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EMILY J. TAYLOR was born and raised in California and has since refused to stay put. She's lived in four states and two continents, all of which have conveniently given her an endless amount of story fodder. She currently works as a creative director in Minneapolis, where she spends the long winters dreaming up glittering words to spin into dark tales. Follow her on Twitter and Instagram @emilycanwrite, or find her on her website at emilyjtaylorauthor.com

All her life, Jani has dreamed of Elsewhere. Just barely scraping by with her job at a tannery, she's resigned to a dreary life in the port town of Durc, caring for her younger sister, Zosa. That is, until the Hotel Magnifique comes to town.

The hotel is legendary not only for its whimsical enchantments, but also for its ability to travel—appearing in a new destination every morning. While Jani and Zosa can't afford the exorbitant costs of a guest's stay, they can interview to join the staff. But once inside, Jani quickly discovers their contracts are unbreakable and that beneath its marvelous glamour, the hotel is hiding dangerous secrets.

With the vexingly handsome doorman, Bel, as her only ally, Jani embarks on a mission to unravel the mystery of the magic at the heart of the hotel and free Zosa—and the other staff—from the cruelty of the ruthless maître d'hôtel. To succeed, she'll have to risk everything she loves, but failure would mean a fate far worse than never returning home.



HOTEL MAGNIFIQUE

EMILY J. TAYLOR




RAZORBILL



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PROLOGUE



The courier was given a single instruction: deliver the boy before the stroke of midnight. Simple—except, usually, she delivered packages during the day, not little boys in the dead of night.

The job paid handsomely, but that wasn't the reason the courier agreed. She took the job because she was curious.

She wondered why a well-to-do couple came to her of all people. Why the boy's father refused to write the address down and instead whispered it into her ear, why the boy's mother wept. Most of all she wondered who might receive this boy, considering the delivery location was not a home, nor an address to any physical structure, but the space in between two—an empty alley on the other side of town.

The boy seemed ordinary enough, with unblemished copper skin a shade deeper than her own. However, he hung his head as they walked, as if the thick night air pressed upon his shoulders.

The courier thrust her lantern at the gloom, beating back shadows with a growing sense of unease. Her grandfather's stories came to her: whispers of magic hiding in the corners of the world, and young children met with terrible fates.

She was too old to believe in stories, and yet she quickened her pace.

One block from their destination, the boy dragged his feet. Gripping his bony shoulder, she tugged him down the final street, and halted.

The alley was gone. A strange, slender building stood in its place, squeezed into the narrow space, fitting in seamlessly with the crumbling structures on either side.

A figure peeled away from a shadow near the entrance.

The courier drew the boy behind her. “Are you the person I’m supposed to meet?”

Whoever it was raised a slim object. A blood-red taper candle flared to life, illuminating a young man’s cool blue eyes and pale face.

The courier searched for a match to explain the flame; no one could light a candle from nothing. Unless—

Shimmering golden smoke billowed from the tip. It spilled onto the street, snaking around the courier. Tiny globes buzzed and flickered like fireflies or dust motes catching moonlight. Or something else. Scents gusted by: peppermint oil, then burnt sugar, as if caramel were bubbling too long on a stove, followed by a whiff of citrus left to rot.

The man strode through the golden smoke and took the boy’s hand, like a father would do. For a brief moment, the boy stumbled, unsure, but then he *willingly* walked with the man toward the narrow building.

The courier clutched her chest and felt her heart pound in an erratic rhythm—harder than it ever had before. This was all wrong.

She lunged to stop the man, but golden smoke twined around her ankles, restraining her. She opened her mouth to scream, but no sound escaped her lips, not even a whimper.

Her hands wrapped around her throat as the man halted at the doorway of the building. She watched in horror as he smiled, sharp-toothed, then brought his striking face level with the boy's own. "Come along now," he said. "I have the perfect job for you."

The man opened the door and jerked the boy inside.

The moment the door shut, the smoke dissipated. The courier strained until she could move her feet. She hurled herself toward the building, skidding to a stop as the entire thing vanished before her eyes, leaving nothing but an alley covered with overgrown weeds and cast in shadows.



I often heard my sister before I saw her, and tonight was no exception. Zosa's supple voice spilled through the open window of Bézier Residence, sounding so like our mother's—at least until she began a raunchier ditty comparing a man's more delicate anatomy to a certain fruit.

I crept inside, unnoticed in the crowd of boarders. Two of the younger girls pretended to dance with invisible partners, but every other eye was fixed on my sister, the most talented girl in the room.

A special kind of girl rented rooms at Bézier Residence. Almost all worked jobs fitting of their foul mouths: second shifts as house grunts, factory workers, grease cooks, or any number of ill-paying positions in the vieux quais—the old docks of Durc. I worked at Tannerie Fréllac, where women huddled over crusted alum pots and wells of dye. But Zosa was different.

“Happy birthday,” I shouted when her song ended.

“Jani!” She bounded over. Her huge brown eyes shone against a pale, olive-skinned face that was far too thin.

“Did you eat supper?” I'd left her something, but with all the oth-

er girls around, food had a tendency to disappear.

She groaned. “Yes. You don’t have to ask me every night.”

“Of course I do. I’m your big sister. It’s my life’s greatest duty.” Zosa scrunched her nose and I flicked it. Fishing in my sack, I pulled out the newspaper that had cost me half a day’s wage and pressed it into her palms. “Your present, *madame*.” Here, birthdays weren’t dusted with confectioners’ sugar; they were hard-won and more dear than gold.

“A newspaper?”

“A jobs section.” I flipped open the paper with a sly grin.

Inside were advertisements for jobs in fancy dress shops, patisseries, and perfumeries, positions that would never belong to a thirteen-year-old who didn’t look a day over ten. Luckily they weren’t what I had in mind.

Skipping past them, I pointed to a listing that had appeared in papers across town an hour ago.

The ink was vibrant purple, like Aligney blood poppies or crushed amethyst velvet. It stood out, a strange beacon in a sea of black and white.



The girls crowded around us, and everyone leaned in as purple ink winked with an iridescence that rivaled polished moonstones.

No address was given. The legendary hotel needed none. It appeared every decade or so in the same old alley downtown. The whole city was probably there now, already waiting like fools for a chance at a stay.

Years ago, when the hotel last made an appearance, the majority of the invitations were delivered beforehand to only the wealthiest citizens. Then, the day the hotel arrived, a few more precious invitations were gifted to random folk in the crowd. Our matron, Minette Bézier, was one of those lucky few.

