

## The Scent Keeper

### EPILOGUE

*I wish I could tell you everything changed after that, my little fish, that your grandmother started baking cookies and bought a house with a garden that you could play in, but you'll soon discover that life is never that simple.*

*I left the city a few days after I burned the last scent paper. Fisher and I went to the bus station and bought our tickets to Secret Cove. I could feel its tidal pull, and when the bus arrived, I went toward it with anticipation.*

*“Emmeline?”*

*I hadn't seen my mother since that day in her condo; we had both needed some time to get used to our new visions of each other. But there she was in her elegant suit, the same outfit she'd been wearing on the day we met, right down to the earrings and swept-up hair.*

*“Victoria,” I said. Fisher took my backpack and stepped away, but not too far. “I wanted to say goodbye,” she said.*

*“It's not forever.” Although if I was being honest, I wasn't sure.*

*The bus driver opened the door and started taking tickets.*

*“I need to go,” I said.*

*She nodded and stepped forward. Before I knew what was happening, she put her arms around me. I gasped with the shock of it, and with the air I breathed in came the aromas of morning coffee and rosemary shampoo. I waited, wondering what perfume she'd created for this occasion, but all I could smell was a hint of sweat. A touch of fear. And then—the scent of my mother's skin.*

*I closed my eyes.*

*Breathe in, Emmeline, I heard my father say.*

*I opened my mind and took in the fragrance of my mother. I took in the scents of the other travelers and Fisher and the city and the sky, and I held them all inside me, pure and complicated and alive. It was the truest perfume I had ever made.*

*Perhaps, my little fish, you will create great fragrances one day, just like your mother, and your grandmother. You will play among the sparkling top notes, the hints of citrus and the salt mist of waves. You will sink into the flowers and spices of the middle notes. But never forget the base notes, for no fragrance is ever balanced without a touch of musk, or smoke, or sadness. Base notes can come from dark places, but they can create beauty all the same. They are reminders of what we will do to live, and what we can give each other. My parents taught me that.*