

Westcrest

Episode #16: Manacled

Falling into another world isn't as disorienting as Jeremy expects it to be. There is a warm gust of air as Jeremy feels himself *detach* from Westcrest and then the hallway is gone and he's struggling in the grip of a spiked, crimson gauntlet.

The first thing Jeremy does is turn his head to study the painting from this side. But here (wherever *here* is) there is no painting, only a dark alcove where it should be. Before he has time to panic, Jeremy feels something clamp down around his wrists. The manacles cut painfully into his flesh, but he bites down on his bottom lip to prevent himself from crying out.

"Move," comes voice from behind him.

Jeremy studies the corridor as he marches forwards, attempting to fix its location in his memory so that he will be able to find it again. To his right, the walls open to the panorama that he saw from the other side of the painting—tall red spires dominate the horizon and crimson flags stir lazily in the breeze. The sky beyond the towers is red.

In fact, almost *everything* here is red. The guard directs Jeremy down another corridor, where windows of red glass colour the light as it passes into the castle. Jeremy's wrists feel hot where the manacles are tight around them.

"Where are you taking me?" Jeremy asks the guard as they pass down yet another crimson-toned corridor.

The guard says nothing, so Jeremy repeats the question. They pause at a heavy stone door. The guard places his hand into a shallow indentation in the wall beside the door and the stone shifts sideways. The room beyond is undoubtedly a cell, without decoration except for a solitary arched window set into the far wall.

"Your quality will be tested," says the guard, as though that is a perfectly satisfactory response to Jeremy's question. There is an instant of relief as the manacles fall free, but the feeling is replaced by pain as Jeremy he realises that his wrists are bleeding.

Jeremy slumps to the floor of the crimson cell, his wrists resting in his lap where they are leaving bloody marks. "You don't get out much, do you?" Says Jeremy. His tone is supposed to be defiant, but he only sounds scared.

The guard simply stares down at Jeremy until the heavy stone door closes between them.

Jeremy inspects his wrists. The wounds are more superficial than he first thought. He uses the base of his shirt to wipe most of the blood off his skin. Now his shirt is red, but his wrists are marked only with a pattern of shallow scratches.

Jeremy knows that he has to try and escape, but he doesn't bother trying to open the heavy stone door. That only leaves the window, so he rises to his feet and peers out of it.

Outside, the wall of the castle drops off to a rocky cliff. Below the cliff is only red sky, as though the castle is floating in the air. Jeremy spots a few places where he could grip onto the wall, but the situation is starting to seem hopeless—even if he did make it down to the cliffs in one piece, he'd have nowhere to go.

Jeremy turns back to face the door. From this side it almost appears as though there's no door at all, only a wall of smooth red stone.

Your quality will be tested, he thinks to himself. And that memory is enough to spur him into action. Without sparing another thought Jeremy leaps up and onto the window sill. He is outside before he has a chance to regret his decision, clinging desperately to the sheer face of the castle wall. The warm, otherworldly breeze wraps around him.