That midnight, the guests stepped into the hotel and disappeared, along with the building. Two weeks later, they famously stepped *back*, appearing in the same alley from nothing but thin air.

My fingers twitched and I pictured cracking the seal on my own invitation. But even if we were fortunate enough to win one, we'd still have to pay for a room—and they weren't exactly cheap.

Zosa's brows drew together. "You want me to interview?"

"Not quite. I'm going to interview. I'm taking *you* to audition as a singer."

It had been four years since I'd taken her to a singing audition—the first one hadn't worked out in our favor, and I couldn't stomach going through it again, so we didn't try for more. But today was her birthday and this was *the* Hotel Magnifique. Everything about it felt different. Perfect, somehow. "Hotels hire singers all the time. What do you say?"

She answered with a smile that I felt in the tips of my toes.

One of the older girls shoved a lock of greasy blonde hair behind her pink ear. “That advertisement is a tease. It would be a miracle if any of us got a job.”

I straightened. “That’s not true.”

She shrugged as she turned away. “Do what you want. I wouldn’t waste my time.”

“Think she’s right?” Zosa asked, her delicate mouth turning down.

“Absolutely not,” I said, perhaps too quickly. When Zosa’s frown deepened, I cursed silently and dragged my thumb along our mother’s old necklace.

The worthless chain was Verdanniere gold, rigid as steel. Maman always joked my spine was made of the stuff. I often fumbled for it when I needed her guidance with Zosa. Not that she ever gave it; dead mothers weren’t any good for guidance.

“The hotel wouldn’t run an advertisement if no one had a chance. Tomorrow, we’ll show them what we’ve got. When they discover how brilliant we are, we can kiss this place goodbye for good.”

The thought felt like a bright coal smoldering in my chest.

My fingers trembled as I straightened one of Zosa’s dark curls like Maman would do. “Let’s show the advertisement to Bézier. She’ll know more about the hotel than anyone here.”

Zosa nodded, eyes gleaming. I plucked the jobs section from her fingers and took off. Girls raced behind me up two flights of stairs to my favorite room, the third-floor sitting room that used to house sailors before Bézier bought the building. It was stuffed with shelves of antiquated ocean charts and atlases for far-off places I’d often page through.

Bézier sat before her fire, stockinged feet propped on a window ledge. Outside, rain battered the port of Durc, turning the city I hated into a wet blur.

Her mouth pinched when we all streamed in. “What is it now?”

I handed her the page of newsprint. Purple ink caught the firelight and Bézier’s pale face slackened.

“Is something wrong?” asked a girl behind me.

Bézier glanced above the hearth to the decade-old sheet of parchment sheathed behind glass: her invitation. In the low light, the purple ink shone with the same iridescence as the advertisement. “Hotel Magnifique is returning, I see.”

Another door opened and a few stragglers squeezed in, jostling for a look.

“I’ve heard the guests sip on liquid gold from champagne flutes for breakfast,” said a girl in back. More girls chimed in with their own rumors.

“They say the pillows don’t have feathers, they’re all stuffed with spun clouds—”

“Heard each night, you cross the world thrice over—”

“And all their fancy doormen are princes from some far-off land—”

“Bet they give fancy kisses, too.” A girl with beige skin and ruddy cheeks made a vulgar gesture with her tongue. Thankfully Zosa didn’t notice. Instead, a grin split her face.

Shame there was no way to know if the rumors were true; guests signed away all memory of their stay upon checkout. Besides luggage, the only thing guests returned with was a feeling of devastat-

ing happiness. Bézier once admitted to icing her jaw from all the smiling.

Curious, I glanced at Bézier. Her eyes had grown misty, as if the hotel returning somehow sparked a memory. I opened my mouth to ask about it until Zosa slipped in front of me. “Did you ever see the maître?”

The maître d’hôtel was the proprietor and as famous as the hotel itself.

Bézier nodded, smug. “The hotel came once when I was a young, pretty thing. The maître had the brightest smile I’d ever seen. Positively gleamed greeting the crowds. He plucked a flower from the air and tossed it to me.” She pretended to catch a tiny bloom. “The thing smelled like blueberry pie then dissolved to nothing in my fingers. Over a decade went by before the hotel came again, and when it did, the maître looked exactly the same.”

“Wearing the same clothes?” someone asked.

“No, you ninny. He *looked* the same. Same face. Same charm. Hadn’t aged, not a day. Makes sense, I guess. He is the greatest suminaire in all the world.”

Girls gasped at the mention of a suminaire: the old Verdanniere word for *magician*.

Outside of the hotel, a suminaire was the most dangerous thing in the world. Magic was said to build in their blood during adolescence until it flared out in an uncontrollable power, with the potential to hurt—or kill—anyone who happened to be near them at the time.

Some said it poured from a child’s nose into a dark cloud.

Others said it looked like pitch-black fingers clawing up a child's throat. And there was no way to tell a normal child from a suminaire before their magic flared.

There were rumors of what to look out for, of course. Outlandish things like craving blood or tongues turning black. There were even children said to come back to life after a fatal wound only to discover they had magic in their blood. But no one could prove it.

Whatever the case, magic was so dangerous that for centuries in Verdanne children suspected to be suminaires were either drowned or burned to death.

But inside the hotel, magic was safe. It was well known the maître somehow enchanted the building himself, allowing the suminaires he employed to perform astonishing feats without harming a soul. Nobody knew how he'd done it, but everybody wanted a chance to see it firsthand.

Before anyone could ask another question, Bézier clapped her hands. "It's late. Everyone to your rooms."

"Wait," I said. "Do you remember anything now that the hotel is back? Is it as magical as the rumors?" As soon as the words left my mouth, I felt silly for asking.

Bézier, however, didn't laugh or think it odd. Instead, she glanced at her old invitation wistfully.

"I'm certain it's more," she said with a bitter note. I'd be bitter too if I couldn't remember the most exciting time of my life. She tossed the advertisement in the fire, then stumbled back. "My god."

The paper caught, burning pink, then green, then crimson, turning the hearth into a dazzling display of rainbow flames. The flames

shot higher, raging into the chimney, creating a more arresting sight than the storefronts of boulevard Marigny.

“It’s *magic*,” Zosa whispered.

