Chloé

"Happy eighth anniversary, Finn," I said to the ghost living inside me.

M*O*'s General Store was finally mercifully empty. I stood behind the counter, leaning against the wall, chilling, if only for a minute. Just enough time to ask the much repeated, yet never-answered question always burning in the back of my mind. "Are you finally going to spill why you chose me?"

My ghost's coolness shifted ever so slightly in my chest. I smiled. One of Finn's tells. An answer of some sort was coming.

But Alice Kyteler appeared outside the plate-glass window walking along Esplanade. My hands splayed and went clammy. Finn's cool mass changed direction inside.

"Crap. If she notices I'm selling my own merchandise in her store, I'll definitely lose my job." I wanted to sweep the thrift-store and shoplifted items dressed as "antiquities" from the large table on the far side of the shop. No time. Why was Alice around during opening hours?

My ghost puckered our abbreviated form of Morse code on the back of my arm, just below my shoulder, *"Maybe she won't notice if you stay calm."*

"Yeah, right, like she's not going to notice my little *Antique Row* and *Cash Only* signs instead of her boujee display of cheese boards and jewelled frames."

The edge of the counter was slippery beneath my sweaty grip. Alice moved past the second window like a valentine come to life — gobs of red hair curling around her heart-shaped face and shoulders. I'd recognize her anywhere, even if I'd only come face-to-face with her a handful of times.

Alice's petite frame strolled past the third window. My heart raced.

Finn twitched the muscle on the back of my arm, *"She may be out doing errands and just walking by."*

True. Alice lived above the shop. Plus, it was almost closing time. "Fingers crossed." I held my breath as she walked alongside the fourth window.

Without this job, I'd be out my awesome above-minimum-wage income and have nowhere to run my side hustle. I was already a burden to my older brother. Our student loans only covered college tuition, so we'd go short of food and gas. Plus each wealthy tourist I swindled brought me closer to living in a proper home rather than the camper we shared.

Alice turned into the chamfered-corner entrance.

I couldn't breathe.

She walked in, jingling the little bell, and leaving the door open to the sun-drenched spring evening and the busy sounds of Lower Lonsdale.

I wanted to duck behind the counter, but it wasn't me that needed hiding.

"Do not look at your antiquities. It'll draw attention."

Alice marched to the counter, pearls swinging over her blouse, and her weird, old-fashioned skirt billowing around her ankles like in that old show, *Little House on the Prairie*.

My eyes landed, as usual, near Alice's throat, on the three parallel scars curving over the hill of her collarbone. She didn't even try to cover them up, like she'd fought a …