

Meredith R.

The Unworthy Ones

“Citizen 1357 your schedule is ready.” I get up to see a boring day awaiting once again. The same grey walls and fold out bed made for a much shorter stay haunt my room daily.

I hear knocking against the wood again and know Bree's waiting for me. “Coming!” The second I open the door she begins to lecture me, “Iris I would like to inform you about the dangerous-” I cut her off before I get the first lesson of today, “yes I know it's not safe outside...”. Sometimes I can't believe how she just listens and doesn't ever question why we can't leave. I mean it's all I ever think about...

Bree and I walk to class and see kids reading notecards and preparing for something... Oh no! I forgot about my oral report today! “Bree what's the report supposed to be about?!” I ask,

“Iris you must listen to the teacher more. The report is a speech we will do today by standing up and-”

“I know what a report is! What's the topic?”

“Oh, you should have been clearer when asking a question...it is about something you want” We sit down as I quickly try to write something out as my other classmates are called up.

“Next up is Iris Walters.” I only have half a page, so I will need to improvise.

“...The thing I'd like most in the world is freedom from here I mean. I would love to just see the sun. The thing I want most is for everyone to go out when...I mean *if* it's safe, uh...I don't know why we can't leave in the first place. Have you ever thought about that? Have any of

you ever heard why? I'd like to. All I want is to see the sun." I quickly sit down and feel everyone staring at me. They aren't angry or entertained. More like...shocked.

Soon the whole class goes by and just as I'm stepping out, Bree stops me. "Iris, could you wait a second." I reluctantly turn around "You know we can't ever leave."

"You don't know that."

"I won't let you!" she says. I will never understand her. Sometimes she just doesn't seem human.

The next day I skip my classes and head for the library. After a while of looking through books I find a book called The Old History saying "now many years before, we created The Institution to leave shelter when the planet was empty of The Unworthy Ones." I don't understand what that means. I check out the book and run into Bree on my way out. "Hey Bree, I want to show you something strange from this book." Suddenly, she grabs it out of my hands and when I hold on she screams. "No!!"

"Bree, calm-"

Without warning her touch sends shocks through my body.

I wake up to a dark, damp room. Freezing, I remember the events from yesterday - well at least I think it was yesterday.

Suddenly there's another voice from above that I know but can't place. "Iris Walkers..." the figure begins walking down stairs towards me, clothed in darkness. "I know what you want...you always have been a Curious one..."

"Who...are you?"

"A girl should at least...recognize her own mother."

The memories come back. Ones I had pushed away trying to forget. *It was dark, my mother was hurrying and frantically packing a bag while she said goodbye to my dad. They thought I was asleep...*

I shake away the memory and said, "Mom...what happened?"

"I didn't want to leave you I just had to...in order to save you. I promised to come back when I knew everything. And now I do. My whole life I wanted to be free and when I was about your age I started to learn things nobody else knew and people tried to stop me. But then the night I disappeared, I left. I really did it. There was absolutely no reason to be down here, I thought." She sighs before continuing. "Well, one that I could understand. Many years ago, our ancestors, the people who built this shelter were living up above and then soon they got ideas...ideas that they were better than the others... who they called called the Unworthy Ones. They were the ones who weren't 'perfect' - the minorities and poorer people. Our ancestors kept themselves segregated from The Unworthy Ones for a long time but soon that wasn't enough. They became so paranoid and scared and thought the Unworthy Ones would try to kill them. So, after years of anxiety and paranoia, they came down here to separate themselves permanently."

"But why are we still down here?"

“People are still afraid of them, and they don’t know what the world has become out there.”

All this starts to sink in. “Bree always tells me it’s dangerous and when I started to bring up the idea of leaving, she freaked out.”

“Iris...she’s not...Bree’s not one of us,” my mom says.

“Mom! What do you mean?”

“She isn’t human! Bree’s a machine.”

Suddenly, Bree enters the room, turns toward my mother and her eyes go blank and she says “Initiating Non-Exodus protocol.”

“We need to run. Now!” My mom cries out, reaching for me.

We start to run away with Bree trailing behind through narrow unused passages. We get to the surface. The actual edge of our civilization. Steaming pipes the only signs people were ever here. “This way!” Mom shouts.

As we go up step, Bree pulls me back. “I can’t let you go! They won’t let me!” She shouts.

A pipe blasts steam separating me and Bree and I turn back to Mom.

“It’s now or never,” Mom says.

We climb back up the steps. Hands firmly gripping the hatch wheel, it takes both of us to turn and open the rusted door. As I step through, I’m met with the one thing I’ve always wanted to see. The sun.