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DIVERGENT

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR
VERONICA ROTH

A MAJOR
MOTION PICTURE
IN THEATERS

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Divergent

Veronica Roth

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Dedication

*To my mother,
who gave me the moment when Beatrice realizes how strong
her mother is and wonders how she missed it for so long*

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CHAPTER ONE

THERE IS ONE mirror in my house. It is behind a sliding panel in the hallway upstairs. Our faction allows me to stand in front of it on the second day of every third month, the day my mother cuts my hair.

I sit on the stool and my mother stands behind me with the scissors, trimming. The strands fall on the floor in a dull, blond ring.

When she finishes, she pulls my hair away from my face and twists it into a knot. I note how calm she looks and how focused she is. She is well-practiced in the art of losing herself. I can't say the same of myself.

I sneak a look at my reflection when she isn't paying attention—not for the sake of vanity, but out of curiosity. A lot can happen to a person's appearance in three months. In my reflection, I see a narrow face, wide, round eyes, and a long, thin nose—I still look like a little girl, though sometime in the last few months I turned sixteen. The other factions celebrate birthdays, but we don't. It would be self-indulgent.

"There," she says when she pins the knot in place. Her eyes catch mine in the mirror. It is too late to look away, but instead of scolding me, she smiles at our reflection. I frown a little. Why doesn't she reprimand me for staring at myself?

"So today is the day," she says.

"Yes," I reply.

"Are you nervous?"

I stare into my own eyes for a moment. Today is the day of the aptitude test that will show me which of the five factions I belong in. And tomorrow, at the Choosing Ceremony, I will decide on a faction; I will decide the rest of my life; I will decide to stay with my family or abandon them.

"No," I say. "The tests don't have to change our choices."

"Right." She smiles. "Let's go eat breakfast."

"Thank you. For cutting my hair."

She kisses my cheek and slides the panel over the mirror. I think my mother could be beautiful, in a different world. Her body is thin beneath the gray robe. She has high cheekbones and long eyelashes, and when she lets her hair down at night, it hangs in waves over her shoulders. But she must hide that beauty in Abnegation.

We walk together to the kitchen. On these mornings when my brother makes breakfast, and my father's hand skims my hair as he reads the newspaper, and my mother hums as she clears the table—it is on these mornings that I feel guiltiest for wanting to leave them.

The bus stinks of exhaust. Every time it hits a patch of uneven pavement, it jostles me from side to side, even though I'm gripping the seat to keep myself still.

My older brother, Caleb, stands in the aisle, holding a railing above his head to keep himself

steady. We don't look alike. He has my father's dark hair and hooked nose and my mother's green eyes and dimpled cheeks. When he was younger, that collection of features looked strange, but now it suits him. If he wasn't Abnegation, I'm sure the girls at school would stare at him.

He also inherited my mother's talent for selflessness. He gave his seat to a surly Candor man on the bus without a second thought.

The Candor man wears a black suit with a white tie—Candor standard uniform. Their faction values honesty and sees the truth as black and white, so that is what they wear.

The gaps between the buildings narrow and the roads are smoother as we near the heart of the city. The building that was once called the Sears Tower—we call it the Hub—emerges from the fog, a black pillar in the skyline. The bus passes under the elevated tracks. I have never been on a train, though they never stop running and there are tracks everywhere. Only the Dauntless ride them.

Five years ago, volunteer construction workers from Abnegation repaved some of the roads. They started in the middle of the city and worked their way outward until they ran out of materials. The roads where I live are still cracked and patchy, and it's not safe to drive on them. We don't have a car anyway.

Caleb's expression is placid as the bus sways and jolts on the road. The gray robe falls from his arm as he clutches a pole for balance. I can tell by the constant shift of his eyes that he is watching the people around us—striving to see only them and to forget himself. Candor values honesty, but our faction, Abnegation, values selflessness.

The bus stops in front of the school and I get up, scooting past the Candor man. I grab Caleb's arm as I stumble over the man's shoes. My slacks are too long, and I've never been that graceful.

