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opening extract from

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written by

Alyson Noel

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EVERMORE

THE IMMORTALS

Alyson Noël

MACMILLAN



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AURA COLOR CHART

RED:	Energy, strength, anger, sexuality, passion, fear, ego
ORANGE:	Self-control, ambition, courage, thoughtfulness, lack of will, apathetic
YELLOW:	Optimistic, happy, intellectual, friendly, indecisive, easily led
GREEN:	Peaceful, healing, compassion, deceitful, jealous
BLUE:	Spiritual, loyal, creative, sensitive, kind, moody
VIOLET:	Highly spiritual, wisdom, intuition
INDIGO:	Benevolence, highly intuitive, seeker
PINK:	Love, sincerity, friendship
GRAY:	Depression, sadness, exhaustion, low energy, skepticism
BROWN:	Greed, self-involvement, opinionated
BLACK:	Lacking energy, illness, imminent death
WHITE:	Perfect balance

THE ONLY SECRET PEOPLE KEEP
IS IMMORTALITY

EMILY DICKINSON

ONE

"Guess who?"

Haven's warm, clammy palms press hard against my cheeks as the tarnished edge of her silver skull ring leaves a smudge on my skin. And even though my eyes are covered and closed, I know that her dyed black hair is parted in the middle, her black vinyl corset is worn over a turtleneck (keeping in compliance with our school's dress-code policy), her brand-new, floor-sweeping, black satin skirt already has a hole near the hem where she caught it with the toe of her Doc Martens boots, and her eyes appear gold but that's only because she's wearing yellow contacts.

I also know her dad isn't really away on "business" like he said, her mom's personal trainer is way more "personal" than "trainer," and her little brother broke her Evanescence CD but he's too afraid to tell her.

But I don't know any of this from spying or peeking or even being told. I know because I'm psychic.

"Hurry! Guess! The bell's gonna ring!" she says, her voice

hoarse, raspy, like she smokes a pack a day, even though she only tried smoking once.

I stall, thinking of the last person she'd ever want to be mistaken for. "Is it Hilary Duff?"

"Ew. Guess again!" She presses tighter, having no idea that I don't have to *see* to *know*.

"Is it Mrs. Marilyn Manson?"

She laughs and lets go, licking her thumb and aiming for the tarnish tattoo she left on my cheek, but I raise my hand and beat her to it. Not because I'm grossed out by the thought of her saliva (I mean, I *know* she's healthy), but because I don't want her to touch me again. Touch is too revealing, too exhausting, so I try to avoid it at all costs.

She grabs the hood of my sweatshirt and flicks it off my head, then squints at my earbuds and asks, "What're you listening to?"

I reach inside the iPod pocket I've stitched into all of my hoodies, concealing those ubiquitous white cords from faculty view, then I hand it over and watch her eyes bug out when she says, "What *the*? I mean, can it *be* any louder? And who is that?" She dangles the iPod between us so we can both hear Sid Vicious screaming about anarchy in the UK. And the truth is, I don't know if Sid's for it or against it. I just know that he's almost loud enough to dull my overly heightened senses.

"Sex Pistols," I say, clicking it off and returning it to my secret compartment.

"I'm surprised you could even hear me." She smiles at the

same time the bell rings.

But I just shrug. I don't need to *listen* to *hear*. Though it's not like I mention that. I just tell her I'll see her at lunch and head toward class, making my way across campus and cringing when I sense these two guys sneaking up behind her, stepping on the hem of her skirt, and almost making her fall. But when she turns and makes the sign of evil (okay, it's not really the sign of evil, it's just something she made up) and glares at them with her yellow eyes, they immediately back off and leave her alone. And I breathe a sigh of relief as I push into class, knowing it won't be long before the lingering energy of Haven's touch fades.

I head toward my seat in the back, avoiding the purse Stacia Miller has purposely placed in my path, while ignoring her daily serenade of *"Looo-ser!"* she croons under her breath. Then I slide onto my chair, retrieve my book, notebook, and pen from my bag, insert my earpiece, pull my hood back over my head, drop my backpack on the empty seat beside me, and wait for Mr. Robins to show.

Mr. Robins is always late. Mostly because he likes to take a few nips from his small silver flask between classes. But that's only because his wife yells at him all the time, his daughter thinks he's a loser, and he pretty much hates his life. I learned all of that on my first day at this school, when my hand accidentally touched his as I gave him my transfer slip. So now, whenever I need to turn something in, I just leave it on the edge of his desk.

