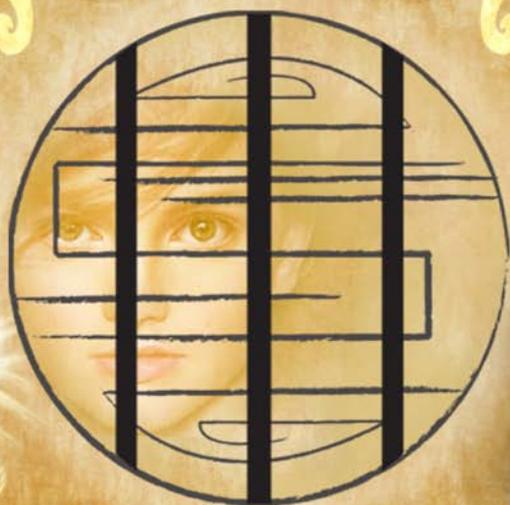


AMAZON BEST-SELLER

# *The Labyrinth Wall*

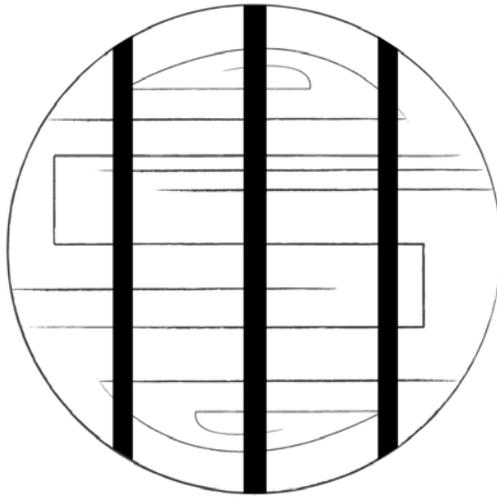


Obsidian Series  
By: Emilyann Girdner



Obsidian Series – Book 1  
Sample

The Labyrinth Wall



Emilyann Girdner

# Chapter 1

## *The Man in White*



Bouncing off the walls of this wasted dark labyrinth, the slimy words leaking from Simul’s mouth carry no authenticity. Consuming green grapes to fill his large stomach, he stands high in his tower. Looming above thousands of us, his creations called the Mahk, he spouts his typical lecture. “We, your Creators, deserve respect. We gave you life, the opportunity to live long, and serve well.” His knack for being a bad liar is transparent as he says the words, “we treasure each of you,” before limping closer to the guard rail. The condition of his soul likely mirrors that of his tough and leathery skin. Perched on his balcony railing, the proud

man goes on speaking, but the empty words mean nothing to me.

Beads of perspiration coat the back of my neck, so I sweep my curly red hair up into a knot and steady it on top of my head using the butt of my dagger. I glance around at the large crowd. Like tiny pebbles that gather at a river bank, we coat the barren landscape sweeping out in front of the castle, only to be dissected at its edges by the openings of labyrinth passageways. The dark cylindrical fortress stretches far above us like a snake looming over its prey, Simul's words the venom it sprays. We're all enemies to each other by the Creators' design, competing for food that only comes to us at the Creators' mercy. Loose skin hangs on the lanky middle-age man beside me. Like most of the Mahk, he's clearly on the brink of starvation. Though they only brought me into existence two years ago, if I had to compare my body to a Creator, I'd guess I look like a seventeen-year-old, give or take a year.

My fidgeting hands find menial entertainment in adjusting my baggy green pants that close in tight around my ankles. All Mahk wear the same bottoms, patterned sashes around our waists, form-fitted shirts, and sleeveless orange shrugs. The Creators might dress us all the same because it's easy, or to remind us that none of us are special; we're easily replaced. Either way, the little rebellious details on almost every person are impossible to miss. One woman wears a small ring she either found or made on her own. Another man has cut his pants to just below his knees. Small details like those are proof we aren't programmed little creations meant only to provide obsidian to our Creators.

It's not long before we're all forming a line, then offering our obsidian taxes. Yawning, the guard withdraws a small cracker from his food satchel. Cracker. Like every other object, every word since my creation, I just know what it is. Never have seen one, never have eaten one,

but that's a cracker. All Mahk have been created with knowledge planted in our minds.

