out the water bottle. This time he takes it in his hands, has a long drink, and then gives it back. "I wouldn't go, kept thinking things would get sorted out, that they'd find a cure. That we'd be all right. Then when she finally talked me around, it was too late. The kids started to get sick before we were even halfway here."

"But what are you going to do about it?"

"Do about it? What do you mean?"

"Listen to me."

He shakes his head, puts his arms back around his knees, rocking. Humming.

But I tell him: about Shay, that she is a survivor, and why we came to Shetland. Where the illness started: underground in a lab. That someone did it *on purpose*, and that the army is involved somehow—that it's *their* fault, not his. That Shay turned herself in to the air force when she realized she was a carrier. That now we need to leave this island, go back to mainland Scotland, and make sure those responsible are held accountable.

He doesn't look at me the whole time I'm talking. He stays as he is, as if he's pretending I'm not here, he's not here, nothing exists.

When I'm finished, there is silence for a while, a long while.
Then he stops rocking.

He doesn't look up. He says something, but it is muffled against his knees, not loud enough to hear.

“What's that?”

He turns back towards me. His face is still pale but where all was dull in his eyes before, now there is a trace of a spark, of anger—of fire.

“Bobby. My name is Bobby.” He holds out a hand and I grasp it, hold it tight.

Bobby leans forwards against me and cries.

CHAPTER 4

CALLIE

THERE'S A SMALL LIFEBOAT. and that's where they put Bobby's family. Kai tries to help but Bobby insists on doing it himself and fusses over how to have them—the smallest child, a boy, on his mother, the two girls either side. Their favorite toys with them. When he tucks a soft blanket all around them with trembling hands, there is such care on his face, even when he soaks it with petrol. Bobby's eyes are dry now, as if the tears before were all he had left, but it is all over Kai's face that he's struggling not to break down.

Near dusk Bobby uses the engine to maneuver the sailboat out of the cave and away from the island, with the lifeboat towed behind. The sea is bigger than it was earlier; the wind has picked up. When they judge they've gone far enough away from the shore, Bobby pulls the lifeboat up to the sailboat.

Now he needs help. He can't bring himself to do it.

Kai uses matches to light the torch they made. He holds it aloft, then throws it on to the lifeboat. When they're sure it has caught they release the boat and push it away with an oar.

Flames dance into the sky.



Later, Bobby shouts instructions at Kai and between the two of them—Bobby knowing what to do, and Kai having the strength to do it—they somehow get the sails up. The wind is steady and the stars in the sky clear as we sail through the night and next day for Scotland.

CHAPTER 5

KAI

THE ST. ANDREWS MARINA is deserted when Bobby bumps us up gently against the pier. I clamber along the side of the sailboat, unwrap the ropes, and sling them over the pilings.

We'd thought about what to say if challenged by the coast guard or anyone at the marina, but it seems authorities only care if you're trying to leave. No one wants to come here unless they belong.

Now that we've docked, Bobby doesn't seem to want to leave his boat. He goes below, and after a while, I follow. He's in the cabin, touching things, picking them up and putting them down again.

He turns and sees me. "Wish I'd burned the lot," he mutters.

"We wouldn't be here if you had."

He draws in a shuddering breath. "No. And so I have to go on." He opens a drawer, takes out some keys, and gestures towards the ladder. "Come on."

Bobby climbs off the boat, and we walk along the pier to the harbor. He doesn't look back.

Apart from the sounds of the sea and some seagulls, everything is quiet, still. There are no people anywhere.

There's a car park behind the jetty and we go there. "Here," he says, pointing at a four-wheel drive, and he hits the key fob in his hand. The lights flash and it beeps. We get in; he starts it. He shakes his head. "Seems so weird that this is still here. That I can just get in and start the car that we left behind."

"How long has it been?"

"I lost count of the days, but not many. Though it is a lifetime—four lifetimes—ago. Over in a minute."

I don't say anything. There is nothing I can say.

We drive along a deserted road: deserted, as in no one else is driving along it, but every now and then a car is empty and abandoned, and he has to maneuver around it. The traffic lights are dead—there's no power? Everywhere we look is dark, silent.

We get to a junction, and Bobby starts to take the left turn. He stops, hesitates, then reverses a little and turns right. "Change of plan," he says. "We're going to the pub."

