

ANGELS LIE TO KEEP CONTROL

That morning Ben felt something was wrong. He had woken up at seven as usual, in the same room he shared with the other kids of his unit, but it seemed that something was not in the right place. Then he remembered: it was the Mutation day, a day in which his eyes, from blue, would have become another colour, describing the job he would have done.

He turned to lie on his side, watching his mates opening their eyes, curious to know what his destiny would have been. His and theirs, because all people, after their birth, were grouped in family units based on the hue their eyes would be after the age of sixteen: thanks to tests people could know what colour would appear in the future and so they could group children in units.

So, Ben was impatient to discover what would happen: was he a Doctor? A Creator? Maybe a Lawyer. No, an Angel. Angels were people just like him, but had immense power: they were the guides of the community; they protected the borders of the city; they had power of life and death over the citizens, all thanks to their particular and rare Mutation: their eyes, instead of being monochromatic, contained every colour of the rainbow.

The boy next to him opened his eyes and Ben winced, surprised: the iris was white, the hue of Creators. They were the second most important people in the city after the Angels: indeed, they created new children.

When the leaders of the unit entered in the room for the morning control, Ben followed a long queue of kids, all ready for their usual morning exam, with an additional one for their eyes. He hadn't gone to the bathroom, he hadn't had enough time and, considering the hair of Meg, the blonde girl in front of him, even the others hadn't had time for that.

While the time was passing by, he was feeling more and more impatient and happy to begin the most important day of his life; he imagined all the combinations he could make, all the new units he could watch growing up, all the studies he could do.

Lost in his daydream, he slowly reached the examination room, where he sat on a small chair in front of a desk. The room was completely white, except for the metal door behind him; very cramped, there was space enough for just two people, plus the glass desk and two chairs, one for Ben and one for the examiner. After writing something on a block notes, the woman examined him briefly, then she pointed a flashlight at his face, to see his eyes in a better way, then she made a surprised face.

Seeing it, Ben got anxious: was it all right? Maybe he had always been in the wrong unit for the whole time.

Maybe, he thought, his eyes hadn't changed at all and that meant problems. He thought about his history lessons, when he had studied the Blue Rebellion, in which Blue citizens, hating them, had started a rebellion against Angels and had tried to subvert the city order; they had all been killed by the Soldiers, the worst punishment ever. Nobody was ever killed, there wasn't the

need: people died because of the *Pill of the Old*, a pill sent by the Angels that made old people die when their job was complete, so that new children could be created.

If his eyes were still blue, he would have been taken away and then probably killed; even though this option was unlikely to happen, Ben couldn't help but feeling scared when the examiner looked at him seriously.

Suddenly, the woman smiled and said: "Your eyes are still blue, but slightly lighter. There is nothing to worry about, you're just late. You will probably completely mutate in two days and you will be able to start working as a Creator. For now, I will give you your uniform, but you won't do anything, just observe what the others do. Have a nice day Ben. "

Ben felt relieved and went cheerfully out of the room, grabbing his uniform: he had no problems and, though he had to wait a little, he would have started working with his mates soon.

He examined his uniform: it was made of a white lab coat with a metal nametag, his name written on it; a pair of black trousers, a white t-shirt, like the one everyone had in the unit, and a digital watch.

Ben went to the bathroom, where he wore his uniform, combing his brown hair right after. He looked at his reflection in the mirror for a little, observing his face: it was curious, he was the only one that had not mutated, while all the others were complete Creators.

He followed his mates to the canteen, where there were the younger units; after a quick breakfast, they went out of the Units Centre towards the Creators Centre, where he followed Meg and a couple of other kids to the third floor. There they found an old Creator explaining their mates what they had to do.

He sat near them, watching his friends while they were starting to work in the big room full of computers and capsules for the growth of new children.

"Don't you want to see how we program a Soldier?"

Ben looked around and saw the old Creator smiling friendly at him, so he stood up and followed him to one of the main computers. He was happy about the fact that, even though he couldn't do anything, he could at least watch how things were made there.

"The first thing we do is to decide his general appearance, considering how many people have the same features: for example, there are already twelve Soldiers with black hair, while there are just eleven with brown hair, so our new Soldier will have brown hair. Then we proceed in the same way for all the other features, until we get to the eyes, which will be red. All right?" asked the old man.

Ben nodded, focused on memorizing all the informations he had just received. It was incredible: thanks to just one computer, thousands of combinations could be made and they were all going to become new people.

"Ok, then you can try now" the Creator encouraged him.

"I can't, I'm not completely mutated. The only thing I can do is to watch."