"Number," the tall, heavily armed guard demands in a gruff voice as a crumb rolls off his beard.

"Araina, P329111." Our names are an interesting thing, our only semblance of unified rebellion against the Creators; confirmation of our identities beyond their simple number system.

His gaze navigates a piece of parchment. Then he marks on it with a writing utensil. Even their writing utensils are fancy. This one has a colorful fluffy feather waving about as he writes with the other end. He pushes me on toward the next guard. No "thank you" or even an instruction to keep going, only a shove.

My offerings are slim, three slick opaque obsidian shards and some kimberlite.

They give me only three potatoes, a dead rat, and two canisters of water. With a quick cram, the items enter my bag, out of sight. My stomach growls angrily.

Frustration would love to bare its teeth about now. Like all the Creators, the distributor is plenty well fed. He clearly suffers no shortage of soft clean clothing each day.

“That’s all we got this week, Blue,” I whisper to myself as if she’s beside me. It’s my moments with gentle Blue that make me think it’s not necessary to kill to survive. She may not take Mahk or Creator form, but there’s more soul under those feathers than in Simul’s whole being. Eagerness to reach my secret spot and see Blue propels my quick departure.

It only takes about thirty minutes to reach Sikla, the one volcano in our land. Compared to the monotonous miles of twisted trees lining cracked black walls that make up most of our world, this volcano is a brilliant jewel. Bright

orange lava flows down its conical form, and occasionally it coughs ash into the atmosphere.

Entering back into a labyrinth passageway, the sound of dingy rocks crunching beneath my feet swims in my ears. A cowering stone statue greets me at the corridor opening. It's one of many in the labyrinth. The breathless stone remnant of what was once a living Mahk represents yet another unhappy way to die in this place. Sporadic dimples and lines form intricate detail in the jagged walls. My eyes follow the climbing cracks in their surface, but their towering tops stretch out of sight.

A map of the labyrinth is clear in my mind, because I've traveled its paths a million times. Aside from a couple select places that few dare to enter, like the Blood Caves or the Rotting Pass, I've been everywhere. There could be some turn left unexplored, but it's unlikely. Not that long ago, it seemed rational to hope there was more

than the hostile life this place offers. Eating what's provided, when it's given by the Creators, or fighting amongst ourselves for scraps is the Mahk way of survival.

"This is my world," I confide to the walls; they're as good as friends in this place. "I'm a puppet, and the Creators pull my strings."

Grating faintly sounds ahead, bringing me to a halt. Silence follows.

Dagger now retrieved from my hair and gripped tightly by my side, I inch forward. A break leading to another corridor lies close ahead. Pressure heavy in my chest, my body scales the wall, sneaking toward the opening. Still no more sounds.

Ready for the worst, I peek around the corner. The lonely passageway stretches beyond my sight, no threat to be found.

That's a relief. My walk toward my hiding spot with Blue can't pass fast enough. Though not many Mahk venture this far away from the castle or Sikla, there's always a chance of being followed. Hunger consumes every moment of Mahk existence, so Mahk will take food if they have to. It's happened to me many times, some of which I've barely survived. Other times, I've been the taker. You do what you have to do.

Rapidly paced footsteps interrupt my thinking, just before pain thunders in my lower back. Air thrown from my lungs, I try to catch my breath as my body falls violently into the dirt. Someone is trying to yank away my bag; my food.

An angry-eyed girl about my age scratches at my arms, screaming at me.

"Get away," I screech.

Dagger still in hand, I swing at her pale shoulder. Quicker than a blink, her leg kicks at my hand, dislodging my

weapon. It flies across the corridor, landing near a twisted stump. Again she reaches for my bag. This time, I let her get close, waiting for just the right moment to pull out of reach. She stumbles, which was the plan. An extra shove sends her flying, head smacking into the sooty wall. Her body drops to the ground. Her eyelids twitch, but she seems unconscious. No sense in waiting around to verify. She's out, but for how long?

My feet can stand to carry me away faster, but the back pain is taking a toll. I check her position every few strides. She hasn't budged. Finally, my turn is in view, and I slip out of the corridor.

