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Opening extract from

The Jewel

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One

TODAY IS MY LAST DAY AS VIOLET LASTING.

The streets of the Marsh are quiet this early in the morning, just the plodding steps of a donkey and the clinking of glass bottles as a milk cart rolls by. I throw off my sheets and slip on my bathrobe over my nightdress. The robe is a hand-me-down from my mother, dark blue and worn at the elbows. It used to be huge on me, the sleeves hanging past my fingertips, the hem dragging on the floor. I've grown into it over the past few years—it fits me now the way it used to fit her. I love it. It's one of the few items I was allowed to bring with me to Southgate. I was lucky to be able to bring as many as I did. The other three holding facilities are stricter about personal items; Northgate doesn't allow them at all.

I press my face against the wrought-iron bars on my

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window—they are arched and curl into the shape of roses, as if by making a pretty pattern, they can pretend they're something they're not.

The dirt streets of the Marsh glow dull gold in the early-morning light; I can almost imagine they're made of something regal. The streets are what give the Marsh its name—all the stone and concrete and asphalt went to the wealthier circles of the city, so the Marsh was left with a thick brown mud that smells briny and sulfuric.

Nerves flutter like tiny wings in my chest. I will get to see my family today, for the first time in four years. My mother, and Ochre, and little Hazel. She's probably not so little anymore. I wonder if they even want to see me, if I've become like a stranger to them. Have I changed from who I used to be? I'm not sure if I can remember who I used to be. What if they don't even recognize me?

Anxiety thrums inside me as the sun rises slowly over the Great Wall off in the distance, the one that encircles the entire Lone City. The wall that protects us from the violent ocean outside. That keeps us safe. I love sunrises, even more than sunsets. There's something so exciting about the world coming to life in a thousand colors. It's hopeful. I'm glad I get to see this one, ribbons of pink and lavender shot through with streams of red and gold. I wonder if I'll get to see any sunrises when I start my new life in the Jewel.

Sometimes, I wish I hadn't been born a surrogate.

WHEN PATIENCE COMES FOR ME, I'M CURLED UP ON MY bed, still in my bathrobe, memorizing my room. It isn't much,

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just a small bed, a closet, and a faded wooden dresser. My cello is propped in one corner. On top of the dresser is a vase of flowers that gets changed every other day, a brush, a comb, some hair ribbons, and an old chain with my father's wedding ring on it. My mother made me take it after the doctors diagnosed me, before the Regimentals came and took me away.

I wonder if she's missed it, after all this time. I wonder if she's missed me, the way I've missed her. A knot tightens in the pit of my stomach.

The room hasn't changed much since I came here four years ago. No pictures. No mirror. Mirrors aren't allowed in the holding facilities. The only addition has been my cello—not even mine, really, since it belongs to Southgate. I wonder who will use it once I'm gone. It's funny, but as dull and impersonal as this room is, I think I'll miss it.

"How are you holding up, dearie?" Patience asks. She's always calling us things like that, "dearie" and "sweetheart" and "lamb." Like she's afraid of using our actual names. Maybe she just doesn't want to get attached. She's been the head caretaker at Southgate for a long time. She's probably seen hundreds of girls pass through this room.

"I'm okay," I lie. There's no use in telling her how I really feel—like my skin is itching from the inside out and there's a weight deep in the darkest, lowest part of me.

Her eyes scan me from head to toe, and she purses her lips. Patience is a plump woman with gray streaks in her wispy brown hair, and her face is so easily readable, I can guess what she's going to say next before she actually says it.

"Are you sure that's what you want to wear?"

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I nod, rubbing the soft fabric of the bathrobe between my thumb and forefinger, and scoot off the bed. There are perks to being a surrogate. We get to dress how we want, eat what we want, sleep late on the weekends. We get an education. A good education. We get fresh food and water, we always have electricity, and we never have to work. We never have to know poverty—and the caretakers tell us we'll have more once we start living in the Jewel.

Except freedom. They never seem to mention that.

Patience bustles out of the room and I follow behind her. The halls of Southgate Holding Facility are paneled in teak and rosewood; artwork hangs on the walls, smudges of color that don't depict anything real. All the doors are exactly alike, but I know which one we're going to. Patience only wakes you up if you have a doctor's appointment, if there's an emergency, or if it's your Reckoning Day. There's only one other girl on this floor besides me who's going to the Auction tomorrow. My best friend. Raven.

Her door is open, and she's already dressed, in a pair of high-waisted tan pants and a white V-neck. I can't say if Raven is prettier than me, because I haven't seen my reflection in four years. But I can say that she is one of the most beautiful surrogates in Southgate. We both have black hair, but Raven's is cropped short, stick straight and glossy—mine falls in waves down my back. Her skin is a rich caramel color, with eyes nearly as dark as her hair, shaped like almonds and set in a perfect oval face. She's taller than me, which is saying a lot. My skin is ivory, an odd contrast with my hair color, and my eyes are violet. I don't need a mirror to tell me that.

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They're what I was named for.

"Big day, huh?" Raven says to me, stepping into the hall to join us. "Is that what you're wearing?"

I ignore her second question. "Tomorrow will be bigger."