The old man took out of his pocket a little black box and smiled in a curious way: "What if you were already a Creator then?"

He opened the box, showing Ben a series of containers with white contact lenses.

"You're not the first one not fully mutated, if not completely Blue; I met a couple of other people like you, so I created these white lenses so they could fit in without any problems."

"But they told me I'm just late" complained Ben with low voice.

"I don't really think you are, I can tell when someone is a Blue. Trust me, these little lenses will save your life, so take them and wear them from tomorrow. Try to not get noticed by anyone and don't tell anyone about this, otherwise we're both dead"

The old man left like nothing happened, waving at him and Ben noticed he had the black box, still open, in his hands. He carefully put it in his pocket, watching what the others were doing with the help of the tutors.

What was the old man trying to say? Were there other Blue people? But their creation had been forbidden for at least six centuries. Was he a mistake, then? However, he decided that he would have worn the lenses. He didn't want to risk.

When their hours of work were over, he got back to the unit with his mates, who were chatting talking about all the things they had learned that day. Ben smiled bitterly, thinking about how he was feeling alienated, but then he remembered the words of the old Creator and felt a little bit better to the idea of him working the next day.

After dinner, instead of going right to the common room for the Sharing, he asked a permission for the bathroom and, once alone, he opened the box and tried on the lenses. Looking at the watch he recognized that the day after he could not wait until the last minute to wear the lenses, so he set an alarm before the usual hour and, once back in the common room, he put the watch under the pillow, so that the alarm would not wake anybody up except for him.

Then he sat with the group and listened to the others talking about their experiences, like Peter, who had had a hard time creating a Gardener, or Susan, who had been able to complete four Lawyers.

"It's good to see that you all wish to learn, you will be a great help for the community" concluded Charlie, one of the leaders, standing up.

When he finally went to sleep, Ben felt relieved and checked if the box was still under the pillow, next to the watch, then he fell asleep.

He woke up the day after before the alarm he had set, with a strange feeling of concern. He had never felt something like that, the community was the safest place ever and so was his unit; he hadn't had any dreams and he wasn't scared of anything. Why was he feeling so concerned, then?

He slowly got up, trying not to make any noise, and he went tiptoeing to the bathroom, wearing his lenses and going back to bed right after. Five minutes later, Charlie and the others entered the room and woke up all the kids.

As usual, after having a quick shower, everybody made a queue for the morning exam, a series of white jumpsuits one behind the other. This time the time they waited less than the previous time and soon it was Ben's turn to enter the examination room.

"How are you today, Ben?" asked the woman with a kind smile.

Ben wanted to say: "I'm terrified and I'm scared that you might find out that I'm not mutated yet" but instead he just answered with a: "Fine, thanks. I can't wait to start".

The woman examined him quickly, then she patted his shoulder with a smile: "Congratulations, everything seems right! Since now you can start working, so help the community as best as you can"

On his way to the Creators Centre, Ben walked past a building different from the others, that he had completely ignored the day before: it was an old palace, now grey, that in the past had probably been light blue, judging by the curls of paint that were still on the walls. The door was blocked by some wooden planks, now nearly gone, and on the rusty plate, still on the centre of the door, there was a word: souls.

Ben slowly walked towards the building, his heart furiously beating in his chest, but, before he could even reach the door, someone called him: it was Meg, who was shouting him to move, otherwise he would have been late. So he got back in the street, but there was something wrong in that building that worried him, as if he had to remember something that had never been there.

When he arrived at the Centre, he went to the third floor like the day before, where he found his mates already working, together with their tutors. He didn't know what to do. Could he work with one of his friends and their tutor? Should he go to a random computer and start on his own? He had decided to get out of the room, when a familiar voice called him.

"Hey, young one! Your computer is here!"

Ben turned around and saw the old man that had helped him waving at him and pointing at a computer next to him. He went to the Creator, happy to see that there was at least one person helping him.

"Today you are going to create the principal habits of a Musician, so I will help you programming his brain" said the old man giving Ben a flash drive.

"Be careful not to lose it, it contains files for at least two hundred brains!"

"But sir, wouldn't it better if people developed their interests by themselves?" asked Ben, surprised that every single detail of someone's life was planned by others, including habits.

"I hope you're joking! It would be complete chaos. If we didn't program every single detail, people could be able to decide for themselves. There would be anarchy, nobody would do the things they were created for and the whole community would be destroyed. Remember this: we act so that there's an order, we're not agents of chaos. That's why our community works, because there's an order, starting from the ones who guide us. And that's another reason why Blue citizens are forbidden. But I'll tell you this tomorrow, now we have a lot of work to do. Oh, you can call me Simon, we're colleagues now."