I close my eyes and wait, my fingers creeping inside my

sweatshirt, switching the song from screaming Sid Vicious to something softer, smoother. All that loud noise is no longer necessary now that I'm in class. I guess the small student/teacher ratio keeps the psychic energy somewhat contained.

I wasn't always a freak. I used to be a normal teen. The kind who went to school dances, had celebrity crushes, and was so vain about my long blond hair I wouldn't dream of scraping it back into a ponytail and hiding beneath a big hooded sweatshirt. I had a mom, a dad, a little sister named Riley, and a sweet yellow Lab named Buttercup. I lived in a nice house, in a good neighborhood, in Eugene, Oregon. I was popular, happy, and could hardly wait for junior year to begin since I'd just made varsity cheerleader. My life was complete, and the sky was the limit. And even though that last part is a total cliché, it's also ironically true.

Yet all of that's just hearsay as far as I'm concerned. Because ever since the accident, the only thing I can clearly remember is dying.

I had what they call an NDE, or "near death experience." Only *they* happen to be wrong. Because believe me, there wasn't anything "near" about it. It's like, one moment my little sister Riley and I were sitting in the back of my dad's SUV, with Buttercup's head resting on Riley's lap, while his tail thumped softly against my leg, and the next thing I knew all the air bags were blown, the car was totaled, and I was ob-

serving it all from outside.

I gazed at the wreckage—the shattered glass, the crumbled doors, the front bumper clutching a pine tree in a lethal embrace—wondering what went wrong as I hoped and prayed everyone had gotten out too. Then I heard a familiar bark, and turned to see them all wandering down a path, with Buttercup wagging her tail and leading the way.

I went after them. At first trying to run and catch up, but then slowing and choosing to linger. Wanting to wander through that vast fragrant field of pulsating trees and flowers that shivered, closing my eyes against the dazzling mist that reflected and glowed and made everything shimmer.

I promised myself I'd only be a moment. That soon, I'd go back and find them. But when I did finally look, it was just in time to catch a quick glimpse of them smiling and waving and crossing a bridge, mere seconds before they all vanished.

I panicked. I looked everywhere. Running this way and that, but it all looked the same—warm, white, glistening, shimmering, beautiful, stupid, eternal mist. And I fell to the ground, my skin pricked with cold, my whole body twitching, crying, screaming, cursing, begging, making promises I knew I could never ever keep.

And then I heard someone say, "Ever? Is that your name? Open your eyes and look at me."

I stumbled back to the surface. Back to where everything was pain, and misery, and stinging wet hurt on my forehead. And I gazed at the guy leaning over me, looked into his dark eyes, and whispered, "I'm Ever," before passing out again.

TWO

Seconds before Mr. Robins walks in, I lower my hood, click off my iPod, and pretend I'm reading my book, not bothering to look up when he says, "Class, this is Damen Auguste. He just moved here from New Mexico. Okay Damen, you can take that empty seat in the back, right next to Ever. You'll have to share her book until you get your own copy."

Damen is gorgeous. I know this without once looking up. I just focus on my book as he makes his way toward me since I know way too much about my classmates already. So as far as I'm concerned, an extra moment of ignorance really is bliss.

But according to the innermost thoughts of Stacia Miller sitting just two rows before me—*Damen Auguste is totally smoking hot.*

Her best friend, Honor, completely agrees.

So does Honor's boyfriend, Craig, but that's a whole other story.

"Hey." Damen slides onto the seat next to mine, my backpack making a muffled thud as he drops it to the floor.

I nod, refusing to look any further than his sleek, black, motorcycle boots. The kind that are more GQ than Hells Angels. The kind that looks very out of place among the rows of multicolored flip-flops currently gracing the green-carpeted floor.

Mr. Robins asks us all to turn our books to page 133, prompting Damen to lean in and say, "Mind if I share?"

I hesitate, dreading the proximity, but slide my book all the way over until it's teetering off the edge of my desk. And when he moves his chair closer, bridging the small gap between us, I scoot to the farthest part of my seat and hide beneath my hood.

He laughs under his breath, but since I've yet to look at him, I have no idea what it means. All I know is that it sounded light and amused, but like it held something more.

I sink even lower, cheek on palm, eyes on the clock. Determined to ignore all the withering glances and critical comments directed my way. Stuff like: *Poor hot, sexy, gorgeous new guy, having to sit next to that freak!* That emanates from Stacia, Honor, Craig, and just about everyone else in the room.

Well, all except for Mr. Robins, who wants class to end almost as much as me.

By lunch, everyone's talking about Damen.