"The pub?"

"Tonight is their wake. Tomorrow will come soon enough."

He pulls in front of a big, old country pub. It's cold, dark. The sun is almost gone now. We get out and walk to the door. It's locked. I peer through the window but can't see anything in the dim shadows.

Bobby picks up a brick that was on the ground, the sort probably used to prop the door open on a fine day. He shrugs and knocks on the door. "It seems wrong not to knock," he says. But then he uses the brick to smash a window.

I help him kick out the panes of glass, and we climb in. It's almost dark outside now and even darker inside, and we stand, waiting, while our eyes adjust.

"There are tea lights. They used them at dinner." Bobby feels

his way through a door to tables; we gather a few together. Matches he finds in a drawer behind a desk. He lights a match and the thin flame wavers as his hand shakes. I guide it to a candle and the wick catches.

“Sit,” I say, and push Bobby on to a bar stool. I go behind the bar. “What’ll it be?”

Bobby tells their stories over a few pints of beer. His hands and voice are steadier now as he lights four candles. One for Sally, who changed his life forever when he met her, here, by this bar a dozen years ago. One for their first daughter, Erin, the daydreamer—so like her mother. One for Maddy, who was never still or quiet and loved to run. And one for Jackson, so small they were only just starting to know who he was.

And I don’t know how he can do this. How he can sit and talk and not scream with rage. I want to shake him, to make him find the anger that will help keep him going.

The way mine does me.

CHAPTER 6

CALLIE

KAI'S SLEEP IS TROUBLED. He's caught in a dream—not a good one—he must be. He twists and shudders, and I wish I could wake him.

If I could sleep, what dreams would I have? I shrug. Nightmares couldn't be much worse than here and now.

I leave Kai at Bobby's house. I can't see the sun yet, but the sky is starting to lighten.

The signs say this place is St. Andrews. Bobby's house is a grand one, and there was another car at the house—a sporty red one—and he's got that sailboat, too. He's got all the nice things and had the matching family and vacations along with it. Their faces smile in frames on the walls—in swimsuits on sandy beaches and in ski gear in the snow.

It doesn't care who you are, though, does it? Rich, poor; young, old; loved, hated—where you are from or the color of your skin—it just doesn't care.

The whole town is empty and dark. No power, no sound—no people sounds, that is. There are birds and the surf and some barking dogs running loose here and there, and that is it.

The only people I find are the silent ones; the dead.

Mostly they're at home, tucked into bed or on their sofas, together or alone. Some have been dead longer than others. No one is collecting them, taking them to pyres to burn. They're just left to rot where they died.

Not as many people as you'd think for the number of houses, though. Did some get away?

And where are the immune, like Kai and Bobby? I'm curious and look closer, everywhere I can, but no one stirs. In a place this size there should be some immune—something like five percent of people are immune, isn't that what they said at that virtual meeting they had in Newcastle?

Where have they all gone?

THE
DARK MATTER
TRILOGY

CONTAGION JULY 2019

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EVOLUTION SUMMER 2020

TERI TERRY is the award-winning author of several books and has been published in the US, Germany, Australia, Canada, and France. Her latest trilogy was inspired by her interest in evolution: “What if an unexpected evolutionary twist from an illness led to some people becoming very different? What if you were falling in love with somebody and they changed?”

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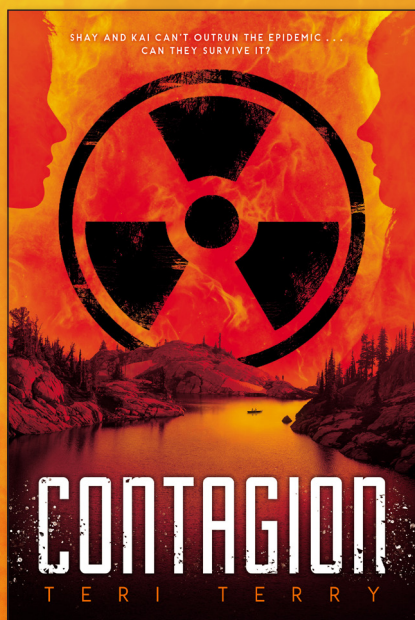
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