The Upper Levels building is the oldest of the three schools in the city: Lower Levels, Mid-Levels, and Upper Levels. Like all the other buildings around it, it is made of glass and steel. In front of it is a large metal sculpture that the Dauntless climb after school, daring each other to go higher and higher. Last year I watched one of them fall and break her leg. I was the one who ran to get the nurse.

"Aptitude tests today," I say. Caleb is not quite a year older than I am, so we are in the same year at school.

He nods as we pass through the front doors. My muscles tighten the second we walk in. The atmosphere feels hungry, like every sixteen-year-old is trying to devour as much as he can get of this last day. It is likely that we will not walk these halls again after the Choosing Ceremony—once we choose, our new factions will be responsible for finishing our education.

Our classes are cut in half today, so we will attend all of them before the aptitude tests, which take place after lunch. My heart rate is already elevated.

"You aren't at all worried about what they'll tell you?" I ask Caleb.

We pause at the split in the hallway where he will go one way, toward Advanced Math, and I will go the other, toward Faction History.

He raises an eyebrow at me. "Are you?"

I could tell him I've been worried for weeks about what the aptitude test will tell me—Abnegation, Candor, Erudite, Amity, or Dauntless?

Instead I smile and say, "Not really."

He smiles back. "Well...have a good day."

I walk toward Faction History, chewing on my lower lip. He never answered my question.

The hallways are cramped, though the light coming through the windows creates the illusion of space; they are one of the only places where the factions mix, at our age. Today the crowd has a new kind of energy, a last day mania.

A girl with long curly hair shouts "Hey!" next to my ear, waving at a distant friend. A jacket sleeve smacks me on the cheek. Then an Erudite boy in a blue sweater shoves me. I lose my balance and fall hard on the ground.

"Out of my way, Stiff," he snaps, and continues down the hallway.

My cheeks warm. I get up and dust myself off. A few people stopped when I fell, but none of them offered to help me. Their eyes follow me to the edge of the hallway. This sort of thing has been happening to others in my faction for months now—the Erudite have been releasing antagonistic reports about Abnegation, and it has begun to affect the way we relate at school. The gray clothes, the plain hairstyle, and the unassuming demeanor of my faction are supposed to make it easier for me to forget myself, and easier for everyone else to forget me too. But now they make me a target.

I pause by a window in the E Wing and wait for the Dauntless to arrive. I do this every morning. At exactly 7:25, the Dauntless prove their bravery by jumping from a moving train.

My father calls the Dauntless "hellions." They are pierced, tattooed, and black-clothed. Their primary purpose is to guard the fence that surrounds our city. From what, I don't know.

They should perplex me. I should wonder what courage—which is the virtue they most value—has to do with a metal ring through your nostril. Instead my eyes cling to them wherever they go.

The train whistle blares, the sound resonating in my chest. The light fixed to the front of the train clicks on and off as the train hurtles past the school, squealing on iron rails. And as the last few cars pass, a mass exodus of young men and women in dark clothing hurl themselves from the moving cars, some dropping and rolling, others stumbling a few steps before regaining their balance. One of the boys wraps his arm around a girl's shoulders, laughing.

Watching them is a foolish practice. I turn away from the window and press through the crowd to the Faction History classroom.

CHAPTER TWO

THE TESTS BEGIN after lunch. We sit at the long tables in the cafeteria, and the test administrators call ten names at a time, one for each testing room. I sit next to Caleb and across from our neighbor Susan.

Susan's father travels throughout the city for his job, so he has a car and drives her to and from school every day. He offered to drive us, too, but as Caleb says, we prefer to leave later and would not want to inconvenience him.

Of course not.

The test administrators are mostly Abnegation volunteers, although there is an Erudite in one of the testing rooms and a Dauntless in another to test those of us from Abnegation, because the rules state that we can't be tested by someone from our own faction. The rules also say that we can't prepare for the test in any way, so I don't know what to expect.