Have you seen that new kid Damen? He's so hot—So sexy—I heard he's from Mexico—No I think it's Spain—Whatever, it's some foreign place—I'm totally asking him to Winter Formal—You

don't even know him yet—Don't worry I will—

"Omigod. Have you seen that new kid, Damen?" Haven sits beside me, peering through her growing-out bangs, their spiky tips ending just shy of her dark red lips.

"Oh please, not you too." I shake my head and bite into my apple.

"You would so not be saying that if you'd been privileged enough to actually *see* him," she says, removing her vanilla cupcake from its pink cardboard box, licking the frosting right off the top in her usual lunchtime routine, even though she dresses more like someone who'd rather drink blood than eat tiny little sweet cakes.

"Are you guys talking about Damen?" Miles whispers, sliding onto the bench and placing his elbows on the table, his brown eyes darting between us, his baby face curving into a grin. "*Gorgeous!* Did you see the boots? So *Vogue.* I think I'll invite him to be my next boyfriend."

Haven gazes at him with narrowed, yellow eyes. "Too late, I called dibs."

"I'm sorry, I didn't realize you were into non-goths." He smirks, rolling his eyes as he unwraps his sandwich.

Haven laughs. "When they look like that I am. I swear he's just so freaking smoldering, you *have* to see him." She shakes her head, annoyed that I can't join in on the fun. "He's like—*combustible!*"

"You haven't seen him?" Miles grips his sandwich and gapes at me.

I gaze down at the table, wondering if I should just lie.

They're making such a big deal I'm thinking it's my only way out. Only I can't. Not to them. Haven and Miles are my best friends. My only friends. And I feel like I'm keeping enough secrets already. "I sat next to him in English," I finally say. "We were forced to share a book. But I didn't really get a good look."

"Forced?" Haven moves her bangs to the side, allowing for an unobstructed view of the freak who'd dare say such a thing. "Oh that must have been awful for you, that must've really sucked." She rolls her eyes and sighs. "I swear, you have no idea how lucky you are. And you don't even appreciate it."

"Which book?" Miles asks, as though the title will somehow reveal something meaningful.

"Wuthering Heights." I shrug, placing my apple core on the center of my napkin and folding the edges all around.

"And your hood? Up or down?" Haven asks.

I think back, remembering how I raised it right as he moved toward me. "Um, up," I tell her. "Yeah, definitely up." I nod.

"Well thank you for that," she mumbles, breaking her vanilla cupcake in half. "The last thing I need is competition from the blond goddess."

I cringe and gaze down at the table. I get embarrassed when people say things like that. Apparently, I used to live for that kind of thing, but not anymore. "Well, what about Miles? You don't think he's competition?" I ask, diverting the attention away from me and back on someone who can truly appreciate it.

"Yeah." Miles runs his hand through his short brown hair

and turns, gracing us with his very best side. "Don't rule it out."

"Totally moot," Haven says, dusting white crumbs from her lap. "Damen and Miles don't play for the same team. Which means his oh-so-devastating, model-quality looks don't count."

"How do you know which team he's on?" Miles asks, twisting the cap off his VitaminWater and narrowing his gaze. "How can you be so sure?"

"Gaydar," she says, tapping her forehead. "And trust me, this guy does not register."

Not only is Damen in my first-period English class, and my sixth-period art class (not that he sat by me, and not that I looked, but the thoughts swirling around the room, even from our teacher, Ms. Machado, told me everything I needed to know), but now he'd apparently parked next to me too. And even though I'd managed to avoid viewing anything more than his boots, I knew my grace period had just come to an end.

"Omigod, there he is! Right directly next to us!" Miles squeals, in the high-pitched, singsongy whisper he saves for life's most exciting moments. "And check out that ride—shiny black BMW, extra-dark tinted windows. Nice, very nice. Okay, so here's the deal, I'm going to open my door and *accidentally* bump it into his, so then I'll have an excuse to talk to him." He turns, awaiting my consent.

"Do *not* scratch my car. Or his car. Or any other car," I say, shaking my head and retrieving my keys.

"Fine." He pouts. "Shatter my dream, whatever. But just do yourself a favor and *check him out*! And then look me in the eye and tell me he doesn't make you want to freak out and faint."

I roll my eyes and squeeze between my car and the poorly parked VW Bug that's angled so awkwardly it looks like it's trying to mount my Miata. And just as I'm about to unlock the door, Miles yanks down my hood, swipes my sunglasses, and runs to the passenger side where he urges me, via not-so-subtle head tilts and thumb jabs, to look at Damen who's standing behind him.

So I do. I mean, it's not like I can avoid it forever. So I take a deep breath and look.

And what I see leaves me unable to speak, blink, or move.