My neck prickled. There was a reason Hotel Magnifique caused gasps and goggling. Normally, magic was rare, dangerous, and to be avoided at all costs. But somehow, inside that hotel, it was the opposite, and tomorrow we might finally have a chance to experience it ourselves.



This morning, a wet southern wind covered the vieux quais in slippery algae. I gripped Zosa's hand as we skidded along the docks, past fishermen unloading pallets and mothers kissing their sailor sons goodbye.

"Jani, look." Zosa pointed at a ferry pulling into port. "Think it's ours?"

"Hard to say."

Four years ago, after our mother had passed, I spent an absurd sum of dublonnes to purchase passage on a similar ferry from Aligney, our small inland village up the coast.

The trip took five days. Zosa spent the time dreaming about what she'd buy in Durc like lace gloves and the striped tins of crème de rose Maman would smear on her face. I couldn't stop smiling, convinced that my life was about to begin.

Things felt different the moment we disembarked. The docks were crowded. Zosa was only nine so I made her stay close. It had hit me then: everyone I cared about was either dead or in Aligney. We were alone in a strange city, and it was all my doing.

It was a mistake to leave home. For the past few months, I'd been saving every coin to buy passage back to Aligney. But at the rate I was going, I didn't want to think about how long it would take. The hotel would probably get us there years faster.

My breath stilled at the thought, and crisp, golden memories of home rushed to me. I could practically feel the uneven cobblestones I ran over as a child, my belly full from gorging on strawberries plucked from swollen summer bushes.

"Move," barked a pale-skinned woman clutching an otter fur stole, snapping me from my thoughts. She walked around us, careful not to come too close.

Zosa fingered the holes in her good frock. "She must think we crawled out from under the docks. Everyone is so glamorous today."

I took off my ruffled lilac hat. The style was terribly dated, but it was the nicest thing I owned. Bending, I fastened it on Zosa as if it were a crown.

"No one is as glamorous as us, madame," I said, and my heart lifted at her grin. "Now let's hurry. The maître d'hôtel himself is expecting us for tea."

Together, we walked past the vieux quais and into town. Streams of purple bunting hung from eaves while pink and green carnations decorated every doorstep. The celebration was unlike anything I'd ever seen, and all for the hotel.

"There's so many people." Zosa giggled as we rounded a corner near the famed alley. "I can't see my feet."

I maneuvered her out of the way of a large group. "If you don't

watch it, someone will stomp on those pretty feet and I'll never hear the end of it."

She twirled. "I don't care. It's wonderful."

"Only until we can't find each other." The thought of losing her in a crowd always put me on edge.

"Are you trying to have no fun?"

"I made it a rule to never have fun until *after* lunch," I teased.

"Truly?"

"Come on, you," I said and steered her into a clearing occupied by street performers in satin brassieres, faces hidden behind *mâché* masks. Zosa jerked back when one performer popped forward, tears of painted blood dripped down her mask as she sang for coin.

"A suminaire called up la magie.

And turned his wife into a pyre.

He scorched her eyes and cracked her bones.

Her fate was rather dire!"

Suminaires were still the subjects of songs and stories, even when nobody had seen one in ages. In the last few decades, sightings became so rare that people stopped worrying about magic hurting anyone, instead growing curious about it, and Verdanniere laws grew lax. The hotel only added to the allure. Here, people were so eager to experience magic that fears about it were forgotten the way one might forget the threat of a lightning bolt striking you dead in a field.

"Do you think we'll see a suminaire today?" Zosa asked.

"Hopefully only *inside*. Where the *maître* makes it safe for everyone."

“I bet the *maître’s* handsome.”

“He’s too old for you,” I growled, and pinched her nose. “Let’s keep moving.”

A moment later, we passed two men with brown skin and giddy smiles. They each clutched thick envelopes. Invitations.

“Six winners this time!” someone shouted.

“They already picked the winners?” My face fell. I supposed the contest was good—it gave everyone hope. Still, I felt a stab of jealousy that I couldn’t shake. Before I could take another step, Zosa tugged my sleeve so hard she nearly took my arm off. “Hey!”

“Would you turn your big head?” She pointed.

Then I saw it.

The hotel looked like it had spent its whole life sewn into the narrow alley between *Apothicaire Richelieu* and *Maison du Thé*. Clad in slatted wood, a single column of windows went up five floors. There couldn’t be more than ten cramped rooms, tops. Above the door hung a sign too ornate for the shabby building where a pair of words swirled with inlaid pearl: *hotel magnifique*.

“How quaint,” I said with a twinge of disappointment. The hotel was unremarkable.

A single round window, twice as large as the others, sat up top and shelved several succulents. Lucky plants. Except I didn’t understand how they got from place to place. Or the building itself, for that matter.

The hotel was rumored to visit every corner of the world. I knew my geography—*Verdanne* was the largest country on the continent, bordered by the jagged mountains of *Skaadi* to the north and

windswept Preet to the east. Beyond were more enormous countries, then oceans filled with endless places to see. The world was vast and unimaginable, and yet this single building traversed it all.

We both straightened at a woman's shriek. "It's the maître!"

A young man stood at the entrance.

"Saw him giving away invitations," the woman went on. "Pressed duchesse roses to the first winner's palm as she entered."

"I knew it. He's magnificent," Zosa gushed.

I had to squint. With the sun shining directly on him, the maître gleamed like a newly minted silver dublonne. He wore a black livery that contrasted with his light skin.

Bézier was right. The greatest suminaire in all the world wasn't much older than me. Nineteen. Twenty, at most. Outrageously young. Or he looked it, anyway.

This man somehow enchanted the whole building, made it safe for the suminaires he employed to practice magic, safe for guests to witness it.

"Welcome." The maître plucked a tulip from the air and handed it to an older woman with brown skin and wide smile as she hobbled into the hotel clutching an invitation. "Pleasure, pleasure," he said to a light-skinned young woman holding another invitation, then, "Outstanding hat, mademoiselle," to her little daughter as they filtered through the door, followed by the pair of giddy men.

The maître cleared his throat. "Thank you all for stopping by. Please come again next time Hotel Magnifique arrives."

He bent in a flourished bow. When he came up, a handful of lilies dripped between his long fingers. He tossed them up. The flowers

folded into tiny birds that dissolved into shimmering purple smoke with each wing beat. When I looked down, the maître was gone.

Incredible. Except for in his place was a rope barring the front door with a sign that read, *only guests and staff beyond this point*.

