

Michelle Shields & Tasha Svendsen

Dr. Martinez

WMS 3930

9 December 2015

### Symbol

The alarm sounded. Three forty-five as always. The Non-Producers always had to wake up earlier than the others. The shapeless forms of halfsleep danced in front of his eyes which almost replicated colors he once knew. Rubbing his eyes awake didn't sharpen the focus nor saturate his surroundings; grey, everything. Flat, drab, anemic. But those faraway colors from his dreams felt closer today. Today was the day they were announcing the lottery. He began his daily regimen, creaking the rusty coils of his cot as he rolled over to meet his blistered and cracked feet to the cold concrete. He walked the worn few steps into the bathroom and the turned on the shower, filling the tiny cubicle with frigid, salty must. His body didn't register the cold anymore he had been living here so long. He wondered how long it had been, surely it was years. As the icy water beat his skin, he tried to picture what his parents must look like now, if he would recognize them. He wondered how often they passed each other on the street without knowing, as his eyes were always focused to the ground. He wondered if they were among other Producers, spitting and pointing at him and the others as they walked to and from their barracks and camp. He stepped out of the shower and caught his reflection in the mirror. He barely knew the person staring back. With sunken eyes and hollow features, he looked far older than a man his age ought to. His calloused fingers traced the outline of the tattoo which obscured most of the recognizable features on his face. The symbol of the State marking him as their property ensured a life of servitude and subjugation, and an identified him as an unmistakable other and burden to

the Allegiance. But those to be chosen in the lottery were promised early release, to have their marks removed, and to reenter the world of the Producers with their debt forgiven. He could barely fathom what that freedom would feel like; the possibility for reuniting with his family, regaining his friendships, and finding a wife. He couldn't imagine the State really just let them go that easily. There had to be something more. He stopped himself. He did not care what their motives were or what was not being disclosed. The honor he had once felt in being his parent's son gave way to defeat long ago when he the girl he loved was given to another suitor. All but her silhouette remained etched in the small photo of her he managed to keep elusive of the Enforcers every time they made a sweep. Nothing could be worse than the hollow life he was living. He selected his day's clean uniform, no different in appearance than all the others, mute and sickly, and encoded with his ID number.

It was always dark when he left the barracks to walk to the camp. And it was always dark when he returned. He only saw color as periphery smudges when the Producers passed him by, in the blue/green of the bruises they were permitted to adorn him with, or the full maroon of his own blood. His muscle memory exercised their habit of walking through the streets to the camp, a measured routine he didn't have to think about. Slurs, glares of disdain, and pieces found trash were often thrown his way, but he kept his eyes down to no reaction. He joined the snaking line of the other grey figures at the Gate of the entrance. The familiar chorus of electronic beeps of handheld modules used by the Enforcers to scan in each worker for arrival pierced the otherwise quiet air. At random, other Non-Producers were taken out the line after being scanned and were led across to restricted entrance to the Facility. These must be the lottery "winners". A lump grew in his throat & he clinched his jaw. An Enforcer was making his way closer. A singular beep rang in his ear and then the pause while the Enforcer looked at the display. He felt his arm

yanked and soon found himself walking an unfamiliar path towards the other Door. The ground felt different and his legs quickened in effort understand the sense of the new space.

Each Non-Producer was taken into his own room and laid on a gurney. A sterile smell stung his nostrils. All moisture evaporated from his mouth. The bright fluorescence of the lights washed everything in glaring light. A man dressed in white looked up from a folder and made his way to the gurney.

“Congratulations”

He exhaled deeply and felt all of his blood heavy in his veins. The man wiped a wet cottonball on his forearm and lifted a syringe filled with opaque liquid. A prick released all the pressure surging through his body. It was happening. He closed his eyes and watched as the faded faces in his memory seemed to get clearer in his mind. Colour seeped into their features and their animation danced across the back of his eyes.

His face felt hot the way he remembered a sunburn feeling, raw and seared. The feeling of his body waking was realized slowly at first, then a rush of pain was born. The fluttering open of his eyes caught the attention of the Attendant who flagged the man in white. The man came over and held a small mirror to his face. His face. Unmarked. He felt reborn. He basked in the heat of it. Then he noticed the angle of the mirror changing, slowly his reflection moving down his body. Down his neck, his torso, the man in white stopped. Flat and absent, the source of pain was revealed. His hand traced what used to be, when his fingers slipped inside a tunnel of emptiness.

“Congratulations.” Said the man in white again, “You’re a Producer.”