The Names We Leave Behind

Short synopsis • Naria Khan

When healer Lis Rouvain wakes in a bed on her own ward, she remembers her teacher beside the basin, but she can't remember asking to be treated. The man waiting outside is the Crown's executioner. He remembers the home they shared, while Lis has only a warning stitched into her coat in her own hand: DO NOT TRUST THE NAMELESS MAN. Then her sister Coriselle begins forgetting her, too.

A patient's darned collar helps Lis remember Edrin, a toymaker who saw soldiers keep people inside burning houses. Thinking her teacher, Vessac, would protect him, she told him what Edrin had seen. The executioner admits that he killed Edrin. Lis already knows this when he asks her to call him Aderic at the fair. She kisses him anyway. As more of her past returns, she learns she helped silence other witnesses herself. Before losing her memory, Lis discovered how to free theirs. She broke her own name so Vessac couldn't follow it into her mind, and in doing so lost her memory of the first time Aderic told her he loved her.

Coriselle has been carrying Edrin's carved wren at Lis's request. When she starts tasting smoke from his fire, she goes to Vessac for help, and Lis follows. During the escape a guard cuts Aderic's throat as he holds a door open for a child. Vessac offers Lis the power to choose what everyone remembers. Her sister wants the comfort of their mother carrying her upstairs without reliving the scald that put her there. When Lis admits she can't promise one without the other, Coriselle asks her to leave it alone. Lis honours her wish and releases the memories taken by force. Coriselle recognises her in time for Aderic to hear the news before he dies.

Lis testifies about her own part in the treatments, and Vessac is convicted. Two years later, while dancing with Coriselle, Lis briefly sees herself through the eyes of someone who misses her curls. She says Aderic’s name and hears a breath nearby. When the fiddler starts again, she takes her sister’s hand and leads.