

The Hollowing

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In the subterranean city of Umbra, where artificial light struggled against perpetual darkness, 5
lived a woman named Nyx. Like every citizen, she bore the Mark—a pulsing, bioluminescent
tattoo that displayed her current emotional state, forcibly injected at birth.

Nyx’s day began as it always did: staring at her reflection, watching the Mark shift from the
dull gray of sleep to a sickly yellow—anxiety about the day ahead. She reached for her EmotiSup- 10
pressor, a small device that allowed her to manually override her Mark. With a few taps, she set it
to a calm blue. It was illegal, of course, but in Umbra, everyone had their secrets.

As she navigated the cramped tunnels to her assigned work sector, Nyx observed the sea of
colors around her. Reds of anger, greens of envy, purples of lust—all carefully monitored by the
ever-present EmotiPolice. Those whose Marks showed too much deviation were swiftly “cor- 15
rected.”

At her station in the emotion processing plant, Nyx’s job was to extract and distill raw feelings
from the few remaining natural emoters—children too young for the Mark. She watched through
one-way glass as they were subjected to various stimuli, their pure emotions harvested and con-
verted into the synthesized versions adults consumed.

Nyx felt a flicker of... something genuine beneath her manufactured calm. Disgust? Rage? She 20
quickly adjusted her EmotiSuppressor, heart racing.

That night, instead of returning to her sleeping pod, Nyx found herself drawn to the lowest
levels of Umbra. Here, in the dank tunnels closest to the planet’s core, she’d heard whispers of a
group called the Hollow Ones.

As she turned a corner, she saw them—dozens of people, their Marks grotesquely scarred or 25
burned off entirely. Their faces were blank, eyes empty. An elderly man approached, his skin
where the Mark should be a mess of scar tissue.

Nyx struggled to respond, her own emotions threatening to break through. “I... I don’t know
what I seek.”

The man nodded. “You will. We all come to understand eventually. Emotion is a disease, a 30
weakness exploited by those in power. Here, we offer the cure—complete emotional excision.”

He gestured to a crude surgical setup in the corner. “We can remove your Mark, sever the
neural connections that allow you to feel. You’ll be free.”

Nyx’s mind reeled. She thought of the children in the emotion processing plant, of the EmotiPo- 35
lice, of the countless nights she’d spent adjusting her Suppressor, desperate for some semblance of
control.

With trembling hands, she stepped forward. “Do it,” she whispered.

The procedure was agonizing, performed without anesthesia—a final, excruciating emotional
experience. When it was over, Nyx felt... nothing. Absolutely nothing.

In the days that followed, Nyx moved through Umbra like a ghost. She returned to work, harvesting emotions she could no longer comprehend. She watched as her colleagues and the EmotiPolice scrambled to understand why her Mark no longer functioned. 40

But as weeks passed, Nyx began to realize the terrible truth. Without emotion, without the ability to connect or empathize, she was losing her humanity. Memories began to fade, relationships became meaningless constructs. She could no longer remember why she had wanted this in the first place. 45

In lucid moments, Nyx understood that she was hollowing out, becoming something less than human. But she could no longer bring herself to care.

As Umbra continued its cycle of artificial day and night, Nyx sat in her sleeping pod, staring at the wall. She had achieved what she thought she wanted—freedom from the tyranny of emotion. But in doing so, she had imprisoned herself in a void far more terrifying than any enforced feeling. 50

In the end, Nyx realized, there was no escape. Only the choice between a life of managed misery or one of empty existence. And she could no longer feel enough to decide which was worse.