"Yeah, but we can't choose our outfits tomorrow. Or the day after that. Or . . . well, ever again." She tucks her hair behind her ears. "I hope whoever buys me lets me wear pants."

"I wouldn't get your hopes up, dearie," Patience says.

I have to agree with her. The Jewel doesn't seem like the type of place where women wear pants, unless maybe they're servants who work in the unseen places. Even if we get sold to a merchant family from the Bank, dresses will probably be the required attire.

The Lone City is divided into five circles, each separated by a wall, and all of them but the Marsh have nicknames based on their industry. The Marsh is the outer circle, the poorest. We don't have industry, we just house most of the laborers who work in the other circles. The fourth circle is the Farm, where all the food is grown. Then the Smoke, where the factories are. The second circle is called the Bank, because it's where all the merchants have their shops. And then there's the inner circle, or the Jewel. The heart of the city. Where the royalty lives. And where, after tomorrow, Raven and I will live as well.

We follow Patience down the wide wooden stairs. Scents from the kitchen waft up the staircase, fresh-baked bread and cinnamon. It reminds me of when my mother would make sticky buns on my birthday, a luxury we could almost never

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afford. I can have them whenever I want now, but they don't taste the same.

We pass one of the classrooms—the door is open and I pause for a moment to watch. The girls are young, probably only eleven or twelve. New. Like I was once. Back when *augury* was just a word, before anyone explained to me that I was special, that all the girls at Southgate were. That thanks to some genetic quirk, we had the ability to save the royalty.

The girls are seated at desks with small buckets beside them, and a neatly folded handkerchief next to each one. Five red building blocks are spread out in a line in front of every girl. A caretaker sits at a large desk, taking notes—behind her on the chalkboard is written the word *GREEN*. They're being tested on the first Augury, Color. I half smile, half wince, remembering all the times I took this test. I watch the girl closest to me, turning an imaginary block in my hands as she turns a bright red one in hers.

Once to see it as it is. Twice to see it in your mind. Thrice to bend it to your will.

Veins of green spread from where her fingers touch the block, creeping across the red surface like vines. The girl's eyes are screwed in concentration, fighting the pain, and if she can hold on just a few seconds longer, I know she'll have done it. But the pain wins, and she cries out and drops the block, red winning over green, then grabs the bucket, coughing up a mixture of blood and saliva. A thin trickle of blood runs from her nose and she wipes it away with the handkerchief.

I sigh. The first Augury is the easiest of the three, but she's

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only managed to change two of her blocks. It's going to be a very long day for her.

"Violet," Raven calls, and I hurry to catch up.

The dining room is only half full—most of the girls are already in class. When Raven and I enter, all talking stops, spoons and cups are put down, and every girl in the dining room stands, crosses two fingers on her right hand, and presses them against her heart. It's tradition on Reckoning Day, acknowledging the surrogates who will be leaving for the Auction. I've done it myself every year but this feels strange, having it directed at me. A lump forms in my throat and my eyes itch. I can feel Raven tense beside me. A lot of the girls saluting us are going to the Auction themselves tomorrow.

We take a seat at our usual table, in a corner by the windows. I bite my lip, realizing that, in a very short amount of time, it won't be "our" table anymore. This is my last breakfast at Southgate. Tomorrow, I'll be on a train.

Once we're seated, the rest of the room sits, and conversation starts again but in low whispers.

"I know it's a sign of respect," Raven mutters. "But I don't like being on this side of it."

A young caretaker named Mercy hurries over with a silver pot of coffee.

"Good luck tomorrow," she says in a shy voice. I barely manage a smile. Raven doesn't say anything. Mercy's face goes slightly pink. "What can I bring you for breakfast?"

"Two fried eggs, hash browns, toast with butter and strawberry jam, and bacon, well done but not burnt." Raven rattles off her breakfast list quickly, like she's hoping to trip

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Mercy up. Which she probably is. Raven likes messing with people, especially when she's nervous.

Mercy just smiles and bobs her head. "And for you, Violet?"

"Fruit salad," I say. Mercy scuttles off into the kitchen. "Are you really going to eat all that?" I ask Raven. "I feel like my stomach shrank overnight."

"You are such a worrier," she says, adding two heaped spoonfuls of sugar to her coffee. "I swear, you'll give yourself an ulcer."

I take a sip of coffee and watch the other girls in the dining room. Especially the ones going to the Auction. Some of them look the way I feel, like they'd be happy to crawl back into bed and hide under the covers, but other girls are chattering with excitement. I never quite understood those girls, the ones who bought into all the caretakers' lines about how important we are, how we are fulfilling a long and noble tradition. I once asked Patience why we couldn't come home after we've given birth, and she said, "You are too precious to the royalty. They wish to take care of you for the rest of your life. Isn't that wonderful? They have such generous hearts."

I said I'd rather have my family than the royalty's generosity. Patience didn't like that very much.

A younger, mousy-looking girl at a nearby table suddenly cries out in pain and surprise as her water glass turns to ice. She drops it and it shatters on the floor. Her nose starts to bleed, and she grabs a napkin and runs out of the dining room as a caretaker hurries over with a dustpan.

"I'm glad that doesn't happen anymore," Raven says.

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