

My Antidote

Inspired by the Shatter Me series by Tahereh Mafi

By Hala BALTAJI 9B

I'm not dangerous.

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Aaron was still staring intently at me. I did not know whom to choose: him, the one man I loved, or the young soldiers standing silently across the room. They probably had families and loved ones too.

I sensed Aaron beside me, careful not to touch me.

"Tell me what you're feeling, love."

I looked up. He was so close that I could almost feel his warmth, but I could not risk reaching for him. I had not touched anyone since I was ten. I had forgotten what human contact felt like: a mother caressing her child, a father holding his daughter's hand as they crossed the road, a lover pulling their whole world into an embrace.

Anderson had designed the experiment to leave me with no safe choice. If I refused to test my power on Aaron, he would order the soldiers to restrain me, knowing exactly what my touch could do.

"Love, are you all right?" Aaron asked.

I shook my head. My breathing became shallow, my chest tightened and my heart hammered against my ribs.

"Juliette, look at me," Aaron said gently.

I obeyed. I tried to force the tears back, but they escaped and slid down my cheeks.

"Are you crying because of me?"

I shook my head again.

"I'm crying for you," I choked out, my throat burning.

His expression softened.

"Why?"

My eyes flew open.

I looked around in panic until my brown eyes met a flash of light green. Aaron was sitting beside my bed, closer than I expected.

"What are you doing?" I asked, my voice unsteady.

"Looking at you," he replied matter-of-factly.

Heat rose to my cheeks before the memories of the coming experiment rushed back.

"Have you been watching me all night?"

Aaron looked away, and the tips of his ears turned pink.

"You told me you couldn't sleep on your own, so I stayed."

I reached towards his cheek, then stopped. Today was the day that would heal me or break me. Today, Anderson expected me to choose between Aaron and the soldiers.

Anxiety clawed at my insides. Aaron noticed immediately.

"It's going to be all right," he said with the gentleness he seemed to reserve only for me.

"I can't lose you."

"You won't," he promised. "I know you would never choose to hurt me. Your power responds to your emotions, but it does not control who you are."

Later, I entered the dreaded testing room. Its walls were so white that I winced beneath the lights. In front of me stood a dozen soldiers in formation, their faces carefully blank.

One young recruit caught my attention. She could not have been much older than sixteen. A single tear marked her cheek.

Then I saw Anderson standing behind them. He caught my gaze and smirked.

Rage surged through me. This man had caused Aaron, me and countless innocent people pain, all because he valued power and discipline more than human life.

Before I could think, I rushed towards him. Several guards reached out to stop me. Hands closed around my arms – and every person who touched me collapsed.

The room fell silent.

I stared at the motionless bodies on the floor. They were not breathing.

Because of me.

I did the only thing I knew how to do. I ran.

I slammed myself into the adjoining room and locked the door. Curling into a corner, I tried to make myself small enough to disappear.

"Small, smaller, smallest," I whispered.

A scream tore from my throat, raw enough to shake the walls.

Then the wall shook again.

It was not my scream. Someone was striking the door from the other side.

Aaron.

With one final crash, the door flew open.

"Juliette! Love, are you all right?"

His eyes searched the room until they found mine. Before I could answer, he crossed the space between us and wrapped his arms around me.

I pushed him away in terror.

"Aaron – no!"

I searched his face for pain, but he remained standing.

"You're not dead," I whispered. The words broke apart as they left me. "How are you not dead?"

My touch was deadly. It had always been deadly.

Aaron stepped closer and wrapped his arms around me again.

"Shh," he murmured beside my ear. "It's all right. I've got you. You are safe, and I am safe."

For the first time since I was ten, I allowed myself to hold another person. His heartbeat remained steady beneath my hand.

That was when I understood.

Aaron was the only person immune to my touch.

He was my antidote.

And this was only the beginning of the end.