

## *The Bracelet*

When something in your life has always been there, steady, unchanging, you don't question it. You don't think about the hows or whys. It just is. It is something you accept, until it impacts your life in such a way that you are forced to wonder how and why. Which is how I got here . . . walking away from the life I knew, away from my friends and family.

I sit in the waiting room before my number is called. I see people pacing anxiously waiting for their test results. Their futures determined by a piece of paper saying if they are genetically perfect or not. People in white coats walk in and out of offices and labs. Some offering good news and a bracelet; others with grim faces, empty handed. Those who are handed the small reward to wear around their wrists leave with smiles. Those who don't, slink away quietly in the hopes that no one will notice their now so obvious imperfections.

“Maia?” A voice behind me calls, surprising me. I turn around to see my father standing in his white coat. “It's your turn.”

I follow him through a maze of hallways.

Finally he finishes with the tests and tells me to go back and wait for my results. I suddenly feel more nervous than I did before. I can't sit still. I join the other pacers waiting for their fates. The seconds seem to crawl by, seconds feel like hours. I keep glancing at the clock. It seems to be taking longer for them to get my results than anyone else's. Could something have gone wrong? Is that why? I begin to run through all sorts of scenarios in my head of what could be happening behind the closed doors. Finally I see Dad walk out. Bracing myself for bad news he hands me my very own small silver chain. I hold out my

wrist and allow him to fasten the clasp. As I walk out of the lab I feel like a weight has been lifted off my chest but my wrist feels strangely heavy.

When I get home I go straight to bed. Once in bed I can't sleep. I toss and turn, playing with my new bracelet securely fastened on my wrist. I've always worn a similar one identifying me as someone who was too young to be tested. But now I'm of age and received my new bracelet. There are an unfortunate few who do not pass and they often end up on the street. Genetic imperfection is a shame to a family. No one will hire without proof you have been tested. A plain silver chain changes the future of so many young people.

There are places for those who don't pass to go. Group homes and such. All government funded, but never enough to keep up with the number of people who end up there after the government tests.

My thoughts are interrupted by the harsh whispers of my parents. I creep down the stairs. They are sitting across the table from one another. I can't see Mom's face but I can tell she is crying. I listen to the argument from around the corner.

“There was no other way,” Dad insists.

“There's always another way,” Mom counters. “When are we going to tell her? I'm not going to be the one to do it.”

“This is for her own good”.

I step around the corner as Mom says, “We will tell her about her genetic imperfection. I don't care about what type of shame you think it'll bring, she deserves to know.”

Dad sees me and starts towards me as Mom turns. “You weren't supposed to find out like this. You weren't suppose to find out at all.”

It dawns on me what has happened.

“You faked my test results.”

My voice is so quiet I'm not sure he can hear me. My throat is constricted, I can barely breathe. Tears spring into my eyes. I think of the other people who failed the test, like I should have. So many people unemployed living on the streets. Why? Because their fathers don't work at the Lab? Because they aren't privileged enough to have someone fake their results?

I run.

I keep running.

It feels like I've been running for hours. I don't know where I am or where I'm going, but I do know I can't stay in that house.

Finally I stop. I look up, there's a group home. I've walked by dozens of them before, but this is different. I look down at my wrist, at that bracelet. I let it fall to the ground as I undo the clasp. Never have I been able to go in before. No one with a bracelet is allowed. As I look at my bare wrist I feel light. I float up the steps. I have a realization: something so small controls the lives of so many people. I smile, knowing by taking it off, I get to decide for myself. I enter the building, and exit my old life.