My gaze drifts from Susan to the Dauntless tables across the room. They are laughing and shouting and playing cards. At another set of tables, the Erudite chatter over books and newspapers, in constant pursuit of knowledge.

A group of Amity girls in yellow and red sit in a circle on the cafeteria floor, playing some kind of hand-slapping game involving a rhyming song. Every few minutes I hear a chorus of laughter from them as someone is eliminated and has to sit in the center of the circle. At the table next to them, Candor boys make wide gestures with their hands. They appear to be arguing about something, but it must not be serious, because some of them are still smiling.

At the Abnegation table, we sit quietly and wait. Faction customs dictate even idle behavior and supersede individual preference. I doubt all the Erudite want to study all the time, or that every Candor enjoys a lively debate, but they can't defy the norms of their factions any more than I can.

Caleb's name is called in the next group. He moves confidently toward the exit. I don't need to wish him luck or assure him that he shouldn't be nervous. He knows where he belongs, and as far as I know, he always has. My earliest memory of him is from when we were four years old. He scolded me for not giving my jump rope to a little girl on the playground who didn't have anything to play with. He doesn't lecture me often anymore, but I have his look of disapproval memorized.

I have tried to explain to him that my instincts are not the same as his—it didn't even enter my mind to give my seat to the Candor man on the bus—but he doesn't understand. "Just do what you're supposed to," he always says. It is that easy for him. It should be that easy for me.

My stomach wrenches. I close my eyes and keep them closed until ten minutes later, when Caleb sits down again.

He is plaster-pale. He pushes his palms along his legs like I do when I wipe off sweat, and when he brings them back, his fingers shake. I open my mouth to ask him something, but the words don't come. I am not allowed to ask him about his results, and he is not allowed to tell me.

An Abnegation volunteer speaks the next round of names. Two from Dauntless, two from Erudite, two from Amity, two from Candor, and then: “From Abnegation: Susan Black and Beatrice Prior.”

I get up because I’m supposed to, but if it were up to me, I would stay in my seat for the rest of time. I feel like there is a bubble in my chest that expands more by the second, threatening to break me apart from the inside. I follow Susan to the exit. The people I pass probably can’t tell us apart. We wear the same clothes and we wear our blond hair the same way. The only difference is that Susan might not feel like she’s going to throw up, and from what I can tell, her hands aren’t shaking so hard she has to clutch the hem of her shirt to steady them.

Waiting for us outside the cafeteria is a row of ten rooms. They are used only for the aptitude tests, so I have never been in one before. Unlike the other rooms in the school, they are separated, not by glass, but by mirrors. I watch myself, pale and terrified, walking toward one of the doors. Susan grins nervously at me as she walks into room 5, and I walk into room 6, where a Dauntless woman waits for me.

She is not as severe-looking as the young Dauntless I have seen. She has small, dark, angular eyes and wears a black blazer—like a man’s suit—and jeans. It is only when she turns to close the door that I see a tattoo on the back of her neck, a black-and-white hawk with a red eye. If I didn’t feel like my heart had migrated to my throat, I would ask her what it signifies. It must signify something.

Mirrors cover the inner walls of the room. I can see my reflection from all angles: the gray fabric obscuring the shape of my back, my long neck, my knobby-knuckled hands, red with a blood blush. The ceiling glows white with light. In the center of the room is a reclined chair, like a dentist’s, with a machine next to it. It looks like a place where terrible things happen.

“Don’t worry,” the woman says, “it doesn’t hurt.”

Her hair is black and straight, but in the light I see that it is streaked with gray.

“Have a seat and get comfortable,” she says. “My name is Tori.”

Clumsily I sit in the chair and recline, putting my head on the headrest. The lights hurt my eyes. Tori busies herself with the machine on my right. I try to focus on her and not on the wires in her hands.

“Why the hawk?” I blurt out as she attaches an electrode to my forehead.

“Never met a curious Abnegation before,” she says, raising her eyebrows at me.

