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Opening extract from

Furthermore

Written by

Tahereh Mafi

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Once upon a time, a girl was born.

It was rather uneventful.

Her parents were happy enough, the mother glad to be done carrying it, and the father glad to be done with the mystery of it all. But then one day they realized that their baby, the one they'd named Alice, had no pigment at all. Her hair and skin were white as milk; her heart and soul as soft as silk. Her eyes alone had been spared a spot of color: only just clinging to the faintest shade of honey. It was the kind of child her world could not appreciate.

Ferenwood had been built on color. Bursts of it, swaths of it, depths and breadths of it. Its people were known to be the brightest—modeled after the planets, they'd said—and young Alice was deemed simply too dim, even though she knew she was not. Once upon a time, a girl was forgot.

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AND SO IT BEGINS

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The sun was raining again.

Soft and bright, rainlight fell through the sky, each drop tearing a neat hole in the season. Winter had been steady and predictable, but it was quite poked through now, and spring was peeking out from underneath it. The world was ready for a change. The people of Ferenwood were excited for spring, but this was to be expected; they had always been fond of predictable, reliable sorts of changes, like night turning into day and rain turning into snow. They didn't much care for night turning into cake or rain turning into shoelaces, because that wouldn't make sense, and making sense was terribly important to these people who'd built their lives around magic. And squint as they might, it was very difficult for them to make any sense of Alice.

Alice was a young girl and, naturally, she was all the things you'd expect a young girl to be: smart and lively and passionate about any number of critical issues. But Alice was also lacking

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a great deal of something important, and it was this—her lack of something important—that made her so interesting, and so very unusual. More on that soon.

The afternoon our story begins, the quiet parts of being alive were the busiest: wind unlocking windows; rainlight nudging curtains apart; fresh-cut grass tickling unsocked feet. Days like this made Alice want to set off on a great adventure, and—at almost twelve years old—she'd very nearly figured out how to fashion one together. The annual Surrender was only a single pair of days away, and Alice—who was determined to win—knew it was her chance to set sail for something new.

She was on her way home now, occasionally peeking over her shoulder at the glittering town in the distance. The village square was undergoing no small transformation in honor of the upcoming festivities, and the clamor of instruction and construction rang out across the hills. Alice jumped from flagstone to flagstone, her face caught in the rainlight glow, her hands grasping for a touch of gold. The town's excitement was contagious, and the air was so thick with promise Alice could almost bite into it. She smiled, cheeks appled in delight, and stared up at the sky. The light was beginning to spark and fade, and the clouds were still hard at work weaving together, breaking and building as they had been all week. One more

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day of this, Alice thought, and everything would change.

She couldn't wait.

She'd moved on to the main road now, a dirt path flanked by green. She held tight to her basket as neighbors passed, nodding hello and waving good-bye, happy to have remembered her clothes today. Mother was always bothering her about that.

Alice plucked a tulip from her pocket and bit off the top. She felt the petals pressing against her tongue; she could taste the velvet, the magenta of it all. She closed her eyes and licked her lips before biting into the stem. Not quite green but brighter, more vibrant; there was a song in that color and she could feel it singing inside of her. She bent down to greet a blade of grass and whispered, *Hello, me too, me too, we're still alive.*

Alice was an odd girl, even for Ferenwood, where the sun occasionally rained and the colors were brighter than usual and magic was as common as a frowning parent. Her oddness was evident even in the simplest things she did, though most especially in her inability to walk home in a straight line. She stopped too many times, wandering off the main path, catching deep breaths and holding them, too selfish to let them go. She spun until her skirts circled around her, smiling so wide she thought her face would break and blossom. She hopped around on tiptoe, and only when she could stand it no longer would she exhale what wasn't hers to keep.

Alice would grow up to be a wildflower, Father once said to

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her. A wildflower in flowing skirts, braided hair dancing from head to knee. She'd always hoped that he was right, that maybe Mother had gotten it wrong, that Alice was never meant to be such a complicated thing with all these limbs and needs. She often wanted to plant herself back into the earth to see if she'd grow into something better this time, maybe a dandelion or an oak tree or a walnut no one could crack. But Mother insisted (the way she often did) that Alice must be a girl, and so she was.

Alice didn't like Mother very much. She found her a bit old and confusing, and didn't like the way Mother worried about walls and doors and the money that put them there. But Alice loved Mother, too, in the way that children did. Mother was soft and warm, and Mother's smiles came easily when she looked at Alice. Anger and tears, too, but those Alice never cared for.

Alice gripped her basket tighter and danced down the road to a song she found in her ear; her toes warmed the earth, and her hair, too heavy for her head, tried to keep up. Her bangles mimicked the rain, simple melodies colliding in the space between elbows and wrists. She closed her eyes. She knew this dance the way she knew her own name; its syllables found her, rolled off her hips with an intimacy that could not be taught.

This was her skill, her talent, her great gift to Ferenwood. It was her ticket to greatness. She'd been practicing for years and years and was determined that it would not be for nothing.

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It would not b—

"Hey there! What are you doing?"

Alice startled. Something tripped and fell, and she looked around in dismay to realize it had been her. Crumpled skirts and silent bangles, the rainlight gone from the sky. She was late. Mother would be upset again.

"Hey!" The same voice as before. "What are you—"

Alice gathered her skirts and fumbled in the dark for her basket, reaching blindly as panic set in. Don't talk to strangers, Mother had always said—especially strange men. *Being afraid meant it was okay to forget your manners. If you're afraid, you never have to be nice. Do you understand?*

Alice had nodded.

And now Mother was not here and she could not explain why, exactly, but Alice was afraid. So she did not feel the need to be nice.

The stranger wasn't much of a man at all, it turned out. More like a boy. Alice wanted to tell him very firmly to go away, but she'd somehow gotten it into her head that being quiet meant being invisible and so she prayed that her silence would somehow make him blind, instead of louder.

Unfortunately, her wish seemed to work on both of them.

The sun had folded itself away and the moon was in no hurry to replace it. Darkness engulfed her. Alice's basket was nowhere to be felt or found.

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She was very worried.

Suddenly Alice understood all about being worried and she promised herself she would never judge Mother for being worried all the time. Suddenly she understood that it is a very hard thing, to be afraid of things, and that it takes up so much time. Suddenly she understood why Mother rarely got around to doing the dishes.

"Does this belong to you?"

Alice turned just a bit and found a chest in her face. There was a chest in her face and a heart in that chest and it was beating quite hard. She could hear the pitters, the patters—the blood rushing around in ebbs and flows. *Don't be distracted*, she told herself, begged herself. *Think of Mother.*

But, oh.

What a heart.

What a symphony inside that body.

Alice gasped.

He'd touched her arm, so, really, she had no choice but to punch him. Her bangles were helpful in this regard. She punched and kicked and screamed a little and she wrenched her basket from his hands and she ran all the way home, out of breath and a little excited, so glad the moon had finally decided to join her.