“Do you think interviews are inside?” Zosa asked.

“I don’t know, but I’m going to find out.” I eyed the sign. Surely I could take a peek. “Wait for me here.”

Elbowing past the crowd, I climbed the steps and slipped under the rope. Three words no wider than a thumb were carved into the front door’s black lacquer: *le monde entier*.

The whole world.

The words tugged at something inside me, beckoning.

I pulled the door open, but it was impossible to see a thing. I took a step forward. But instead of walking inside, I crashed nose-first into a wall.

Stumbling back, I trailed my fingertips over what appeared to be a sheet of glass filling the doorframe. At least I assumed it was glass, until a hand reached through and grabbed my wrist. With a shriek, I discovered the hand was attached to a young doorman.

I blinked, trying to make sense of the open doorway that was also a wall and this boy who simply walked through it.

No, not a boy. Much too tall, with lean muscles evident under his livery. The maître was blindingly pale, but this young man was the opposite. His warm copper skin accentuated the vivid brown eyes that stared down at me.

“Can I help you?” he asked in Verdanniere with an accent I’d never heard before.

I glanced up at the building and pictured all the atlases lining Bézier's sitting room, the blobs of land I would trace with my fingertips. It didn't seem plausible that such an old structure could travel far.

"Where were you yesterday?" I asked.

"A minute's journey from here," he said curtly. When I tried to inspect the wall, he shut the door. "Only guests and staff are allowed inside."

Right. That damned sign. "Where are the interviews?"

"You want to interview with the hotel?"

He seemed surprised, which made me bristle. I skewered him with a glare. "Obviously."

We both jumped when the hotel's door burst open. A group wandered out. A lapis necklace glittered against a petite guest's deep brown skin. She was followed by another guest with skin so close to white that it would char in a minute under Durc's summer sun.

They laughed and a wafting sultry scent made my toes curl. "What's that smell?"

"Desert jasmine. It's rather ordinary."

Ordinary wasn't the word I would use. I could gobble that scent for dessert. "It's exquisite. Where is it from?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm in a hurry. I really don't have time right now for silly girls."

"Excuse me?"

"You took the words right out of my mouth," he said with a smirk, then tried to duck past me.

I couldn't enter the building by myself and although he was in-

furiating, he was the only employee I'd seen besides the maître. I grabbed his arm. "Where are the interviews?"

"Don't you understand I'm busy?"

"Then hurry it up and answer my question."

He gave me a long look then scanned down the street. I tried to pinpoint what it was he searched for, but all I could see was a mass of people. My breath halted when he brushed a curl from the side of my neck.

"If I were you, I would go straight home. Pretend the hotel never came," he said in a low voice. Then he dipped past me, disappearing into the crowd.



Over the next two hours, the doorman wouldn't leave my mind, the way his vivid eyes seemed to judge me. The way he'd brushed me off. He probably warned me away because he didn't think I belonged in a place like the Hotel Magnifique.

I picked at my green-stained fingers. The dye from the tannery stank of harbor fug, as most things did in Durc. Some said if you lived here long enough, barnacles would sprout from your rib bones. I didn't doubt it. After a rare bath, my skin would still stink of rotting fish. But I refused to give up now. Maman always said I was too stubborn for my own good, but I couldn't help myself. The doorman's actions made me want the job even more.

"Could this line go any slower?"

"God, I hope not." Zosa swiped at sweat dripping from under the lilac hat.

The line outside Maison du Thé—the old teahouse beside the hotel, where we'd learned interviews were being held—was obscenely long. Unfortunately for my aching calves, we were at the end.

When we reached the teahouse entrance, Zosa shrieked at a

gilded sign listing the open positions. stage performer appeared between musician and scullery maid. A man with fair skin dressed in a suit too elaborate for the heat didn't spare us a smile. Instead, he opened the door and practically shoved us through.

Inside, marble countertops held weighted silver scales. Tall glass jars covered every shelf, filled to the brim with brightly colored tea leaves.

"Next!" shouted a woman from the back room. The interview.

"Will you go first?" Zosa's voice shook with nerves, just like during that first audition years ago.

I straightened a ruffle on the hat. "Of course I will."

In back, a statuesque, olive-skinned woman greeted me. Her cropped brown hair matched the gleam of her velvet pantsuit. She dressed like a man but had more panache than all the men I knew. I liked her, I realized, until she wrinkled her nose at me.

"Not much to look at, are you?" she said, then held up a large bronze compass with a gleaming green jade needle. "Now hold still."

The compass's needle spun in dizzying circles, but it didn't stop once. The woman tucked the compass in her pocket.

"What was that for?"

"I ask the questions." She snatched my chin. "Your name?"

I swallowed. "Janine Lafayette. But everyone calls me Jani."

"What a boring name." Her lips tugged up. "I'm Yrsa, by the way." She released my chin. "Have you lived in this city your whole life?"

"I'm from an inland village up the coast called Aligney," I said, a tremor in my voice.

"Did you like your little village?"

When we were babies, Maman pointed our cribs toward the center of Aligney so our feet would always know the way back, a Verdannièr superstition that stuck with me.

Even now, I could perfectly picture the tight rows of houses that turned lemon yellow in the winter sunsets. I knew exactly when the poppies would bloom, and where our next dinner would come from. I had friends there—friends who *worried* about me. It felt like I hadn't taken a deep breath for the past four years, but in Aligney I could breathe with every corner of my lungs.

My only constant these days was the ache in my chest to return.

"I loved my village. I only brought my sister here after our mother died. I planned to go back when—"

"So your mother is dead." She cut me off. "What about your father?"

Maman never told us specifics. "He was a farmer."

"And where do you live now?"

I started to tell her about Bézier Residence until she fluttered a hand, dismissing me with a wave. "I've heard enough. Send in the next person."

Zosa shot up when she saw me. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," I lied. "Don't keep the woman waiting."

My sister dashed in back while I scrubbed tears from my eyes. It was foolish to let myself hope. I traced the hard outline of a coin in my pocket, left over from the newspaper. At least I could buy Zosa a tin of pastilles when she was through, help sweeten the rejection.

Minutes passed. I heard her muffled singing through the door. Eventually Zosa burst into the front, a blank look on her face.

“Well?”

She held up a sheet of parchment and my mouth went dry. The page curled at the corners, archaic compared to modern foolscap. A black line at the bottom told me exactly what it was.

One contract. For a single job.