I shiver, and goose bumps appear on my arms. My curiosity is a mistake, a betrayal of Abnegation values.

Humming a little, she presses another electrode to my forehead and explains, “In some parts of the ancient world, the hawk symbolized the sun. Back when I got this, I figured if I always had the sun on me, I wouldn’t be afraid of the dark.”

I try to stop myself from asking another question, but I can’t help it. “You’re afraid of the dark?”

“I *was* afraid of the dark,” she corrects me. She presses the next electrode to her own forehead, and attaches a wire to it. She shrugs. “Now it reminds me of the fear I’ve overcome.”

She stands behind me. I squeeze the armrests so tightly the redness pulls away from my knuckles. She tugs wires toward her, attaching them to me, to her, to the machine behind her. Then she passes me a vial of clear liquid.

“Drink this,” she says.

“What is it?” My throat feels swollen. I swallow hard. “What’s going to happen?”

“Can’t tell you that. Just trust me.”

I press air from my lungs and tip the contents of the vial into my mouth. My eyes close.

When they open, an instant has passed, but I am somewhere else. I stand in the school cafeteria again, but all the long tables are empty, and I see through the glass walls that it’s snowing. On the table in front of me are two baskets. In one is a hunk of cheese, and in the other, a knife the length of my forearm.

Behind me, a woman’s voice says, “Choose.”

“Why?” I ask.

“Choose,” she repeats.

I look over my shoulder, but no one is there. I turn back to the baskets. “What will I do with them?”

“Choose!” she yells.

When she screams at me, my fear disappears and stubbornness replaces it. I scowl and cross my arms.

“Have it your way,” she says.

The baskets disappear. I hear a door squeak and turn to see who it is. I see not a “who” but a “what”: A dog with a pointed nose stands a few yards away from me. It crouches low and creeps toward me, its lips peeling back from its white teeth. A growl gurgles from deep in its throat, and I see why the cheese would have come in handy. Or the knife. But it’s too late now.

I think about running, but the dog will be faster than me. I can’t wrestle it to the ground. My head pounds. I have to make a decision. If I can jump over one of the tables and use it as a shield—no, I am too short to jump over the tables, and not strong enough to tip one over.

The dog snarls, and I can almost feel the sound vibrating in my skull.

My biology textbook said that dogs can smell fear because of a chemical secreted by human glands in a state of duress, the same chemical a dog’s prey secretes. Smelling fear leads them to attack. The dog inches toward me, its nails scraping the floor.

I can’t run. I can’t fight. Instead I breathe in the smell of the dog’s foul breath and try not to think about what it just ate. There are no whites in its eyes, just a black gleam.

What else do I know about dogs? I shouldn’t look it in the eye. That’s a sign of aggression. I remember asking my father for a pet dog when I was young, and now, staring at the ground in front of the dog’s paws, I can’t remember why. It comes closer, still growling. If staring into its eyes is a sign of aggression, what’s a sign of submission?

My breaths are loud but steady. I sink to my knees. The last thing I want to do is lie down on the ground in front of the dog—making its teeth level with my face—but it’s the best

option I have. I stretch my legs out behind me and lean on my elbows. The dog creeps closer, and closer, until I feel its warm breath on my face. My arms are shaking.

It barks in my ear, and I clench my teeth to keep from screaming.

Something rough and wet touches my cheek. The dog's growling stops, and when I lift my head to look at it again, it is panting. It licked my face. I frown and sit on my heels. The dog props its paws up on my knees and licks my chin. I cringe, wiping the drool from my skin, and laugh.

"You're not such a vicious beast, huh?"

I get up slowly so I don't startle it, but it seems like a different animal than the one that faced me a few seconds ago. I stretch out a hand, carefully, so I can draw it back if I need to. The dog nudges my hand with its head. I am suddenly glad I didn't pick up the knife.

I blink, and when my eyes open, a child stands across the room wearing a white dress. She stretches out both hands and squeals, "Puppy!"