They started analysing the brain of the Musician, but Ben was not focused on what he was doing: he was still thinking about the words Simon had said and the more he thought about them, the more he was sure he was doing something horrible. He realized others had planned his whole life the whole time; that he was constantly influenced so he had to do what others wanted.

He realized that he didn't want to be a Creator and that was the last thing he wanted to do in his life.

However, if he had told this thing to anyone, things would have been worse, so he tried to concentrate on his job.

At the end of the day, Ben was feeling emotionally tired: he had worked for hours deciding what others would have done in their future and it was making him feeling horribly. In addition, the white lenses were hurting his eyes, so he decided to go to the bathroom to wash his face.

Once he closed the door, he removed the lenses and threw them angrily in the bin, covering them with a lot of tissue paper. He started crying.

Leaning on the door, he sat on the floor, feeling a strange sadness of which he didn't know the origin.

Suddenly he heard voices screaming from the second floor and fear replaced his sadness. He had felt worried for the whole day and now this worry was justified. He stopped crying, choking back tears, listening to the noises coming from the other room.

Nothing.

Then, quick steps and screams, probably of his mates, followed by dull thuds, as if heavy objects had fallen.

Terrified, he stepped back from the door, until he reached the opposite wall of the small bathroom. He hoped nobody would enter and that whoever was out there could go away and leave him alone.

Then he heard nothing at all, except for his breath, which the walls of the empty room echoed, expanding it. Ben tried to calm down, to persuade himself that everything was all right and, once sure, he opened the door and entered the other room.

A horrible vision appeared in front of his eyes: the bodies of his mates were lying down on the floor, lifeless, someone with their eyes still open, some others with their heads covered by their arms, as if they could protect themselves. Someone was lying on their back and someone wasn't, but there was one thing in common for all of them: blood. Horribly red, it was slowly dripping from the stomach of some kids, staining the shirts of others, gathering in red pools around the heads of the Creators.

The vision was so horrible that Ben felt the taste of the bile in his mouth and nearly threw up, especially when he saw that also Simon was dead. That poor Creator had been kind with him, he didn't deserve to die. After all, the others didn't deserve death either, like Meg, one of his best friends, that now was lying on the floor, blood dirtying her hair and her clothes, and her open eyes, in which there still was an expression of pure terror.

He knelt next to her and he closed her eyelids, staining his hands with blood, then he stepped back: he didn't even know what he was doing, but he knew that it was the right thing to do, so he continued, closing the eyes of all the others, as if they were sleeping a horrible and unfair sleep.

While he was doing this, he didn't see the shadow that had entered the room and that was now approaching him. But when he was in his visual range, Ben turned quickly, got up, and saw a guy, a little older than him, dressed in black and with a bloodied dagger in his hand.

"There's one more!" he shouted back at the door, then he started walking towards Ben, who stepped back, until he found himself trapped between the window and the scary guy.

He saw the other one lifting the dagger and held his breath waiting for the hit to come, but it didn't; the other guy looked at him, surprised, then he moved away.

"You're Blue!" he exclaimed and his determined face became a surprised expression.

"What?" Ben couldn't understand, still shocked from being nearly killed.

"Your eyes. They're blue" the guy repeated.

"Ah, right" stuttered Ben: "I'm late, in a few days they will become completely white"

"Trust me, it will never happen. Well, it might seem weird to you right now, but you have to come with my group. We're all Blue and we have a place to hide in, you'd be safer with us. Moreover, someone will come here and will discover these Whites, so you'll be even more in danger."

"Forget it! First you try to kill me and then you want me to follow you? Sorry if I don't trust you, but I'm not coming with you"

"All right, suit yourself, then. Good luck, you'll need it"

The guy made a step, as if he was going away, then he turned back and punched Ben right in the face, knocking him out.

The only thing that Ben could feel was darkness. Warm and comforting darkness, where he was playing like a little kid, jumping and laughing, like nothing mattered.

Then he heard a voice through the darkness. The voice was the one of a woman, low and near, as if she was right behind him.

"Poor little boy" she was saying: "You nearly broke his nose! I want you to apologize as soon as he wakes up, is that clear Jack?"

Ben slowly realized that there was nobody behind him and that he was dreaming, so he opened his eyes, trying to get up, but a painful headache forced him to lie down again.

"Easy, easy" the woman placed a hand on his forehead, to calm him: "You got hit pretty bad, you know. Rest a little bit more, then we will talk. You're safe now"

Ben slowly turned his head, in time to see a cloud of red hair disappearing behind a door. What had happened? The last thing he remembered was the horrible scene at the lab, then the punch. Where was he?