Yrsa sauntered up. “I offered your sister a position. She’ll be paid ten Verdanniere dublonnes a week singing for our guests.”

Ten dublonnes was triple what I made. I had to bite my tongue to keep from tearing up. Of course Yrsa would think Zosa was extraordinary, especially compared to her lackluster sister.

Zosa couldn’t go alone. If Maman were here, she’d be poking me to do something. But Zosa was grinning like the sun itself had risen inside of her, and I couldn’t think of a single thing to say that wouldn’t break her heart.

Yrsa placed a bronze-nibbed pen and purple inkwell on a table. Pulling out a golden pin, she pricked my sister’s finger. A perfect bead of blood welled.

My hands shot up. “What are you doing?”

“It’s part of the contract. Even our guests sign something similar.” Yrsa tilted the drop into the inkwell. Purple ink hissed while Zosa’s blood dissolved. Yrsa dipped the pen and pressed it between my sister’s fingers.

My eyes darted to the contract. I expected the page to be drafted in Verdanniere—the language of Verdanne and a fairly common tongue across the continent. This contract had a smattering of Verdanniere, but most paragraphs were in languages I’d never seen. At the bottom was an X.

Zosa's cheeks were flushed. "I've never had anything this exciting happen to me. Jani, I did it."

Jealousy swept through me. My fingers curled with a swift desire to grab the contract and sign it myself. I turned to Yrsa. "My sister is barely thirteen. She can't go by herself. We could share a room and I could work doing whatever you needed." *Let us both go.*

"Afraid that's not possible," Yrsa said. "I offered her the job. Only guests and staff can pass the threshold."

The threshold: that wall made of nothing. There wasn't a way to get past it together.

"It's all right," Zosa said. "We'll speak to someone. It'll all work out."

She didn't understand that I couldn't go unless they hired me too. I put my face in my hands. When I looked up, Zosa had lifted the pen nib to the parchment and scrawled her name across the bottom of the page.

I leaped forward and knocked over the inkwell. Purple splattered on the table as I grabbed the pen and gave it back to Yrsa. I glanced down and almost gasped aloud. The purple well wasn't spilled or knocked over. It was capped. But I'd seen the ink spill, I was sure of it.

It had to be magic.

"Your sister will report to the hotel by six o'clock." Yrsa tucked Zosa's signed contract down her jacket and left.

"There's no way you're going," I said, putting my foot down, right on top of an old nightshirt Zosa was reaching for. The seams ripped when she snatched it, while pretending I wasn't there. "Hello. Right

in front of you.” I poked her forehead and she glowered. “See. Not so invisible, am I?”

Continuing to ignore me, she stuffed Maman’s old sheet music down a grain sack filled with more of Maman’s mementos. A spider hopped from the burlap onto her finger. She shrieked, flinging it off then flipping around to face me. “You never let me do anything I want to do.”

“That’s not true. Besides, I made a promise to watch over you.”

She rolled her eyes. “That was before Maman died. I’m thirteen now. You weren’t much older when you took the job at the tannery.”

“Do you think I had a choice? Now I’m seventeen and know better.” I waved a hand around the cramped room. “I pay for all this. I have a say.”

“The soot, you mean? The beetles and smell of rotting teeth? You don’t spend your days pulling out your hair, wishing it was your skin, so you didn’t have to feel the itchy dirt. With ten dublonnes a week, I could send some back. You could move out of the vieux quais by next winter.”

“How would you send me money from the other side of the world?”

“There has to be a way.”

“I’ve never heard of one.”

“If Maman were still alive, she’d let me take the job.” Zosa’s bottom lip quivered. “Jani, I thought you wanted me to sing.”

“I *want* you to sing,” I said, and felt a pang in my heart, but I didn’t know what else to do. “But not like this, without me. I’m sorry.”

Zosa ripped off the lilac hat and chucked it into the hall. I took a

step to grab it and stopped. A pearl peeked out of Zosa's sack.

Maman's pearl earrings.

When we were little, Zosa would clip them on and belt out a song, pretending to be a stage performer, while I crowed along like a tuneless donkey. I hadn't seen them since Zosa went on her first audition in Durc. Her only audition, until today.

The memory hit me. I'd thought the earrings would make her look older so I clipped them to her earlobes and put her in my old pink dress. She'd looked like a nervous little flower, but we'd needed money and Zosa wanted to audition more than anything.

Now I wished I could erase that day from both our minds.

I rolled a pearl between my fingers. Opalescent paint chipped away, exposing a cheap wooden bead beneath. After the audition didn't go as planned, I tried selling the earrings to a jeweler only to be laughed away. I never told Zosa how worthless they were.

"Listen to me. As soon as I save enough, I'm booking passage to Aligney." I took Zosa's hand. She tried ripping it away, but I held firm. "What if you're not back by the time I leave? Or something happens and I'm forced to go somewhere else? What if the hotel doesn't return for another decade?" I pictured returning from work to an empty room, and my throat thickened. "I don't want to be left alone," I admitted with a wince.

A tear slid down her cheek. After a few silent seconds, her small hand squeezed mine. She sat down. "My hair's a snarling mess from that hat. Would you help me brush it out?"

I let out a long exhale.

That evening, Zosa fell asleep early, while I lay awake, unable to

close my eyes. When the Durc clock chimed eleven, my stomach rumbled; it had been hours since I'd eaten. I crept down the stairwell and stopped to pick up the lilac hat, now trampled with mud—the only casualty of the day, thank god.

Tiptoeing into Bézier's kitchen, I set the hat down and pillaged through leftover pantry scraps. Neck deep in the bread shelf, I reached for a stale crust when the kitchen door creaked. I froze. It was late for girls to still be up. My fingers curled around a can of wooden spoons. Holding it like a weapon, I turned.

A man stood in the doorway.

"There you are. You're quite late, you know."

He inspected the banged-up lilac hat, then me. It was the young doorman from earlier. His cap was gone, no longer covering his shoulder-length black hair. When he tucked a dangling strand behind his ear, my breath caught. One of his fingers wasn't a finger at all but a finely carved and polished piece of wood.

It flexed.

Dangerous. The word flitted across my mind. I raised the can of spoons. He arched a brow. My arm drew back an inch. "What do you want?"

"Unless you were hiding this hat under your skirt earlier, I don't believe I'm here for you." He fingered a lilac ruffle. "I'm searching for the owner of this . . . thing. A young lady who signed a contract."

