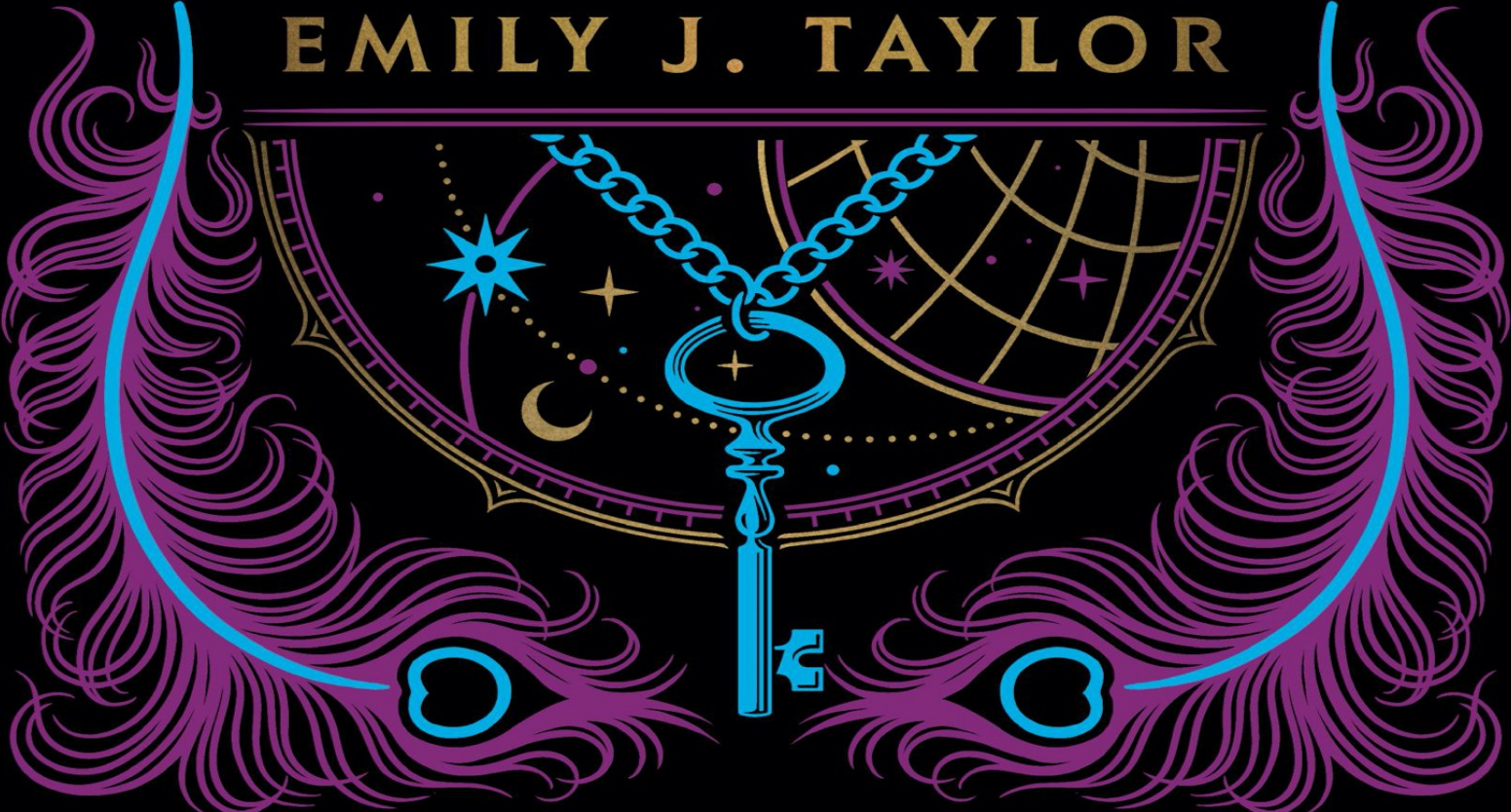




HOTEL

MAGNIFIQUE

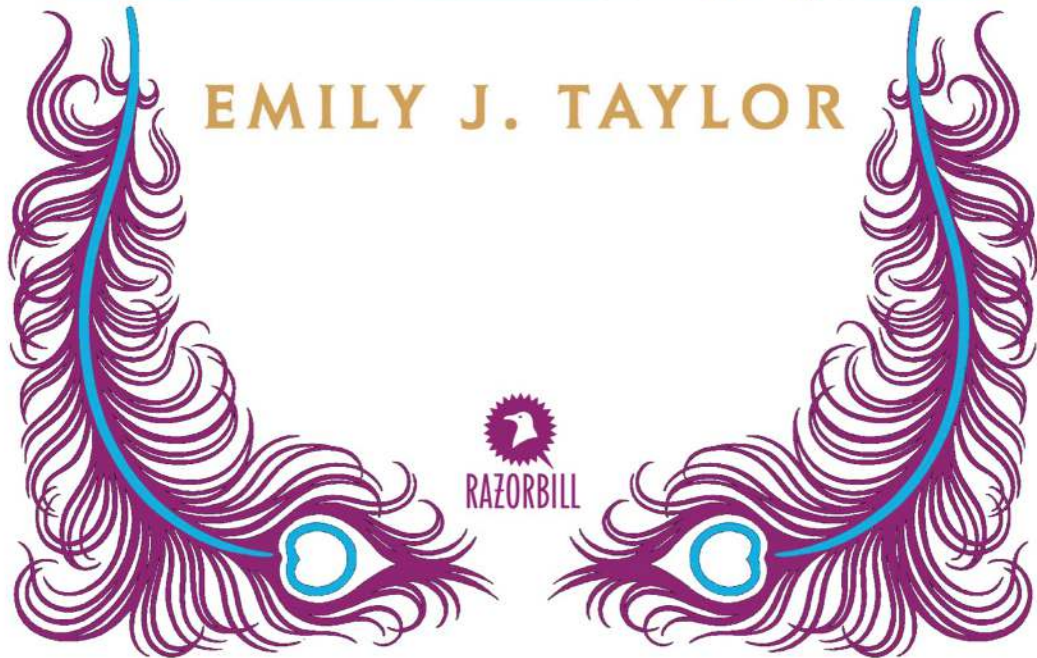
EMILY J. TAYLOR





HOTEL MAGNIFIQUE

EMILY J. TAYLOR





An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, New York



First published in the United States of America by Razorbill,
an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2022

Copyright © 2022 by Emily Taylor Creative LLC

Penguin supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin to continue to publish books for every reader.

Razorbill & colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

Visit us online at penguinrandomhouse.com.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Taylor, Emily J., author.

Title: Hotel Magnifique / Emily J. Taylor.

Description: New York : Razorbill, 2022. | Audience: Ages 12 and up. |

Summary: Seventeen-year-old Jani and her little sister Zosa secure jobs at a glamorous magical hotel, but when Jani realizes that their staff contracts are unbreakable, she 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.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021039042 | ISBN 9780593404539 (trade paperback) | ISBN 9780593404515 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780593404522 (ebook)

Subjects: CYAC: Hotels, motels, etc.—Fiction. | Sisters—Fiction. | Magic—Fiction. | LCGFT: Novels.

Classification: LCC PZ7.1.T3849 Ho 2022 | DDC [Fic]—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021039042>

ISBN 9780593404515 (HARDCOVER)

ISBN 9780593524121 (INTERNATIONAL EDITION)

ISBN 9780593404522 (EBOOK)

Cover art © 2022 by Jim Tierney

Cover design by Kristie Radwilowicz

Design by Tony Sahara, adapted for ebook by Michelle Quintero

This book is a work of fiction. Any references to historical events, real people, or real places are used fictitiously. Other names, characters, places, and events are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual events or places or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

pid_prh_6.0_139656596_c0_r0

CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)
[Chapter 22](#)
[Chapter 23](#)
[Chapter 24](#)
[Chapter 25](#)
[Chapter 26](#)
[Chapter 27](#)
[Chapter 28](#)
[Chapter 29](#)
[Chapter 30](#)
[Chapter 31](#)
[Chapter 32](#)
[Chapter 33](#)
[Chapter 34](#)
[Chapter 35](#)
[Chapter 36](#)
[Chapter 37](#)
[Epilogue](#)

[*Acknowledgments*](#)

[*About the Author*](#)

For Eric

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 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 other 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 the 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 Verdaniere 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 both 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 devastating 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.



The next 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 all the frivolous things she'd buy in Durc, like fingerless 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 dripping 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!”

I’d heard the same words sung many times before. Here, 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. 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 cry. “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.