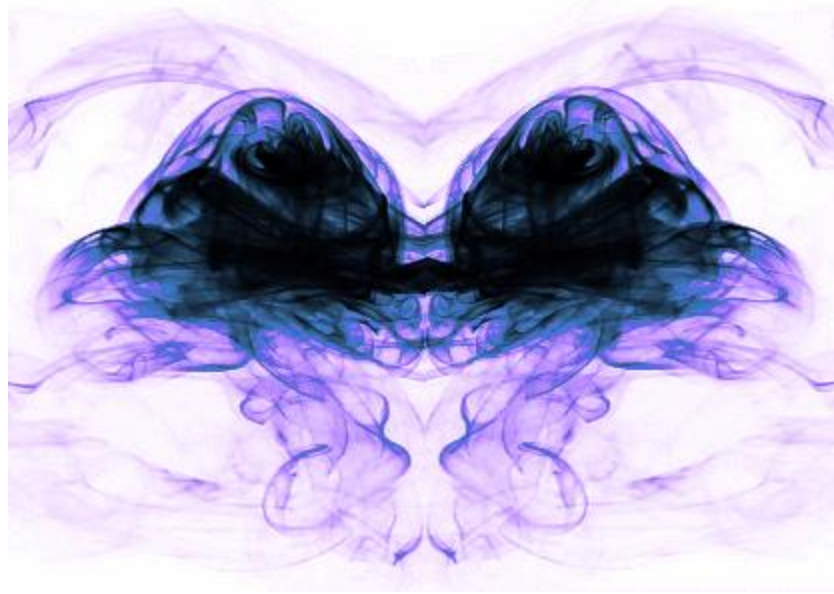


A YA Sci-Fi Novelette
amy mcnulty

Josie's
coat



Colorful Waking

“JOSIE? JOSIE? YOU’RE LINGERING AGAIN.”

Jake’s beaming face is the first thing I see after I blink my eyes—my *own* eyes—to take in the room around me. No matter how many times I go back and forth between HQ and the clients, it still takes me a second to get my bearings. I know I’m back in my own body, but I still feel like I’m just an observer, like I have to make an extra effort to get my limbs to move.

Jake removes my connection helmet as I sit up. “No matter,” he says. “You’ve more than earned an extra minute of rest. I just got the reports on how much money you made your client today.”

I smile politely, resting a hand on my stomach. I swear I go through the vitamins faster than my co-workers. Even though my body just lies there, I still need the vitamins so it can keep operating without ever letting my consciousness rest. They’re the same vitamins our clients take, only their consciousnesses take entire eight-hour shifts off. Their bodies continue to operate

during that time with one of the dream-workers beamed straight into their brain via the clips they wear on their earlobes.

“I’ll transfer your cut to your account.” Jake types something on his freestanding chrono screen, leaving me to swivel my legs over the side of the table and look around for my evening vitamin on my own. It’s not there. I open my mouth to ask, but Jake tucks his screen under one arm and squeezes my shoulder awkwardly with the other. “And HQ’s bonus for this is going to be huge!”

Simone’s in the doorway, her arms crossed. She regards me as if I’m a bit of dirt she found on her pure-white shoe, and the look doesn’t let up even when Jake lets me go. “Jake, I have Josie’s evening vitamin.” Oh. So she’s on vitamin-distribution duty. That explains both the lateness of my nourishment and the scowl on her face—no client wanted her for the day shift.

Jake rushes across the room to stop her. “No! No more vitamins for Josie!”

For a second, Simone looks like Jake just told her she was the dream-worker of the month.

Jake tears that happiness from her in an instant. “I’ve got approval to give something very special to Josie!” He disappears behind me. “Simone, get everyone in my group in here.”

Simone clenches the hand holding my vitamin so hard, I worry she’s going to break the capsule and let an evening’s limitless energy slither through her fingers. Something about wasting that vitamin is especially scary to me, as if there aren’t billions more where that came from. Our ancestors made so many of them hundreds of years ago, we’re sure never to run out, even if they can’t make anymore.

The bone-thin woman and the engorged vitamin.

Simone leaves, and Jake pats me on the head like a doting dog owner. “Dream-worker of the month again, Josie,” he whispers. “Not just in my department—but probably the whole damn HQ.”

