

PRAISE *for* BOOK 3 *in the* SERIES

Inside the Sun

“In Alexis Marie Chute’s *Inside the Sun* we find a flawed, tight-knit family fighting for world survival, courage displayed in a small, fragile package, and a daring journey leading to the ultimate sacrifice. Fast moving and thrilling, be prepared for a wild ride.”

—Jan Von Schleh, multi-award-winning author of *But Not Forever*

“*Inside the Sun*, by Alexis Marie Chute, is the much-anticipated conclusion to The 8th Island Trilogy. Equal parts fast, funny and achingly tender, Chute leads the reader on a wild ride through her beautifully written alternate universe. As we continue to follow Ella Wellsley on her quest to find a cure for her terminal cancer, the answer she finally uncovers from the mysterious Star under the sea will keep you turning pages long into the night. Impossible to put down!”

—Michelle Cox, author of author of the Henrietta and Inspector Howard series

“Alexis Marie Chute’s universe is exquisite in all its beauty and darkness. Once you’re inside, you’ll never want to leave.”

—Omar Mouallem,
coauthor of national bestseller *Inside the Inferno*

“Chute is an artist of words in her colorfully painted novel, *Inside the Sun*. Readers will get lost in this fantastical adventure filled with captivating imagery of magical worlds and mythical creatures. Told through the eyes of a complex web of characters bound by bloodlines and love, *Inside the Sun* tells a truly unique tale that transports the reader back to the delightful bliss of childlike wonder.”

—Rebecca Loomis, author of *A Whitewashed Tomb*

“Through the eyes of multiple protagonists, Chute follows the harrowing adventure of the Wellsley family through magical portals and against determined forces. Readers will love this conclusion to The 8th Island Trilogy as it weaves themes of self-confidence, family turmoil, and the eternal struggle between good and evil. An energizing read!”

—Yodassa Williams, author of *The Goddess Twins*

“A complex story, *Inside the Sun* anchors rich fantasy worlds with relatable characters and heartfelt family relationships. A fitting end to The 8th Island trilogy.”

—Marty Chan, author of *Kung Fu Master*

“The novel conveys that though life’s darkest moments may seem utterly unconquerable, finding a path through them always leads to an overwhelming brightness that surpasses all. This book is a must-read.”

—US Review of Books, Recommended book

“Buckle up for Chute’s journey to a world full of unique characters, races, and magic in *Inside the Sun*, the third book in The 8th Island Trilogy.”

—Cheryl Campbell, author of *Echoes of War*

“Immaculate world-building underscores Chute’s beautifully written finale for her 8th Island Trilogy series. *Inside the Sun* takes readers on an exhilarating journey as Jarr-Way and its derivatives are on the verge of destruction. Naiu—the source of all life—is retreating, and only the Star has the power to save the worlds. With an army of Steffanus warriors, Bangols, Olearons, and more, Ella and her family race against time to find the Star. Their travels are laced with peril, including the ruthless Senior Karish who is hell-bent on devouring the Star, and slaughtering anyone who gets in his way. Despite a lot of grim events, the story never loses its undercurrent of love, or the common thread that unites all beings as they strive, not just to survive, but to thrive.”

—Elise Holland, award-winning author of *The Thorn Queen*

SELECT PRAISE *for* BOOK 2 *in the* SERIES
Below the Moon

**2019 Living Now Book Awards Bronze Medal
in Adventure Fiction**

“Action-packed fantasy”

—*Foreword Reviews*

“This book will delight lovers of Neil Gaiman.”

—Andrea Jarrell, author of *I'm the One Who Got Away: A Memoir*

“If you have any love for the fantasy-adventure genre, you need to be reading this series.”

—Conor McCreery, author of *Kill Shakespeare*

“*Below the Moon* is a wonderfully original and richly imaginative tale that shows us that anyone can be a hero, regardless of our abilities.”

—Jaci Wells, author of the forthcoming *The Lost Priestess*

“*Below the Moon* is utterly enchanting!”

—Pierre Dimaculangan, author of *The Sage, the Swordsman and the Scholars*

Reader's Favorite, 5/5 Star Review

SELECT PRAISE *for* BOOK 1 *in the* SERIES
Above the Star

“*A Wrinkle in Time* meets *The Princess Bride*.”

—Lee Lee Thomson, *The Perpetual You* magazine

“Shows readers that there is a power within all of us to change the world.”

—Jessica Kluthe, author of *Rosina, the Midwife*

“Think of *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and Homer’s *Odyssey* all wrapped up together.”

—Raymond Gariepy, editor of *WestWord* magazine

“Will hold you spellbound until the last page.”