And even though Miles starts waving at me, glaring at me, and basically giving me every signal he can think of to abort the mission and return to headquarters—I can't. I mean, I'd like to, because I know I'm acting like the freak everyone's already convinced that I am, but it's completely impossible. And it's not just because Damen is undeniably beautiful, with his shiny dark hair that hits just shy of his shoulders and curves around his high-sculpted cheekbones, but when he looks at me, when he lifts his dark sunglasses and meets my gaze, I see that his almond shaped eyes are deep, dark, and strangely familiar, framed by lashes so lush they almost seem fake. And his lips! His lips are ripe and inviting with a perfect

Cupid's bow. And the body that holds it all up is long, lean, tight, and clad in all black.

"Um, Ever? Hel-*lo*? You can wake up now. *Please.*" Miles turns to Damen, laughing nervously. "Sorry about my friend here, she usually has her hood on."

It's not like I don't know I have to stop. I need to stop right now. But Damen's eyes are fixed on mine, and their color grows deeper as his mouth begins to curve.

But it's not his complete gorgeousness that has me so transfixed. It has nothing to do with that. It's mainly the way the entire area surrounding his body, starting from his glorious head and going all the way down to the square-cut toes of his black motorcycle boots, consists of nothing but blank empty space.

No color. No aura. No pulsing light show.

Everyone has an aura. Every living being has swirls of color emanating from their body. A rainbow energy field they're not even aware of. And it's not like it's dangerous, or scary, or in any way bad, it's just part of the visible (well, to me anyway) magnetic field.

Before the accident I didn't even know about things like that. And I definitely wasn't able to see it. But from the moment I woke in the hospital, I noticed color everywhere.

"Are you feeling okay?" The red-haired nurse asked, gazing down anxiously.

"Yes, but why are you all pink?" I squinted, confused by the

pastel glow that enveloped her.

"Why am I *what*?" She struggled to hide her alarm.

"Pink. You know, it's all around you, especially your head."

"Okay, sweetheart, you just rest and I'll go get the doctor," she'd said, backing out of the room and running down the hall.

It wasn't until after I'd been subjected to a barrage of eye exams, brain scans, and psych evals that I learned to keep the color-wheel sightings to myself. And by the time I started hearing thoughts, getting life stories by touch, and enjoying regular visits with my dead sister, Riley, I knew better than to share.

I guess I'd gotten so used to living like this, I'd forgotten there was another way. But seeing Damen outlined by nothing more than the shiny black paint job on his expensive cool car is a vague reminder of happier, more normal days.

"Ever, right?" Damen says, his face warming into a smile, revealing just another one of his perfections—dazzling white teeth.

I stand there, willing my eyes to leave his, as Miles makes a show of clearing his throat. And remembering how he hates to be ignored, I motion toward him and say, "Oh, sorry. Miles, Damen, Damen, Miles." And the whole time my eyes never once waver.

Damen glances at Miles, nodding briefly before focusing back on me. And even though I know this sounds crazy, for the split second his eyes moved away, I felt strangely cold and weak.

But the moment his gaze returns, it's all warm and good again. "Can I ask a favor?" He smiles. "Would you lend me

your copy of *Wuthering Heights*? I need to get caught up and I won't have time to visit the bookstore tonight."

I reach into my backpack, retrieve my dog-eared copy, and dangle it from the tips of my fingers, part of me yearning to brush the tips against his, to make contact with this beautiful stranger, while the other part, the stronger, wiser, psychic part cringes—dreading the awful flash of insight that comes with each touch.

But it's not until he's tossed the book into his car, lowered his sunglasses, and said, "Thanks, see you tomorrow," that I realize that other than a slight tingle in the tips of my fingers, nothing happened. And before I can even respond, he's backing out of the space and driving away.

"Excuse me," Miles says, shaking his head as he climbs in beside me. "But when I said you'd *freak out* when you saw him, it wasn't a *suggestion,* it wasn't supposed to be taken *literally.* Seriously Ever, what *happened* back there? Because that was some mega tense awkwardness, a real *Hello, my name is Ever and I'll be your next stalker* kind of moment. I'm so serious, I thought we were gonna have to *resuscitate* you. And believe me, you are extremely lucky our good friend Haven was not here to see that, because I hate to remind you, but she did call dibs . . ."

Miles continues like that, yammering on and on, the entire way home. But I just let him talk it out as I navigate traffic, my finger absently tracing the thick red scar on my forehead, the one that's hidden under my bangs.

I mean, how can I explain how ever since the accident, the only people whose thoughts I can't hear, whose lives I can't know, and whose auras I can't see, are already dead?