I don't have time to respond before Simone returns, trailed by the rest of the team: Ruby, Levi, Jude, Daniel, Tali, Gaddy, Ash, Isaac, Zeb, and Ben. Each of their faces is like a piece in a puzzle of widespread contempt—except for Ben's. He shuffles uncomfortably, knowing he could easily be in my shoes. At sixteen, he's the youngest among us by just a year, but he's easily Jake's second favorite. Only whereas I have to do twice the dream-work as the rest, Ben gets away with doing less than half.

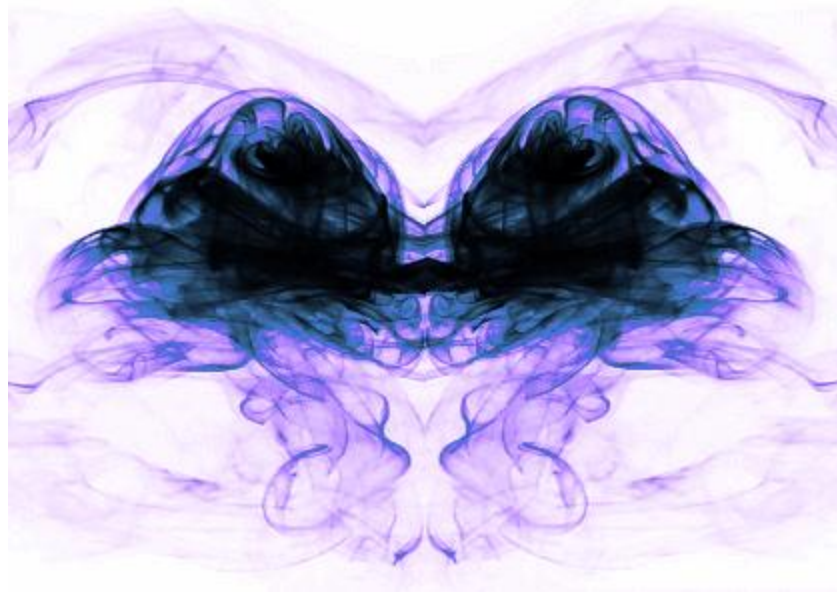
“Team,” says Jake. “Josie earned her clients a total of over one billion dollars this month.” He pauses, but there are no cries of adulation like he seems to be expecting. He clears his throat. “And so, HQ has allowed me to gift her with this—a coat she can wear that acts like a non-stop vitamin, a coat her clients voted for her to have so she never need take a break! A coat that marks her as my pride and joy, my greatest dream-worker.”

I feel the coat drape over my shoulders—and it's an instant shock to my senses. My frayed nerves come to life, the breadth of space between the fabric of the coat and my jumpsuit almost electrifying as it dances across my skin. The material is like water in my palm, as soft as the silk on many a client's bedspread, only it's *my* hands that are touching it, my own body that's experiencing it, not an echo of the signals sent from the client's brain. I'm so caught up in the *feel* of it, I don't at first notice the color—it's a coat of many colors, a rainbow like I've only ever seen through a client's eyes.

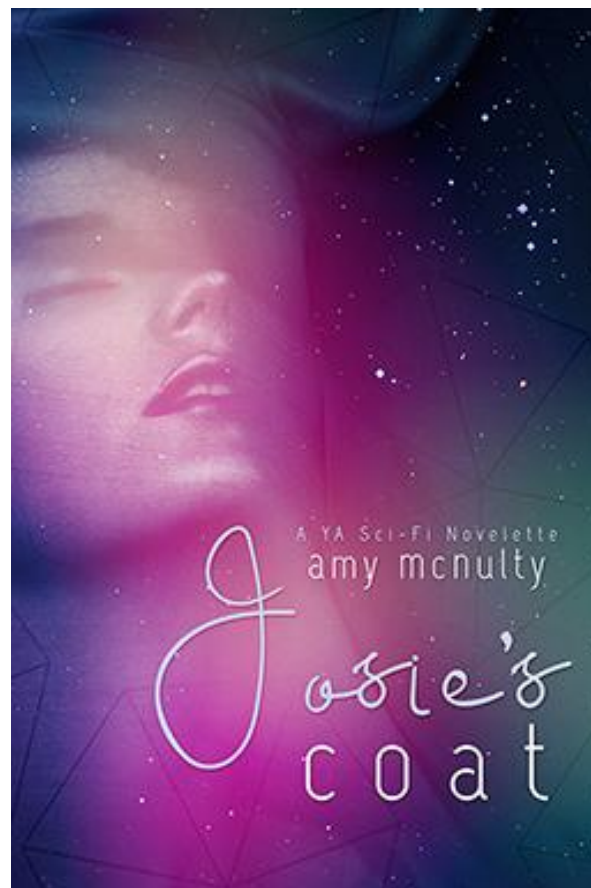
“May you bring us many more happy clients, Josie!” Jake says, stepping between me and the rest of the team. “To celebrate, everyone take your break! This could be the last time you spend much time with Josie. This coat will keep her active for so much longer!”