"You there?" someone waved a hand in front of his eyes. He looked on his left, where there was the boy who had tried to kill him.

"I'm sorry I had to punch you that hard but, man, you're pretty stubborn, you know? I'm Jack by the way and the one you saw before is Rachel" smiled Jack: "When you feel ready, we have to go to the common room, so we can explain you the situation. If we're lucky, we might be given a mission"

"Ok, I think I'm ready" Ben got up from the bed he was lying on and followed Jack out of the infirmary and through a series of corridors, then finally they reached the common room.

The room was smaller than the one he had in his unit, but it was very similar: chairs and sofas near the walls, some tables where some people were reading and a big bookshelf. The walls, instead of being white, were light blue and they had no windows. He felt a little surprised, then he remembered: that was the 'safe place' Jack had talked about, it was obvious they had to hide.

He observed the people in the room. They were all different: old people and young ones, but nobody was younger than sixteen; they were all doing different things, something that felt strange: everyone in the units did the same things as the others, to feel more like a group. All the people in the room had just one thing in common: they all had blue eyes.

Some other people entered the room and Ben recognized Rachel, the redhead of the infirmary. She smiled at him and then glanced angrily at Jack, who innocently smiled back.

"Ok people, listen!" an old man exclaimed with authority: "We have a new guy today, directly from the Creators labs!" he pointed at Ben while the people in the room were applauding.

"That's not the only reason why we're doing an extraordinary council today. The group led by Sean and Natalie has brought us bad news: the Angels have discovered what we've done yesterday, when we broke into the Creators Centre and now they know we are still alive, all thanks to someone who decided it was better to kill the Creators instead of just knocking them out"

He glanced at a young woman on the opposite side of the room, who was smiling proudly: "They deserved it. They could have created a bunch of Soldiers, but we've stopped them once and for all."

"We're doomed now, don't you understand? If we don't act now, all Souls will be gone and the Angels will rule the community forever!" shouted Jack angrily.

"Calm down, you were with her too, do I have to remind you?" said the man: "However, you're right. We have to act now, and fast. I have an idea, but this plan needs people who are not afraid to die. I'll let you do whatever you were doing before, we are going to talk this evening and I'll show you my plan"

He went out of the room, followed by some other people, probably the ones he had to talk to in order to make the plan.

Jack elbowed Ben, so that he would follow him, and then they went to Rachel, who was waiting for them: "You're probably confused right now, so I'll try to explain everything to you since the very beginning." she smiled.

"People with blue eyes are called Souls: we are what remains of them since the Souls Slaughter"

"You mean the Blue Rebellion against the Angels, right?" asked Ben. He had a feeling that something was wrong: since the time he had looked at the people in the room, he had felt that they were not as evil as the history books made them seem, but he still could not understand why there had been a rebellion. Or slaughter, as Rachel called it.

"That's what the Angels made you learn, yes. Truth is, *Angels lie to keep control*, so everything they do is wrong. In the past, Souls were essential for the community, because they had the most important duty: they had been created in a special way, so that they could make the Angels young and powerful with their blood. Their blood is different from the others, because it contains a particular element that, mixed with the blood of the Angels, can make them live longer and empowers them. Every four years they killed a Soul, but they didn't use the Pill of the Old: they stabbed them. That's the only way Souls' blood can be used, the person has to die that way. After some centuries, Souls realized that the Angels were evil, so they refused to die. And that's why the Souls Slaughter happened: a group of Soldiers, specifically created to kill citizens who didn't obey the orders, went to the Souls Centre, took them to the Angels Centre, where they were all killed. After that, Angels decided to make people learn their version of the story and, since then many Souls had been killed, they stopped their creations, because they had enough power for at least two thousand years.

Souls were the only ones that were created at that time, but Angels realized that they needed to control every single citizen, so they made the Creation Centres, where they now create every single citizen. That's why there aren't any mothers and fathers, because they would represent a certain freedom. And *people must not have freedom*.

Even though everything seemed to work well, sometimes there was a mistake in the creation of new people and that's why we're all here: we're mistakes, we're Souls, so we have power, but we're also in constant danger. Indeed, every one of us has taken a pill: these pills cannot harm us, but they are deadly for the Angels; if they kill us and use our blood they will die. And if they die, all their control over people is over. Everybody could be free to live their lives as they want."

Ben was shocked by what Rachel had said: it was so overwhelming that he had to sit on a chair. They were mistakes but at the same time they had an immense power. Anger filled him when he thought about those poor Souls who had been killed and he decided he was willing to do everything to stop the Angels.