He meant Zosa. "She's not here."

Unconvinced, he stepped into the room. Too close. I launched the can at his head. It missed, hitting the wall, raining wooden spoons upon his shoulders.

“Excellent throw.” He pulled a spoon from his collar. “As much as I appreciate a good game, there’s no time. I’ve come to bring the hat’s owner back to the hotel!”

“Who are you?”

“My name’s Bel. Now where is she?”

I didn’t trust him as far as I could spit. “She’s not going anywhere with you.”

“So she is here after all.”

I bit out a curse.

He turned toward the door. I had to stop him. I reached under the butcher block and pulled out a thick, tarnished kitchen knife. Racing over, I flung myself between him and the door. Bracing one hand against the frame, I aimed the knife at his middle, and a thrill rushed through me. “Still think I’m another silly girl?”

“Of course.”

“Oh. Well . . . If you go any further, you’ll regret it.”

“I’m sure I will.” He flicked his wooden finger. At the tiniest snick, a blade shot out. A switchblade.

He lunged at me. The kitchen knife clattered to the floor as he pinned me against the door, his face inches from mine. I felt his exhale against my bare skin. If someone walked in and saw us like this, they would get the wrong idea.

I flushed at the thought and struggled against him, but he held firm. With his switchblade at my throat, Bel bent and sniffed the air next to my neck. His nose wrinkled. “Isn’t there soap in Durc?”

I reared back and spat on his face. He wiped his chin on his

shoulder. The city clock chimed the half hour. Eleven thirty.

“Don’t you have somewhere better to be?”

He swore, his blade clicking closed. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

“Doubt it.”

“Look. I’m taking your friend through the lobby door by midnight. She signed a contract. Deal with it.”

I saw it then around the corners of his eyes, recognized it from my own face in the mirror; he was desperate. I knew from experience that desperate folk made foolish decisions.

“There are countless rooms here. You’ll never find her in time. Give me a job as well and I’ll take you straight to the owner of that hat.”

He kicked the kitchen knife away and stepped toward me until my shoulders hit the wall. “You don’t understand. It’s nearly midnight.”

Midnight was spoken with reverence: the hour the hotel left.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” he added.

I believed him. He didn’t *want* to hurt me. But the look in his eyes told me he was willing to.

“Will you be punished if you don’t bring her back?” I asked. There had to be a reason he was risking returning by midnight to find Zosa.

“I won’t be punished. But don’t you think it would be rude to deny the girl her job?”

Unbelievable. “After warning me away, how can you possibly care about whether my sister gets a chance to work?”

“Your sister?” he said. “And I don’t care about her.”

“If that’s true, then give me a job too.”

“No.”

“Then leave us alone.”

A low growl escaped Bel’s throat. “Enough. I have to find her, which means you have to move.” He snaked an arm around my back, the other around my neck, his thumb catching Maman’s necklace until it was on the verge of snapping.

I clawed at him. My fingers tugged something hard at his collarbone. It jolted me, and I clutched my wrist.

A thin chain holding a key had snuck out from under his jacket. I’d never touched magic, but there wasn’t any other explanation for what I felt. I didn’t understand, though—everyone knew magic ran through a suminaire’s blood, not objects. He must be somehow enchanting the key.

“Are you a suminaire?” I asked.

Bel’s mouth curved into a wicked smile, and my stomach dropped. He shoved the key under his shirt then glanced at my hand still wrapped around my wrist.

“Give me a job,” I said again. Thankfully, the words came out sounding braver than I felt.

This time, an odd expression crossed his face, as if he were actually considering it. “Are you often this irritatingly persistent?”

“For you, always.” Feeling emboldened, I flashed my teeth. “Will you take me?”

“It’s not that simple. I don’t carry ink and no one gets inside

without first signing a contract or holding an invitation.”

My eyes grew. “What if I could get myself inside?”

“How would you manage that?”

“With an invitation.”

He released me. “Produce an invitation and I’ll eat that ruffled atrocity of a hat.”

“Then get a fork and give me five minutes.”

“You have one minute.”

I raced up the stairs to Bézier’s third-floor sitting room. I ripped her framed invitation from above the mantel. Smashing the glass, I fished the paper out. I rushed down to the kitchen and waved it in Bel’s face, breathless. “Will this work?”

He took it from me. “How old is this thing?”

“Will it work?”

“I’ve never seen anyone try to use an invitation this old before.” He handed it back. “Now where is this sister of yours? We should have left ten minutes ago.”

My blood pulsed. “You’ll give me a job?”

“I don’t exactly have a choice.” Except he did. But for whatever reason, he was unwilling to leave without Zosa. His eyes settled on the invitation. “If we make it inside and that *thing* allows you entrance, I’ll give you a trial run for a position.”

“What does that mean?”

“You’ll work for two weeks without pay, the same length as a guest’s stay. Prove to me you’re worthy to stay on and you will.”

“At ten dublonnes a week?”

“Five.”

Less than Zosa. But five was still more than I made now. “So you’ll control my fate?”

“Let me guess. You have a problem with that.”

“I don’t,” I forced out, even though the thought made my jaw clench. “So what if something happens?”

“You’ll be out of a job.” Meaning I’d be sent back here. Without pay and without Zosa. “It’s a *very* generous offer.”

“I’m sure it is.” Three years ago I’d walked into Tannerie Fréllac desperate for work. Because of my age, I’d been given a trial run that turned into a long-term position. Just like Bel was offering me. I could do this. I glanced up. “How can I trust you?” He could easily be lying.

“I’m extremely trustworthy.”

“I’m supposed to believe that?”

“Entirely up to you.”

I wished Maman were here. She would know what to do. “Swear it on your mother,” I said, thinking fast.

A pained look flashed across his face. “I don’t remember my mother.”

“Oh . . . Sorry,” I said, awkward, while my heart gave a little twist. I barely had any memories of my own father. My gaze dropped to his key. “Then swear it on your magic.”

“Fine. I swear on my magic I’ll give you a job. Now we’ll have to run if we want to make it on time.”

Right. I pictured me and Zosa stepping out of the hotel and into

Aligney, returning home at last. Bel gave me an odd look when I giggled then slapped a hand over my mouth. I turned toward the stairwell and paused. If we ran, Zosa couldn't keep up with us.

"You'll have to carry her," I said, and flew up the stairs. Bel followed at my heels. Seconds later, he swung Zosa over his shoulder like a sack of winter turnips. She blinked awake, bucking, until I whispered the plan.