—Reader’s Favorite

Inside *the* Sun

The 8th Island Trilogy

BOOK 3



BY

Alexis Marie Chute



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chapter 1

Ella

I doubt I'll ever enjoy portal jumping between worlds. The magic this type of travel requires is sharp; it cuts you apart in all the places you're not meant to be cut. My mind is spliced. My stomach halved. My spirit shaved. At the same time, for a cancer kid like me, this isn't altogether unpleasant.

My nausea and pain float in my detached body, held tightly by the Bangol Luggie. *My* Bangol. He loves me, and it creases his face with worry at the thought of losing me in this in-between place. I can see his piercing nails whitening the skin of my hand as he clings to me.

My consciousness hovers over here, in this lavender patch of moving light, apart from my rail-thin silhouette. From this spot I watch myself, removed from my illness and disconnected from the tumor at the base of my skull. It's a relief that I don't need to pretend to be strong in these moments; we're all hurting—every one of us left in our company. Luggie. Me. The other humans: Lady Sophia, Duggie-Sky, my mom Tessa, and—yuck—her not-so-secret boyfriend: Captain Nathaniel Billows, Nate for short. The Olearons, too: Junin, Islo, brothers Azkar, Nameris, and Kameelo. And honorary Olearons: Dad—called Ardenal in the world of Jarr—and now Grandpa Archie.

Traveling from the derivative planet, Earth, to Jarr feels like being squeezed between elevator doors. The breath is choked out of my body over there. My mind is pressed, like an orange

in Grandma Suzie’s hand-held juicer—the old-fashioned kind where you’re forced to do the work yourself.

Ghost-like, I drift my consciousness toward Luggie, watching him and myself. The shifting blues and pinks reflect on his gray skin. Stones grow from his head and are freshly cut from his cheekbones. Luggie’s brow is pinched above his palm-sized yellow eyes. He studies the portal, the beams of light, and channels of Naiu, the magic that powers everything, everywhere.

Luggie clings to one of my hands, and with my other, I hold my chest. I watch myself—my body without my spirit—protect what lies beneath the fabric of my baggy T-shirt. Dangling on a long chain around my neck are two objects. Both hold power.

A locket.

A key.

From across the expanse of galaxy, I command my free hand to coil the chain and lift it. The flash of orange light that spins us also reaches for the key. My fingers curl around the polished metal. In my mind, I say, *Mine*. My voice has the rumble of seriousness I learned from Mom when she ordered me, in her “. . . *final warning!*” to get off my favorite fan fiction horror site to complete my homework. I do a pretty good Mom impression.

We begin traveling faster. I can see it in the way Luggie’s silhouette and the curve of my physical face—the Ella over there—are blurred lines. I brush my consciousness against Luggie, and he shivers, startled from toying with a band of green light that races between us. His eyes shift, straining to focus, searching for me.

“There you are,” he says. “Something was missing from you, but now I understand.”

I smile at him and he finally sees me. The real me.

I can’t reply to him. Not even in this un-place, the place straddling places. I’m mute. Cancer has left me speechless on top of pale, weak, and generally pathetic. All I can do is nod.

Luggie notices the objects in the hand of my physical body. He's seen Grandma Suzie's locket before. It holds faded pictures of Grandpa Archie and Dad. Luggie noticed my nervous habit of clicking the locket open and closed after I was captured by the Bangols. I'd stare into Grandpa's and Dad's eyes in the photographs, asking for their help in a prayer.

Since we reconnected with Mom, Dad, and Grandpa Archie in the glass city of the Olearons, Luggie understands the power of the locket more than ever. He's witness to the fierce love my family shares—and the secrets that pull us apart. The locket represents my life before the lies, betrayals, and conflicting desires. That's why I cling to it—to the memory of what we once were.

It's not, however, the locket that now arrests Luggie's attention. It's the key. Its shape indicates it's Bangol made—the patterns and curves of its bow, stem, and bit. His breath is choked at the sight of it, even more than by the Tillastrion that toys with us on our portal jump from Earth to Jarr-Wya.

I instruct my body to extend itself toward Luggie, resting the key in his callused gray hand. In his grasp, the chain pulls tightly around my neck. Luggie and I hover so close now that even my detached spirit quivers with longing. I chuckle in my head. What a crazy love!

Luggie stares at the key. "This was my father's," he begins. "Where did you get it?"

Palm to palm, my physical hands open and close, signing *book* in American Sign Language. It's a gesture easy to guess the meaning of and Luggie understands.

"The blank book my sister, Nanjee, gave you . . . There must have been a hidden compartment. This key is made from the metal my father—" He can't help but pause. His dad, Tuggeron, is dead, killed by Zeno as Luggie watched. I hated Tuggs—don't

get me wrong—but Luggie loved his dad, however cruel and abusive he was.

