

The orientation plays across a series of dancing, flickering screens that slide across the hard concrete wall as I walk. Captain Lancer leads me down the dark hallway, the steel doors of an elevator awaiting me at the end. When those doors open, they reveal within them an elevator box of polished hardwood. Fine detailings of roses, leaves and vines curl up the walls of the elevator, carved with passionate skill and a careful, masterful hand.

I step from the lights of blue and green into the warm hues of the elevator. Captain Lancer remains in the hallway, hands behind his back and a twinkle of annoyance in his eyes.

As the elevator doors close and the hum of the motor whirs in the background, the voice of Madame Shale continues. She is talking about the duration before our memories will return. Two days for the first generation. At the most, a week, for a third generation.

A moment before, I'd heard... from a source my whirling, tap-dancing memories cannot recall, that this is my sixth time being pulled from the elevator. Sixth generation. I try to recall my past, see a way through to who I've been before. But all I find is smoke and fog. My only memories are of the last few moments. My memories are of burning light and foreign hands, invasive touch and unkind words.

The elevator's hum ceases and the doors slide open. The floating screens, bearing the smiling face of Madame Shale, turn dark. I step from the elevator into the hallway before me. My bare feet press into a thick, soft carpet. Plush texture wraps around my toes and heel. A gentle song, the whimsical lilt of a violin, drifts through the hallway. The walls, like the elevator, are carved hardwood, polished and augmented with the work of artisans and woodcarvers.

As I walk I notice the photographs to my right, lining the wall. All of them of a woman, sitting at a desk. In the first, the woman's desk presses against a wall of rough concrete, the light from a square half meter window casting light past her. I recognise the red of her short hair, the

warmth of her smile and the sharp green of her eyes. She's younger than in the video, but it's certainly Madame Emery Shale in the image.

Each image that I walk by shows her behind a new desk, bigger, larger than the one before. The window grows in width and height and slowly, picture by picture, she rises above the city. As she rises, so does she age, lines and wrinkles finding her face and the red of her hair losing its luster.

At the end of the hallway, the last of the pictures behind me, I face forward, toward another door. I reach my hand out to open it but the two sides slide apart, revealing a living image. Standing before me, in an office of three glass walls, is Emery Shale.

"You're in one of those pictures," she says. "The last one, on your right. Care to guess where?" She taps her finger on the surface of her table and smiles. She steps forward, away from the table and holds out her hands.

"Aria," her voice is sweet. As she steps toward me I see just how much of this woman has been robbed by photos and video, by recordings and screens. Standing before me, arms open, eyes warm, more so than I've seen in my brief life, she becomes beautiful.

"We have so much to talk about."

She takes my hand and leads me toward one of the glass walls of her office. She presses a hand against it and pushes. The glass door slides open, revealing a balcony of glass and the city of Harmony stretching below and beyond.

Walls of stone rise from both sides, reaching beyond where we stood and up to the cloudy evening sky. Into the walls of the valley, stretching out into the distance are buildings; homes carved into the sides of the valley walls and expanding out from them. There are bridges and walkways connecting the sides of the walls. Within the valley itself, are thousands more

buildings, large and small, spires and blocks, twisting shapes and cylinders and lights and the rampant noise of human beings. And all of it is below us. The air touches my skin, I shiver. My feet seem to touch nothing as I stand on the glass balcony. It is as though I am flying, drifting, held up by an unseen power.

Madame Shale turns to me, sadness conquering her eyes. “What happened to you, Aria?”

I say nothing. She knows I cannot remember.

She closes her eyes and allows herself a brief nod, accepting that truth. “I know, you don’t remember. It’s just... You vanished. You packed up and left us, three months ago. You worked remotely, barely sent communication. . . And then ten days ago we stopped hearing from you. Just... we just heard fragmented, fractured reports of a woman with mint green hair causing fight after fight, dancing from one drunken rage to another. For ten days you were nothing more than a news report spreading from district to district.”

She turns away from me, opening her eyes to watch the flickering lights of the city. Their frantic neon hues colour the world below. Harmony City is a sickly rainbow. But at this height, those lights don’t reach us. The warm glow of the single, calm light of Shale’s office brushes our backs as we watch the city.

“Who was I?” I ask, finally cracking the silence.

“Not a simple question” Madame Shale does not look at me as she speaks. “But I’ll do my best to answer.” She turns away from the city and back to the office, striding away from me.

“Was I under the desk?” I ask. “In the picture, the one you said I’m in. Was I under the desk?”

“You were,” Madame Shale says, turning to face me.

“Why was I under your desk?” I know the answer, but the question leaves me anyway.

Madame Shale only smiles and walks back into her office.