Jake hums a tune as he pushes past my teammates and out the door. *My last break, I think, loosening my grip on the coat sleeve. The last time I'll be awake in my own body to enjoy the feel of this coat. Some gift it turned out to be.*

“Josie,” says Simone, her voice low. “The sun is setting soon. Before you're stuck to your table for life, let's see how that gift looks in the sunlight.”



PURCHASE INFORMATION



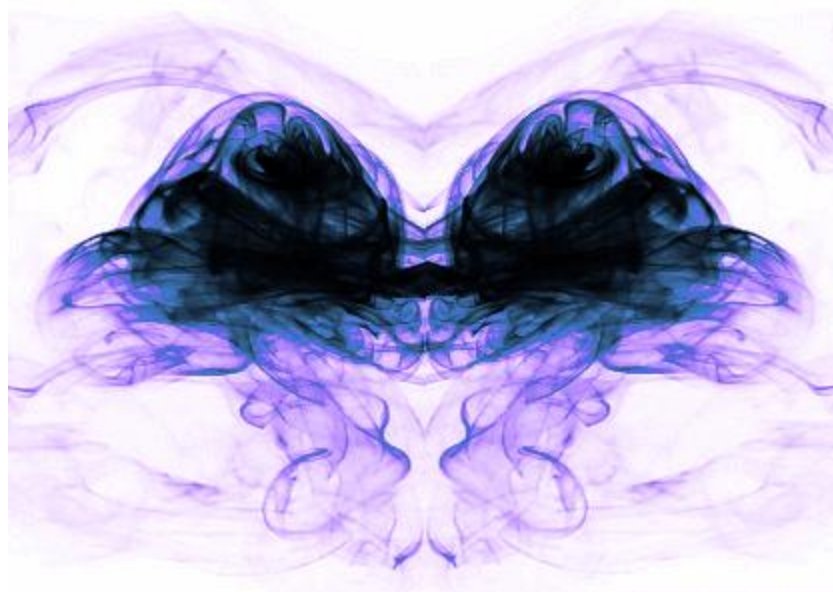
A woman with shoulder bones as sharp as an eagle's talons—bones almost protruding from her skin—opens her mouth as wide as it'll go, impossibly wide, consuming the pill that takes both of her arms to cradle. The nourishment makes her thin stomach pop out like she's pregnant with a child so large it'll burst through her stomach. She swallows slowly and licks her lips. Her eyes search around hungrily for more.

That dream again.

Josie is skilled at her job as an “unfortunate” who inhabits the bodies of her clients to perform their work while they sleep, but her coworkers' cruel jealousy over her success leads to her enslavement and the loss of her dream-worker status. A YA sci-fi reimagining of the tale of Jacob's favorite son Joseph, his dreams, and his famous coat.

A novelette by the author of *The Never Veil Series* and *Fall Far from the Tree*.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

AMY MCNULTY IS A FREELANCE writer and editor from Wisconsin with an honors degree in English. She was first published in a national scholarly journal (*The Concord Review*) while in high school and currently writes professionally about everything from business marketing to anime. Her YA romantic fantasy debut, *Nobody's Goddess*, won The Romance Reviews Summer 2016 Readers' Choice Award in Young Adult Romance. In her down time, you can find her crafting stories with dastardly villains and antiheroes set in fantastical medieval settings.

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