That one was sneaky. Exercising more caution wouldn't have hurt. The sound tipped me off. Impatience was what cost me. Thanks to my recklessness, an uncomfortable pain throbs in my lower back from her attack. Focusing on the discomfort won't help. Only fifteen or so minutes until I reach Blue, reach home.

The branch poking through the wall above the boulders comes into view. Joy washes through me. I've almost reached our hiding spot. Upon my arrival, the climb up the boulders is faster than usual. Maneuvering too hastily across the branch and through the small hole in the wall causes me to nearly fall from the tree.

"Blue?" I drop to the ground, surveying the small space. "Blue? Come here." My eyes scan the twisted black bushes and walls filled with my drawings.

She croaks but is still nowhere to be seen. After a few minutes, she emerges from behind some thorny bramble. Blue's slender body rushes to my side, her tall skinny legs jerking to a halt before she nudges my cheek.

Fingers dancing through her blue feathers, I'm unable to resist the smile that spreads across my face. "Okay, okay."

Standing at my height, her big gold eyes bat at me.

“What were you doing back there?”

She fluffs her wings as if to gesture confusion.

My thumb grazes the little scar above her eye where my dagger nicked her face the first time we met. She still loves me despite the pain I inflicted on her. Even now, I tell myself if I had no obsidian to pay my taxes, if I had absolutely nothing left to eat, I could... Cringing, I push the thought far away.

She prances back behind the thick, tangled black bushes. She likes to play in them, but their giant thorns are unsettling to me. Her feathers must protect her.

Evidently she’s busy. I shrug, preparing to pull out a rock and draw on the wall. Images in my mind scream to be released. That girl who attacked me and her angry eyes need a place in my drawings.

Splashing sounds from Blue’s direction. She croaks bleakly.

“Blue?” My arms are pushing through the tangled branches. What could she possibly be splashing in? Water that isn’t provided by the Creators isn’t safe. My heartbeat drums in my ears.

When I finally reach her all the way at the back of the shrubbery, a scream rings from my lips when her long legs submerge in acidic water. Nerves twitch under my skin. Countless times I’ve suffered burns from the water around here.

“Blue, no!” I dash toward her.

She disappears into the dangerous liquid of a small pool extending from the base of the wall.

Without hesitation, I dive in. The cool water wraps around me. It doesn’t burn or blister my skin at all. The water isn’t acidic like the other river or pools near which my fingers dig for obsidian. My eyes open to see Blue a few feet ahead of me, swimming beneath the wall to the other side. Gliding through the water on her trail, I

realize this pond might be the source of the Creator's clean water.

Swimming is a new experience. Invading my ears and my nostrils, the liquid is at first unpleasant. Within moments, my thoughts move on to the relaxing cool temperature and the satisfying pressure grazing each arm with every stroke forward. Glimpses of smooth multicolored pebbles resting on the mud catch my eye.

Lovely chartreuse plants rise up from beneath us.

Smooth texture greets my hands when they touch their green tips. The plants might even be edible.

We emerge on the other side of the wall into an expanse of emerald grass and brown trees. Lush blades of healthy greenery stretch far into the distance, and little wild flowers bloom throughout. Unlike the twisted, barren dark trees of the labyrinth, these are bushy with big oval leaves. Some are growing pink and red fruit on them. Each the size of a fist, they cause the branches to

dip toward the ground. Everything is displaced from the ebony trees and volcano I've always known.

The cleansing water has made my skin a shade lighter. I'm no longer covered in soot. Blue prances around the field happily. It's tempting to join her, but this place, though lovely, doesn't feel safe. My gut suggests something isn't right about our surroundings, and as I wave her back over to me, another figure breaks from the surface of the water.

Darith emerges soaking wet and jumps to his feet. We can't be more than fifteen feet apart. He probably doesn't even know who I am, but I'd be a lot happier if he wasn't always beating me to the punch. He's either a better thief than me or he reads my thoughts and then acts before I get the chance. He's cost me so many meals I've lost count.

Getting rid of him has been tempting in the past, but there's never a right moment. That's how the world

works. You eat to survive, and you kill to eat. Operating life like everyone else would make living a lot easier: take what you need and don't put much thought into the repercussions. Though I've taken food in desperate times, I've never killed to do it.

