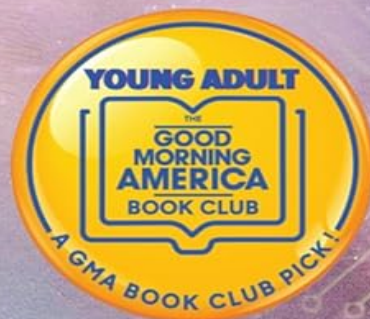


#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

TAHEREH MAFI

WATCH  
ME

A SHATTER ME NOVEL







# WATCH ME

A SHATTER ME NOVEL

TAHEREH  
MAFI







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## EPIGRAPH

The question of the next generation will not be one  
of how to liberate the masses, but rather, how to  
make them love their servitude.

—Aldous Huxley

No one will ever know the violence it took to  
become this gentle.  
—Unknown

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**ROSABELLE**

# CHAPTER 1

When I open the cupboard, the shelves are empty.

This is no surprise, of course; the shelves have been empty for weeks. It's for Clara's sake that I make a show of opening them every morning, pretending there might be more than the same skittering cockroach living inside.

I close the cabinet door, then turn to face her. Clara never leaves the bed unless I carry her; today she's sitting up and staring out the icy window, her pale eyes made paler by the blast of early morning light. Her hand trembles as she twitches the threadbare curtain, and a blue glare briefly illuminates the glass.

"We're out of bread," I announce. "I'm heading out."

Some days Clara lets me leave without asking questions. Other days she asks me how I pay for the food I bring home. Today she says, "I dreamed of Mama last night."

I keep my face impassive. "Again?"

Clara turns toward me, so gaunt her eyes appear sunken in her face. "She wasn't well, Rosa. She was suffering."

I step into my boots, shaking my head as I move into a shaft of light. "It was only a dream," I say to her. "The dead don't suffer."

Clara looks away again. "You always say that."

"And you stare at her photograph too much," I say, knotting my laces. My right hand doesn't shake today, and I experience a rush of relief as I straighten, then a flash of terror as I note the dwindling fire in the hearth—and the disappearing pile of firewood beside it. I force the terror down. "Besides," I add, "you hardly knew her."

"Well, you hardly speak of her," Clara counters with a sigh.

Through the window I glimpse a redheaded woodpecker and watch, transfixed, as it hammers its beak into a mossy trunk. It's been just over a decade since the fall of The Reestablishment—just over a decade since we've lived here, on Ark Island—and I, too, wish I could bash my head

over and over against a hard surface every day. I take a sharp breath, ignoring the ever-present ache of hunger.

It's still strange to see the birds.

They fill the sky with sound and color, rattling roofs and branches. All around us evergreens spiral skyward, never surrendering to the seasons. It's always damp here; viridescent; cold. Lakes shimmer unprovoked. Distant mountain ranges seem painted in watercolors, layers of teeth made translucent by fog. The warm and well-fed have been known to call this land beautiful.

"I won't be long," I say, buttoning myself into Papa's old coat. Years ago I cut off the military insignias with a dull blade, earning myself a scar in the process. "I'll see about rebuilding the fire when I get back."

"Okay," Clara says quietly. Then: "Sebastian came by yesterday."

I stiffen.

Very slowly I reanimate, wrapping my mother's tattered scarf too tightly around my neck. I was allowed to work at the mill yesterday, and by the time I got home Clara had been asleep.

"He came to deliver the mail," she says.

"The mail," I echo. "He came all this way just to deliver the mail."

Clara nods, then reaches under her pillow to retrieve a folded newspaper and a thick, unmarked envelope, both of which she holds out in offering. I tuck the two into my coat pocket without glancing at either.

"Thank you," I say softly. I imagine, for a moment, how it might feel to slit Sebastian's throat.

Clara tilts her head at me. "He said you missed last week's meeting."

"You were sick."

"I told him that."

I look toward the door. "You don't need to tell him anything."

"He still wants to marry you, Rosa."

I lift my head sharply. "How do you know about that?"

"Would it be so terrible?" She ignores my question, shivering violently. "Don't you like him? I thought you liked him."

I turn to face our little kitchen, the small stove, the rickety table and chairs we never use. The wooden plaque hanging above the sink.

Our society

REESTABLISHED



Our future  
REDEFINED

My eyes unfocus.

I was ten when I came home to find a black bear tearing through the last of our food. Clara was three; Mama had been dead three days. I don't remember killing the bear or burying what remained of my mother.

I remember the blood.

I remember the weeks it took to scrub the floorboards. The bars of Clara's crib. The ceiling. Mama's last words to me had been *close your eyes, Rosa*, except that she'd closed her eyes and I'd kept mine open. She put the gun in her mouth just hours after we heard that Papa would no longer be executed for war crimes. He'd traded all of us in for a half-life, selling secrets to the enemy in exchange for a slow rot in prison. I used to think Mama killed herself because she couldn't withstand the shame. Now I'm certain it was because she knew she'd be forced to pay for Papa's treason.

Maybe she thought they'd spare her children.

I grab the bear pelt from its hook and drape it around Clara's trembling limbs. She hates the pelt. She says the bear's pain still lingers in the cottage, that it makes her retch even after all these years. So when she allows the fur to settle on her shoulders without protest, I know the situation is dire.

"If you married Sebastian, things would be better," Clara says, suppressing another shiver. She pauses to cough, and the hacking sound drives a hole through my head. "They'd lift the sanctions. You wouldn't have to pretend we have food in our cupboards every morning."

Slowly, I meet her eyes.

I remember when Clara was born, when I'd looked at her and wondered whether Mama had given birth to a doll. Only later did I realize I must've looked just as strange when I was born: all ghost and glass. I study her often when she sleeps, or when the illness overtakes her so completely she slips into a coma. At thirteen, she's tender and optimistic; nothing like I was at her age. Still, despite the seven years between us, she and I are physically similar: shockingly pale; hair so blond it's nearly white; eyes a disorienting shade of cold. Staring at Clara is like staring into the past, at what I used to be, who I could've been.

I was soft once, too.

“I really think he loves you,” she says, her eyes brightening with feeling. “You should’ve heard the way he talked about you— Rosa, wait—”

I don’t say goodbye to my sister.

I reach for the automatic rifle tucked away in the entry, pulling the strap over my head before tugging a battered balaclava over my face. I step into the cold, and thick flakes catch in my eyelashes just as the front door slams shut behind me, the sound briefly drowning out his voice. It’s my only explanation for being startled.

“Rosabelle,” he says, cutting in front of me with a smile. “Still dead inside?”