“—the metal my father mined from the earth,” Luggie continues. “He told me its quantity of Naiu was beyond that of even the Banji flowers. My father was digging one day and came across a pocket of energy that threw him back against the stone mine. He melted all there was of it into this. My father knew the key was powerful but was not aware of how to wield it.”

I owe Luggie an apology for keeping the key a secret from him, but my mouth doesn’t move. If my body tries to speak the words “I’m sorry,” I’ll fill the galaxy with green birds. I have borne this burden of silence since the Steffanus warrior, the late Tanius, transformed my cancer-broken voice into emerald feathers and wings and chirping beaks.

“Thank you for showing me this, Ella, but I don’t want it. Lust for power and the Star corrupted my father. I do not plan to follow in his footsteps.”

Luggie drops the key, which swings back to me on its chain. It lands against my body with a shock of electricity—and love. The key is warm, beckoning, and alive. Like a puppeteer, my consciousness controls my arms and fans my fingers to study it. As my hands stir the atmosphere within the portal, the colored lights around us melt to azure oceans. Small holes begin to appear, flashing past us quickly.

Rips in the portal?

No.

Keyholes!

I slip my consciousness back inside my weak shell of a body clothed in sheer paneled tights and a T-shirt I wear askew, revealing the skin of one shoulder. *Ugh*. Cancer, we meet again. My stomach lurches. A headache swells at the front of my head. I swallow the nausea and fight through the pain. Pulling Luggie

close to me, I click the key into a random keyhole with all the energy I can spare. I'm clueless of what will open to us, but I want Luggie beside me. There will be no more secrets between us.

A door rimmed in blinding light emerges and opens through the shifting journey of the Tillastrion. For a second, it's too bright to see anything as Luggie and I tumble through the opening. Mom would call us reckless, but her days aren't numbered like mine. It's easier to err on the side of caution when you've got a future to look forward to. I only have now.

"The key opens to a different world—but where are we?" Luggie says to himself.

My chest is hot with realization. All the keyholes that passed us by . . . they aren't all doors to *one* place. I want to scream at my inability to speak. "The key opens doors to *all* worlds," I would say—and Luggie would understand then, too. His lemony eyes would glow with the epiphany of what this means.

The races of Jarr-Wya build Tillastrions to travel to their derivative, Earth, and back again. It takes two to portal jump between worlds (unless you're a Steffanus), one from each world: one to build the device, the other to operate it. Jarr and Earth. The potential portals have been limited to our two connected realms—until now. The possibilities are endless! What new places can we travel to?

A pungent odor interrupts my wild imaginings.

Luggie scrunches his nose, too. My eyes sting, but I peer around us as the white light fades to a black city with crooked streets. It's humid and salty, like sea air, and I hear a wicked cackle. Doors squeak on rusty hinges and slam at the jarring sound of a scream. The cackle continues but fades; whoever is laughing is heading away from us. More hinges squeak, and gloomy eyes peer from the cracks of doorways, shifting, on the lookout.

Luggie and I are caught in a herd of humanoid creatures that move quickly despite their curved backs. They peer at us with cat eyes from above their blue fur-covered shoulders. This is the moment I realize I didn't need to show Luggie what the key can do. There had to be another way than this. If I'd been patient, I could have communicated with Mom telepathically and asked her to relay the message to Luggie.

I feel behind me for the door and am relieved to find its round edge. Before I can pull Luggie away from this foreboding place of charcoal skies and charred bricks and slick midnight surfaces—its blackness like a disease worse than my cancer—we're bowled over by a creature sprinting across the road.

At another scream in the distance, my heart twists into a tight ball. The cackle rings out once more.

The creature is terrified, too. Doors screech and locks click. The creature snarls at us and barks in its language, pulling itself from the road. We stare blankly at it, which causes it to pause. Then, in a language both Luggie and I can understand, it says, "Fools, leave this place or be eaten alive from the inside out!"

My hand pulls against the resistance of the door, and, as it opens a crack, a whoosh of air escapes from the Tillastrion's journey from Earth to Jarr. The creature's eyes widen, and its mouth hangs open.

"I smell Naiu! On second thought, take me with you," it says, not waiting for my reply.

It catapults itself forward, and all three of us tumble through the doorway, which the creature slams behind us. Something shatters under our weight. Immediately, I know it's the secret history of the Olearons, the magical square of glass hidden in Luggie's sack—but I can't worry about that now. Its broken pieces clink like wineglasses, and I can tell that Luggie, too, knows what's been lost.

I turn the key and the outline of the round door fades back into the rushing colors. Without the key, the keyhole passes us by, along with a dozen others, until I slip the chain inside my shirt and collapse into Luggie's arms.

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three books in The 8th
Island Trilogy.