Arms hanging limply, eyes wide open, I'm frozen for a moment as we observe one another. Then his gaze shifts to Blue. My body comes to her protection as I dash between them before he has a chance to strike her down with his curved black sword.

"You want to kill her? You're going to have to get past me."

Surprise sweeps through his green eyes, and his face tightens. Within a second, his sword is clutched in his grasp and ready for an attack.

"Araina, I never would have guessed ya would have such a big secret. How long have you been protectin' this nice large meal? Why don't we split it?"

To hear anyone else acknowledge my name out loud is startling. “Araina” only ever comes from my lips. The guards never say it back. It sounds venomous on Darith’s tongue, but what bothers me most is that he has the nerve to make an assumption about what I would or wouldn’t be likely to do.

“You guessed wrong!”

He attacks and misses. I dart behind him strategically, and he stumbles, attempting to dodge my agile movements. Terror rises in me at the feeling of his sword almost grazing my hand. A slice across his shoulder should slow him down. He’s taken aback by the exposed raw flesh and retreats a few feet. We dance like this a couple more times, aiming to kill, but finding ourselves evenly matched.

When his weapon slices my leg, Blue croaks from behind me. Nausea swells in my stomach at the sight of my blood staining my green pants, but I push past it. My grip

on the dagger becomes less steady as sweat invades my palms. The sharp edge of his ebony sword is swinging toward me, but he's not quick enough. My position is perfect for a good stab into his side.

"The wall! What's happening?" The color is draining from his face. The labyrinth wall is rippling, and a man bursts right through.

Darith and I do a double take, our gazes fixed on the stranger across the field. A man just came through a wall. This was different from the branch coming through the wall above the boulders. This time, the wall seemed to wave as he jolted through. There was never an actual opening.

In the next moment, he's on his feet as his head darts about in confusion. His tall, skinny body jolts frantically, facing one direction then another, trying to determine which way to go. Deeply drawn eyebrows shelter the man's brown eyes that scream fear. He must be running

from something. Goosebumps rise on my skin when his gaze lands on me, and he charges in my direction.

The tall brown man with matching hair trips on his loose white pants as he sprints across the field toward us. He screams at me, “Raiyla.”

That word has no meaning to me. Maybe it’s “help” in his language.

I’ve been so off guard, I barely notice Darith preparing to take another blow at me. My body ducks down, and I draw back.

“Friend of yours?” he questions.

“None of your concern, but no.”

He resumes his murderous attempts on my life, despite the potential threat of the approaching stranger. I’m overwhelmed by the situation. It’s becoming difficult to dodge his charges, which prevent me from keeping an eye on the man in white.

If the mystery man is aiming to attack me, I'm as good as dead. Giving up isn't an option, not in my book. The longer that sword is in Darith's hand, the likelier chance it will end up striking me. Energy summons from every corner of my being into one punch to his face. He looks dizzy. Next my leg kicks his arm, nearly dislodging his weapon. Retaliating with a shove, he almost knocks me to the ground.

A brief moment passes as we race to collect ourselves. I have to be first. A swift kick from my foot hits Darith in the chest and knocks him back into the pool of water. As I turn to take note of the other man's position, he's now upon me and he grabs my injured leg with both hands. My body jerks with fear, my leg kicking him.

Everything is happening so fast there isn't enough time to process it all: a new place within the labyrinth, an attack on mine and Blue's lives, and now a man

emerging out of a wall. How did he come through that wall? From where?

My hand signals Blue toward the bushes to take cover so we can regroup. As we make our way, I notice the pain in my leg is dying down. My skin is mending itself. My eyes fall on the man in white who is attempting to regain his composure.

Did he do that? Was he trying to heal me? Is that even possible?

# *The Labyrinth Wall*

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**This book is in memory of my Grandmother:**

Mary Elizabeth Peavy Allen

Thank you, Grandma, for your encouragement,  
your support and your unfailing love.  
You read me Blueberries for Sal, Mother Goose, and other  
exciting tales that helped me to love stories.  
You and these stories will always be in my heart.  
I love you.