

January 5, 1968

Durant Estate, New York

I couldn't try any harder. No light was coming out of my fingertips. I sat on the floor in front of the fireplace across from my mother, who could uplight as easily as she could breathe.

"I've told you a million times," Mother said, "you have to stop trying. You let it happen."

"What if I can't do it?"

"You can! You were born to. You just don't listen!" Mother sighed and closed her eyes. She dropped her head, then raised it, her nostrils flaring when she inhaled again. "Let's start over. Try to relax. Imagine the light moving down your arms and it will obey you." Again, Mother's hands produced the light. It drifted to the high ceiling, like smoke.

I failed again. I couldn't look at my mother's face this time.

"What is the problem, Nessa? You're eleven years old! I could do this when I was six!" Mother was standing, giving up once more. I looked up and watched her smoothing her soft brown hair. Her hair didn't need to be smoothed.

"Maybe Grandma Mavis can help me," I mumbled.

"That's a great idea. I wash my hands of you." She covered her eyes with her hands, then put her hands on her hips and surveyed the living room as if she were seeing it for the first time.

"I'll be in the bath. Tell your brothers not to bother me unless the house is on fire." She turned quickly for the stairs, then stopped. "No, don't even bother me if the house *is* on fire."

"Okay." Every time I asked my mother for help uplighting, it ended this way. I was going to be the only Durant woman who couldn't uplight. The only one in history, ever. I couldn't even glow, like the Durant men. For eleven years, I had only been uplit by others. At the Alignment,