"Who is he?" she mouthed, then wagged her eyebrows at his backside.

God. "Stop that." I pinched her nose.

Bel looked between us.

"What is it?" I asked.

"You really wouldn't have let me take her without you." He sounded surprised.

"Like you said, irritatingly persistent."

His mouth twitched as if holding back a smile. "Don't drop the invitation until you're through the front door." He started down the hall.

Zosa's sack still sat on the floor filled with Maman's junk left over from her days as a music tutor. Those pearl earrings.

Then it hit me: Zosa would soon sing in front of a real audience, what she'd always wanted. All those years of scraping by were worth it after all.

In a few months we'd have enough saved to support us for years in Aligney. But we could travel with the hotel first, see some of the world. Everything felt too wonderful to be real.

“Would you hurry?” Bel shouted.

Footsteps creaked. Girls were waking up.

I hoisted Zosa’s spider-infested burlap and raced after the doorman carrying my sister.



Maman once told me that a true gift tends to make itself known. The year I turned eleven, I finally understood what she had meant.

Aligney's Fête de la Moisson took place at the start of autumn. Grown-ups sipped vin de framboise under the stars and bartered their late summer crops, and Maman had her students perform to collect donations for the music school.

That year, Zosa had begged to sing at the fête. *Not yet, ma petite pêche*, Maman had scolded. *You're too young*. But I'd thought my sister was good enough to earn some dublonnes and we wanted to buy this tin of butter caramels we'd spotted in a shop window. They were exquisite—wrapped in golden foil with little adventure stories tucked beneath each label. Determined to have them, I tied ribbons into Zosa's hair and stole an apple crate from our cupboard. After sundown, we marched to the edge of town where the festival was held.

Everyone stood behind intricately painted stalls lit by flickering lanterns carved with fairytales. Embarrassed at our old crate,

I almost turned around. But Zosa refused, and I had splinters from hauling that awful crate. I hadn't wanted it to be for nothing.

Stealthily avoiding Maman, we crept to the end where the late arrivals were setting up. I recognized Madame Durand stacking aubergines from her garden. She turned up her ruddy nose when I kicked rocks to make a space. I put out the donation sign I'd painted along with an empty flour jar.

Old Durand had snickered, and I'd hated her for it. But Zosa ignored her. She hopped right up and began singing so beautifully that everyone stopped what they were doing to watch.

I'd been listening to Zosa sing for so long that her voice felt as ordinary as her snoring, but the people around us didn't have the same reaction. A crowd formed. *What a songbird! An angel! Remarkable little plum*, people murmured. Then Maman appeared, and she was covering her mouth.

That's it, I'd thought, *we're about to be hauled away by our earlobes*. But Maman's hand fell away and she smiled. Tears pricked her eyes, and I laughed at all the dublonnes clinking into our flour jar. All because of my sister.

I often wondered if Zosa remembered that day, if it had been as significant to her as it was to me. Now here we were, years later, standing before a prize larger than any flour jar filled with coins.

Moonlight cast Hotel Magnifique in shades of gleaming silver. Bel opened the black-lacquered door. With my hands gripping the invitation, the lights appeared crisp in a way they hadn't before. I pushed my fingers past the threshold. No invisible wall.

“Greetings, traveler!” A woman’s obnoxiously effervescent voice chimed in my ears.

“Who was that?”

Bel glared. “Would you get on with it? You might be holding a sack of junk, but I’m holding a tiny person with rather sharp bones.”

When I didn’t make a move, he nudged me forward and I stumbled across the threshold. I opened my mouth to complain, but the words never came. The stink of fish was gone, replaced with floral scents and an undercurrent of oranges. And the sight . . .

This place wouldn’t fit inside that old alley, nor a space fifty times that size.

The hotel was a palace.

A colossal staircase curved up the back. Candle-stuffed globes dripped from overhead like shining grapes. Above them, gold trim and filigreed fauna decorated every speck of ceiling, while the surrounding walls were papered in dark flowers. As I stared at the wallpaper, the petals *fluttered* as if blowing in a breeze.

The sights were almost too much to take in.

Mercury glass partitions hugged the perimeter, creating intimate seating areas filled with pink fringed cushions. One partitioned space contained a life-size chess set, its realistic queens dressed like goddesses in flowing robes.

Along a back wall, a series of alcoves housed plush banquettes. My eye caught on a trio of huge, crescent moon-shaped lounge chairs near the door. They glowed as they bobbed, suspended in air.

Near the chairs, a row of luggage carts led to a grand concierge

desk. No one worked the desk, and yet a multitiered cake covered in rose petals sat on the surface beside a tower of precariously stacked champagne flutes.

My breath halted as liquid bubbled from the top glass and spilled over the sides. Soon all the empty flutes were overflowing in a magical fountain of champagne, right atop the desk.

But behind everything was the greatest sight of all; a huge glass column shot to the ceiling, enclosing some sort of garden.

Moonlight filtered through white vines that climbed to where the column met the second-floor balcony. High above, a large bird swooped to a branch flush with more birds. It was an enormous aviary shooting through the center of the hotel.

There were storefronts along boulevard Marigny that kept exotic birds in cages. Zosa would giggle as they ruffled their brightly colored feathers. The aviary's thick glass blurred the view along the lobby level. Whatever was kept inside had to be unlike any bird in Durc.

The front door slammed. I turned and my sleeve snagged the branch of an orange tree that grew straight from the floor. Chunks of marble had crumbled away while thick roots twisted up from underneath. Branches hung with waxy leaves and gleaming oranges that appeared slick to the touch. Curious, I poked one. The orange swayed.

"Don't touch those," Bel said. He set Zosa down and looked from my neck to Bézier's invitation, a horrified expression on his face.

"What is it?"

"You're aging."

I lifted a hand and found myself unable to grasp what I was seeing. My skin was sallow. Each of my knuckles poked through loosening flesh. I ran fingers over my collarbone, shuddering at skin hanging where it should be taut. Age spots bloomed up my wrists. No, not age spots—they turned black and stunk, rotting and oozing. When a plump maggot wriggled out, I felt bile coming up my throat.

I wasn't aging. I was decomposing like a spoiled fish on the summer docks.

"Jani, what's happening?" Zosa scooted toward me.

"Don't," I croaked. Loose skin shuddered. At this rate, I'd be a corpse in minutes.