As she runs toward the dog at my side, I open my mouth to warn her, but I am too late. The dog turns. Instead of growling, it barks and snarls and snaps, and its muscles bunch up like coiled wire. About to pounce. I don't think, I just jump; I hurl my body on top of the dog, wrapping my arms around its thick neck.

My head hits the ground. The dog is gone, and so is the little girl. Instead I am alone—in the testing room, now empty. I turn in a slow circle and can't see myself in any of the mirrors. I push the door open and walk into the hallway, but it isn't a hallway; it's a bus, and all the seats are taken.

I stand in the aisle and hold on to a pole. Sitting near me is a man with a newspaper. I can't see his face over the top of the paper, but I can see his hands. They are scarred, like he was burned, and they clench around the paper like he wants to crumple it.

"Do you know this guy?" he asks. He taps the picture on the front page of the newspaper. The headline reads: "Brutal Murderer Finally Apprehended!" I stare at the word "murderer." It has been a long time since I last read that word, but even its shape fills me with dread.

In the picture beneath the headline is a young man with a plain face and a beard. I feel like I do know him, though I don't remember how. And at the same time, I feel like it would be a bad idea to tell the man that.

"Well?" I hear anger in his voice. "Do you?"

A bad idea—no, a very bad idea. My heart pounds and I clutch the pole to keep my hands from shaking, from giving me away. If I tell him I know the man from the article, something awful will happen to me. But I can convince him that I don't. I can clear my throat and shrug my shoulders—but that would be a lie.

I clear my throat.

"Do you?" he repeats.

I shrug my shoulders.

"Well?"

A shudder goes through me. My fear is irrational; this is just a test, it isn't real. "Nope," I say, my voice casual. "No idea who he is."

He stands, and finally I see his face. He wears dark sunglasses and his mouth is bent into a snarl. His cheek is rippled with scars, like his hands. He leans close to my face. His breath smells like cigarettes. *Not real*, I remind myself. *Not real*.

“You’re lying,” he says. “You’re *lying!*”

“I am not.”

“I can see it in your eyes.”

I pull myself up straighter. “You can’t.”

“If you know him,” he says in a low voice, “you could save me. You could *save me!*”

I narrow my eyes. “Well,” I say. I set my jaw. “I don’t.”

CHAPTER THREE

I WAKE TO SWEATY palms and a pang of guilt in my chest. I am lying in the chair in the mirrored room. When I tilt my head back, I see Tori behind me. She pinches her lips together and removes electrodes from our heads. I wait for her to say something about the test—that it's over, or that I did well, although how could I do poorly on a test like this?—but she says nothing, just pulls the wires from my forehead.

I sit forward and wipe my palms off on my slacks. I had to have done something wrong, even if it only happened in my mind. Is that strange look on Tori's face because she doesn't know how to tell me what a terrible person I am? I wish she would just come out with it.

"That," she says, "was perplexing. Excuse me, I'll be right back."

Perplexing?

I bring my knees to my chest and bury my face in them. I wish I felt like crying, because the tears might bring me a sense of release, but I don't. How can you fail a test you aren't allowed to prepare for?

As the moments pass, I get more nervous. I have to wipe off my hands every few seconds as the sweat collects—or maybe I just do it because it helps me feel calmer. What if they tell me that I'm not cut out for any faction? I would have to live on the streets, with the factionless. I can't do that. To live factionless is not just to live in poverty and discomfort; it is to live divorced from society, separated from the most important thing in life: community.

My mother told me once that we can't survive alone, but even if we could, we wouldn't want to. Without a faction, we have no purpose and no reason to live.

I shake my head. I can't think like this. I have to stay calm.

Finally the door opens, and Tori walks back in. I grip the arms of the chair.

"Sorry to worry you," Tori says. She stands by my feet with her hands in her pockets. She looks tense and pale.

"Beatrice, your results were inconclusive," she says. "Typically, each stage of the simulation eliminates one or more of the factions, but in your case, only two have been ruled out."

I stare at her. "Two?" I ask. My throat is so tight it's hard to talk.