"Give me a pill" he said.

In the evening, they all gathered again in the common room, anxious to discover the plan. Ben was particularly excited, because Jack had told him all of their missions to free the community and now he wanted to participate.

"Ok folks, silence now!" shouted the leader: "we have the plan! Tomorrow some volunteers have to go near the Angels Centre and to be seen by the Angels. If the plan works, you will enter the Centre and they'll probably kill you, that's why we want volunteers. Angels are not wise; they only care about power, so they will use our blood. That's the thing we want: they will die, freeing all the community. Our sacrifice will save thousands of people, now and in the future, and we will avenge our ancestors. All of you, who remain here, will be free to live your life as you want, so you will not need a leader anymore. I volunteer to kill the Angels. Who is with me?"

A few hands rose, including Jack and Ben's hands.

Ben still remembered his friends, their dead bodies on the lab floor, and he decided to avenge them.

"Why are you volunteering?" he asked Jack once back in their room.

"I feel bad for the ones I killed, but it was necessary, because it gave us the opportunity to put an end to the whole story. In addition, you and Rachel volunteered too and you two are the only friends I have, so I want to die with you. And, you know, I'm super egocentric, so if I die I will be remembered as a hero."

He looked at Ben, expecting a reaction.

"You can laugh, I was joking".

They finally laughed, releasing some of the anxiety for what they had to do.

The morning after they left for their mission. They ran through some narrow and dark streets, arriving in front of the Angels Centre.

The leader said: "Now Jack and Ben will attract their attention, but we have to make sure the Soldiers will not kill them instantly, they have to enter the Centre. Rachel, Luke, I want you to cover them. After that, it will happen what has to happen, so I want to tell you that I am extremely proud of you all. It has been an honour to work with you."

There was a small hug between the seven volunteers and another between Ben, Jack and Rachel.

"It's show time!" shouted Jack jumping out of the small street right in the square of the Centre.

Ben followed him, knocking on the door of the Centre, from which a confused Soldier went out.

"Look, we're Blue!" said Jack patting the Soldier's shoulder, while Ben was making faces at him.

After a little confusion, Rachel Luke and the whole group was captured by the Soldiers and taken inside.

It was working; they were nearly there. Ben was anxious: a small mistake could lead to disaster, so he had to stay focused on what he had to do. He glanced at Rachel, who was talking freely to the Soldier who was escorting them, telling him about her passion for art and for music. Jack was pinching another Soldier's cheeks, visibly annoying him.

When they finally reached the Angels room, everyone stopped what they were doing.

"Ah, some Souls!" exclaimed an Angel, cheerfully clapping her hands: "Long time no see, it's a pleasure"

"The pleasure is all yours, trust me" said Ben sarcastically.

"You're the boy from the Creators unit, the one who disappeared after... let's call it the Blue vengeance" said the other Angel, who was sitting on a chair that reminded a throne. He gently smiled at Ben, but the boy saw that his smile was hiding the anger he was feeling towards the group of Souls.

"We have to hold a ceremony, our most important citizens are back again after centuries!" said the female Angel: "The ceremony you deserve. I hope you will excuse us if we tell you this right now, but you disappeared for years and we could not inform you. We've waited for so long for you to come and now that you're all here... we should celebrate in the most appropriate way!"

Pointing at two soldiers, she said in a solemn voice: "Open the room for the Ceremony of Souls".

"I think we should celebrate our young Souls in first place" she laughed happily, placing one hand on Ben's shoulder and the other one on Jack's, guiding them outside the hall, to the room where the two soldiers had disappeared.

Once in the room, they were separated and each one of them was taken to another small room, where there was an old marble chair, a table and a silver dagger decorated with golden spirals and a shiny cup.

Ben sat on the chair, where he was tied tight, then the Angel took the dagger.

"I am sorry if you might not like this ceremony, but you will help the whole community with your bold sacrifice" said the Angel looking pitifully at Ben. He smiled as if he was happy, even if he was obviously making fun of her.

"I'm sure I will" he replied looking fiercely into her eyes.

Then he felt a sudden and excruciating pain in his chest, but he didn't scream. He smiled when the pain became less persistent and his vision blurred, but he winced when another stab hit him. However, he remained silent, feeling his blood flowing out of his chest.

He slowly felt less present and his vision went darker, but he tried to keep his eyes open, watching the Angel collecting his blood in the cup and slowly drinking it.

With one last look he saw the Angel collapsing to the ground, dead, then he closed his eyes.