Before I could blink, Bel took off across the lobby. A sharp cramp stabbed my side. I stumbled, knocking the orange tree. An orange broke off, hitting the floor and smashing into shards. Even despite my current state, my brows furrowed. Fruit didn't shatter.

Another cramp struck me, and I sank to my knees. Bel returned a moment later with a sheet of parchment. A contract.

"Do something," I groaned.

Zosa whimpered.

He placed the contract in front of me, along with a large well of purple ink. With a flick of his switchblade, he stabbed my thumb and dripped my blood into the ink as the Durc clock in the square across from the hotel began its chime to midnight.

I managed to sign my full name by the eighth chime. Just before the tenth, Bel rifled through some big book leaning near the entrance. He pulled out his key and shoved it into the door's lock.

His forehead fell against black lacquer, the lean muscles on his back rising and falling at the eleventh chime.

I didn't look at my hands. I couldn't bear to see what was left. So I sat, dazed, waiting for that clock's twelfth chime to midnight. It never came.

Bel slid to a crouch, eyes locked on mine. I caught the edge of a smile before his forehead collapsed on his crossed arms. "Welcome back."

"He's right," Zosa said, amazed.

I touched my neck, my cheeks. My skin no longer sagged.

"Next time some fool tries to get in with an old invitation, remind me it's a terrible idea," Bel said, but I was too giddy with relief to let his words rile me.

"It's after midnight." Zosa hopped up and ran to the nearest window and tried to peek behind the shuttered drapes.

"We're not in that alley in Durc anymore, are we?" I asked Bel.

His brows drew together. "We're in *an* alley." Pushing up, he stepped toward me and stopped when his heel crunched against one of the broken orange shards. "You broke an orange? Seems you're not very good at following instructions."

I shot him a peeved look, but he was already kicking away the remaining shards, hiding all evidence of what I'd done. Then he studied me with an intensity I'd never experienced from anyone, let alone a man. My skin prickled. He leaned toward me, but didn't touch me. Instead, he grabbed my signed contract and swore.

"Is there something wrong with the contract?"

“Not exactly.” He tucked it down his pocket.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

We both jumped at the click of heels on marble. “There isn’t time to explain. I’ll find you tomorrow before your orientation.”

“When is that?”

He put a finger to his lips at the same moment Yrsa popped out from a back hall balancing a teacup on a saucer. “Ah, Bel! Glad you made it back, dearest. I was frightfully worried.”

“We both know that’s a lie,” Bel said, his eyes never leaving her teacup.

“Because of you I had to send the gathering guests to bed early. Surprise, surprise. You’re in a shitstorm of trouble.”

“I retrieved your hire, didn’t I?” Bel turned to Zosa, but it was me who caught Yrsa’s eye.

“What’s that one doing here?”

“I’m allowed to give out a contract every now and then under certain circumstances. Her sister refused to come without her,” he said. Not exactly the truth, but I wasn’t about to argue. “Don’t worry. She’ll be my responsibility. Besides, housekeeping needs the extra help.”

“You’re willing to take her on?” Yrsa sounded surprised and somewhat amused. “Very well. She can stay, but if she does something sublimely asinine, don’t come running to me.”

“She’ll behave,” Bel said, looking directly at me. A warning.

I thought of the two-week trial run and my stomach flipped. Luck got me here. Not merit.

Images poured through my mind—faces of workers plucked from the highest pedigrees. They'd all sense I was an impostor by tomorrow evening.

Stop it. You can do this, I told myself. No way I'd let anyone send me back now, especially Bel. He was probably already counting the ways I might mess up.

Zosa bounded over, skidding to a halt a foot away. She lifted an orange shard Bel had missed and yelped. The jagged piece bit into her palm. Blood dripped down her arm.

Yrsa set her teacup down and pulled a tiny vial of gold paste from her pocket. She uncapped it and scraped up the smallest bit. In one swift movement, she removed the shard and smeared gold into my sister's cut.

Zosa wiped her palm down her skirt, then lifted it to her face. "It's healed."

I inspected it. The cut was zipped up. Not even a scar.

Yrsa waved the orange shard at Bel. "Did you break a marvelous orange?" I'd never heard of a *marvelous* orange, but the look on Yrsa's face meant it was significant.

Bel shrugged. "Knocked it with my elbow when I carried the little one in." He cut me a look that said to keep my mouth shut. He was lying for me.

"Sorry if I made him break your orange, madame," Zosa added, clearly joining the charade to save my neck. I would have hugged her if Yrsa wasn't watching.

"Don't worry about it. It happens from time to time," Bel said, then turned to Yrsa. "Will you show these two downstairs? As you know, I

have someone expecting me.” He pointed to me. “And if that one tries to throw something at you, don’t worry—she has appalling aim.”

I could only glare at the back of his head as he stalked off.

“Good luck reporting to Bel. That boy doesn’t care about anyone but himself.” Yrsa picked up her teacup. “Now follow me.”

Yrsa led us around the aviary. The glass went up forever, passing candlelit balconies. Around us, more orange trees grew from the marble. Haunting music filled my ears, but there were no musicians.

“It’s all magic,” Zosa whispered.

I nodded, breathless. With each step, the grimy film of my life in Durc seemed to drip away.

We barely blinked as Yrsa steered us down a staircase to an underground service hall lit by candles in slim sconces. The flames grew, turning mauve and casting the hall in dreamy pink. They stretched toward us as we passed. When one got close to my hair, Zosa batted it away.

“They’re harmless and always curious of new staff. They’ll stop soon enough,” Yrsa said. “Here we are.”

A door drifted open. The room behind it was tiny and perfect—it was like peering inside a dollhouse. Nothing was crooked or peeling or lived in. I was afraid to touch anything for fear I might corrupt it with my calluses.

Zosa rushed inside and flopped on a bed arranged with pillows. One bounced up and hovered an inch in the air, as if actually stuffed with spun clouds. The Bézier girls would squeal at the sight, but they weren’t here. We were.

Yrsa turned to leave.

“Wait.” She stopped. “Are we truly Elsewhere?” I asked. I knew her answer, but I needed to hear her say it out loud, that magic had taken me far from Durc, and one step closer to home.

Her hands curled around her teacup. It was filled to the brim with milk that miraculously swirled on its own.

“Welcome to Hotel Magnifique,” she said with a smile, then sauntered off down the pink-tinged hall.