"If you had shown an automatic distaste for the knife and selected the cheese, the simulation would have led you to a different scenario that confirmed your aptitude for Amity. That didn't happen, which is why Amity is out." Tori scratches the back of her neck. "Normally, the simulation progresses in a linear fashion, isolating one faction by ruling out the rest. The choices you made didn't even allow Candor, the next possibility, to be ruled out, so I had to alter the simulation to put you on the bus. And there your insistence upon dishonesty ruled out Candor." She half smiles. "Don't worry about that. Only the Candor tell the truth in that one."

One of the knots in my chest loosens. Maybe I'm not an awful person.

"I suppose that's not entirely true. People who tell the truth are the Candor...and the

Abnegation,” she says. “Which gives us a problem.”

My mouth falls open.

“On the one hand, you threw yourself on the dog rather than let it attack the little girl, which is an Abnegation-oriented response...but on the other, when the man told you that the truth would save him, you still refused to tell it. Not an Abnegation-oriented response.” She sighs. “Not running from the dog suggests Dauntless, but so does taking the knife, which you didn’t do.”

She clears her throat and continues. “Your intelligent response to the dog indicates strong alignment with the Erudite. I have no idea what to make of your indecision in stage one, but —”

“Wait,” I interrupt her. “So you have no idea what my aptitude is?”

“Yes and no. My conclusion,” she explains, “is that you display equal aptitude for Abnegation, Dauntless, and Erudite. People who get this kind of result are...” She looks over her shoulder like she expects someone to appear behind her. “...are called...*Divergent*.” She says the last word so quietly that I almost don’t hear it, and her tense, worried look returns. She walks around the side of the chair and leans in close to me.

“Beatrice,” she says, “under no circumstances should you share that information with anyone. This is very important.”

“We aren’t supposed to share our results.” I nod. “I know that.”

“No.” Tori kneels next to the chair now and places her arms on the armrest. Our faces are inches apart. “This is different. I don’t mean you shouldn’t share them now; I mean you should never share them with anyone, *ever*, no matter what happens. Divergence is extremely dangerous. You understand?”

I don’t understand—how could inconclusive test results be dangerous?—but I still nod. I don’t want to share my test results with anyone anyway.

“Okay.” I peel my hands from the arms of the chair and stand. I feel unsteady.

“I suggest,” Tori says, “that you go home. You have a lot of thinking to do, and waiting with the others may not benefit you.”

“I have to tell my brother where I’m going.”

“I’ll let him know.”

I touch my forehead and stare at the floor as I walk out of the room. I can’t bear to look her in the eye. I can’t bear to think about the Choosing Ceremony tomorrow.

It’s my choice now, no matter what the test says.

Abnegation. Dauntless. Erudite.

Divergent.

I decide not to take the bus. If I get home early, my father will notice when he checks the house log at the end of the day, and I’ll have to explain what happened. Instead I walk. I’ll have to intercept Caleb before he mentions anything to our parents, but Caleb can keep a secret.

I walk in the middle of the road. The buses tend to hug the curb, so it’s safer here.

Sometimes, on the streets near my house, I can see places where the yellow lines used to be. We have no use for them now that there are so few cars. We don't need stoplights, either, but in some places they dangle precariously over the road like they might crash down any minute.

Renovation moves slowly through the city, which is a patchwork of new, clean buildings and old, crumbling ones. Most of the new buildings are next to the marsh, which used to be a lake a long time ago. The Abnegation volunteer agency my mother works for is responsible for most of those renovations.

When I look at the Abnegation lifestyle as an outsider, I think it's beautiful. When I watch my family move in harmony; when we go to dinner parties and everyone cleans together afterward without having to be asked; when I see Caleb help strangers carry their groceries, I fall in love with this life all over again. It's only when I try to live it myself that I have trouble. It never feels genuine.

But choosing a different faction means I forsake my family. Permanently.

