



EXCERPT Frankie Comes Home...

Paying for a hot dog in pennies and dimes is embarrassing. Being two pennies short and having the hot dog stand guy take pity on us was completely humiliating. We're skinny. I just hope the Kings haven't eaten everything we had stored away.

Without Kin and Keeps, there's been a little more to go around. My shoulders sag. Now there are more mouths to feed. My fingers scrape the insides of my pockets, searching for a coin that maybe got snagged in the seams. If I turn them inside out, I really will look like a street urchin. I'm the pirate who opens the treasure chest, finds he's been beat, and opens it again just to rub it in. I snort.

We wait for a large crowd to head for the subway and melt in. Frankie's eyes are as wide as a sliced moon as we weave and duck. Eyes on each other, hands gripped tightly.

Kite pushes Frankie's head under the turnstile as I pay with our last coin. She presses her back into me. The smell of faint perfume, the last of her old life, and salt, the new, coming from her hair. As I reach around her to push the stile, a two for one, her breath catches. I let my hand rest on her waist for a second. Let myself imagine we're a couple on our way home from a shopping trip, and then it falls like so many un-granted wishes into a fountain.

Leaning close to her ear so she can hear me, I hold my breath, thinking inhaling any more of her sweetness may actually kill me. "Ready?"

She nods. Her cheek brushing my lips.

We take our route to the secret door. To the home we now share like kids playing house, only far too real.

Frankie, to her credit, rolls with the punches. Punch one: Hot dogs instead of roast beef and gravy for dinner. Punch Two: Cheating our way through the subway. Punch Three... I knock on the King's door, and Krow answers. He looks us up and down, slick and distrustful

for a moment, then breaks into a grin. “Kettle! Kite!” he shouts. “Kettle and Kite are home.” He stares at my hands. When he sees there’s no food—only a suitcase—he quickly looks away. But there’s no hiding his disappointment.

Frankie squeezes her way through the doorway into the vast, abandoned subway tunnel. My home. My refuge. And now hers. Blinking, she stands on her tiptoes. Lip in teeth. “Holy hell!” she shouts, and several Kings look her way.

Kite flushes pink, then taps her sister’s shoulder. “Frankie!” she chastises. “Language.” We step inside, and Frankie swings her head from side to side. “I mean tank you, holy hell.”

We both chuckle, eyes connecting over the top of her head.

Punch three: “This is where we’re going to be staying for a while,” Kite’s voice chases after a galloping Frankie as she jumps from bed to bed. She is the spokes of a traveling star. She is the light **you** can’t catch.

Frankie doesn’t hear her, and Kite runs to catch her sister. I drag the case inside, plonk it on Kin’s bed. Now Kite’s to share with her sister.

Finally, Frankie stops running and presses a palm to her chest as she wheezes. Kite rushes to her, and she puts both hands on her sister’s shoulders. “Are you okay?”

Punch four is for me, and I feel it sock me right in the guts. As I watch them, I know. Like *really* know that I would do anything to help them. They are instantly and permanently part of this family. And it scares me.