Just past the Abnegation sector of the city is the stretch of building skeletons and broken sidewalks that I now walk through. There are places where the road has completely collapsed, revealing sewer systems and empty subways that I have to be careful to avoid, and places that stink so powerfully of sewage and trash that I have to plug my nose.

This is where the factionless live. Because they failed to complete initiation into whatever faction they chose, they live in poverty, doing the work no one else wants to do. They are janitors and construction workers and garbage collectors; they make fabric and operate trains and drive buses. In return for their work they get food and clothing, but, as my mother says, not enough of either.

I see a factionless man standing on the corner up ahead. He wears ragged brown clothing and skin sags from his jaw. He stares at me, and I stare back at him, unable to look away.

"Excuse me," he says. His voice is raspy. "Do you have something I can eat?"

I feel a lump in my throat. A stern voice in my head says, *Duck your head and keep walking.*

No. I shake my head. I should not be afraid of this man. He needs help and I am supposed to help him.

"Um...yes," I say. I reach into my bag. My father tells me to keep food in my bag at all times for exactly this reason. I offer the man a small bag of dried apple slices.

He reaches for them, but instead of taking the bag, his hand closes around my wrist. He smiles at me. He has a gap between his front teeth.

"My, don't you have pretty eyes," he says. "It's a shame the rest of you is so plain."

My heart pounds. I tug my hand back, but his grip tightens. I smell something acrid and unpleasant on his breath.

"You look a little young to be walking around by yourself, dear," he says.

I stop tugging, and stand up straighter. I know I look young; I don't need to be reminded. "I'm older than I look," I retort. "I'm sixteen."

His lips spread wide, revealing a gray molar with a dark pit in the side. I can't tell if he's smiling or grimacing. "Then isn't today a special day for you? The day before you *choose*?"

“Let go of me,” I say. I hear ringing in my ears. My voice sounds clear and stern—not what I expected to hear. I feel like it doesn’t belong to me.

I am ready. I know what to do. I picture myself bringing my elbow back and hitting him. I see the bag of apples flying away from me. I hear my running footsteps. I am prepared to act.

But then he releases my wrist, takes the apples, and says, “Choose wisely, little girl.”

CHAPTER FOUR

I REACH MY street five minutes before I usually do, according to my watch—which is the only adornment Abnegation allows, and only because it's practical. It has a gray band and a glass face. If I tilt it right, I can almost see my reflection over the hands.

The houses on my street are all the same size and shape. They are made of gray cement, with few windows, in economical, no-nonsense rectangles. Their lawns are crabgrass and their mailboxes are dull metal. To some the sight might be gloomy, but to me their simplicity is comforting.

The reason for the simplicity isn't disdain for uniqueness, as the other factions have sometimes interpreted it. Everything—our houses, our clothes, our hairstyles—is meant to help us forget ourselves and to protect us from vanity, greed, and envy, which are just forms of selfishness. If we have little, and want for little, and we are all equal, we envy no one.

I try to love it.

I sit on the front step and wait for Caleb to arrive. It doesn't take long. After a minute I see gray-robed forms walking down the street. I hear laughter. At school we try not to draw attention to ourselves, but once we're home, the games and jokes start. My natural tendency toward sarcasm is still not appreciated. Sarcasm is always at someone's expense. Maybe it's better that Abnegation wants me to suppress it. Maybe I don't have to leave my family. Maybe if I fight to make Abnegation work, my act will turn into reality.

"Beatrice!" Caleb says. "What happened? Are you all right?"

"I'm fine." He is with Susan and her brother, Robert, and Susan is giving me a strange look, like I am a different person than the one she knew this morning. I shrug. "When the test was over, I got sick. Must have been that liquid they gave us. I feel better now, though."

I try to smile convincingly. I seem to have persuaded Susan and Robert, who no longer look concerned for my mental stability, but Caleb narrows his eyes at me, the way he does when he suspects someone of duplicity.

"Did you two take the bus today?" I ask. I don't care how Susan and Robert got home from school, but I need to change the subject.

"Our father had to work late," Susan says, "and he told us we should spend some time thinking before the ceremony tomorrow."

My heart pounds at the mention of the ceremony.

"You're welcome to come over later, if you'd like," Caleb says politely.

"Thank you." Susan smiles at Caleb.

Robert raises an eyebrow at me. He and I have been exchanging looks for the past year as Susan and Caleb flirt in the tentative way known only to the Abnegation. Caleb's eyes follow Susan down the walk. I have to grab his arm to startle him from his daze. I lead him into the house and close the door behind us.

He turns to me. His dark, straight eyebrows draw together so that a crease appears between

them. When he frowns, he looks more like my mother than my father. In an instant I can see him living the same kind of life my father did: staying in Abnegation, learning a trade, marrying Susan, and having a family. It will be wonderful.

I may not see it.

“Are you going to tell me the truth now?” he asks softly.

“The truth is,” I say, “I’m not supposed to discuss it. And you’re not supposed to ask.”

“All those rules you bend, and you can’t bend this one? Not even for something this important?” His eyebrows tug together, and he bites the corner of his lip. Though his words are accusatory, it sounds like he is probing me for information—like he actually wants my answer.

I narrow my eyes. “Will you? What happened in *your* test, Caleb?”

Our eyes meet. I hear a train horn, so faint it could easily be wind whistling through an alleyway. But I know it when I hear it. It sounds like the Dauntless, calling me to them.

“Just...don’t tell our parents what happened, okay?” I say.

His eyes stay on mine for a few seconds, and then he nods.

I want to go upstairs and lie down. The test, the walk, and my encounter with the factionless man exhausted me. But my brother made breakfast this morning, and my mother prepared our lunches, and my father made dinner last night, so it’s my turn to cook. I breathe deeply and walk into the kitchen to start cooking.

A minute later, Caleb joins me. I grit my teeth. He helps with everything. What irritates me most about him is his natural goodness, his inborn selflessness.

Caleb and I work together without speaking. I cook peas on the stove. He defrosts four pieces of chicken. Most of what we eat is frozen or canned, because farms these days are far away. My mother told me once that, a long time ago, there were people who wouldn’t buy genetically engineered produce because they viewed it as unnatural. Now we have no other option.

By the time my parents get home, dinner is ready and the table is set. My father drops his bag at the door and kisses my head. Other people see him as an opinionated man—too opinionated, maybe—but he’s also loving. I try to see only the good in him; I try.

“How did the test go?” he asks me. I pour the peas into a serving bowl.

“Fine,” I say. I couldn’t be Candor. I lie too easily.

“I heard there was some kind of upset with one of the tests,” my mother says. Like my father, she works for the government, but she manages city improvement projects. She recruited volunteers to administer the aptitude tests. Most of the time, though, she organizes workers to help the factionless with food and shelter and job opportunities.

“Really?” says my father. A problem with the aptitude tests is rare.

“I don’t know much about it, but my friend Erin told me that something went wrong with one of the tests, so the results had to be reported verbally.” My mother places a napkin next to each plate on the table. “Apparently the student got sick and was sent home early.” My mother shrugs. “I hope they’re all right. Did you two hear about that?”

“No,” Caleb says. He smiles at my mother.

My brother couldn't be Candor either.

We sit at the table. We always pass food to the right, and no one eats until everyone is served. My father extends his hands to my mother and my brother, and they extend their hands to him and me, and my father gives thanks to God for food and work and friends and family. Not every Abnegation family is religious, but my father says we should try not to see those differences because they will only divide us. I am not sure what to make of that.

“So,” my mother says to my father. “Tell me.”

She takes my father's hand and moves her thumb in a small circle over his knuckles. I stare at their joined hands. My parents love each other, but they rarely show affection like this in front of us. They taught us that physical contact is powerful, so I have been wary of it since I was young.

“Tell me what's bothering you,” she adds.

I stare at my plate. My mother's acute senses sometimes surprise me, but now they chide me. Why was I so focused on myself that I didn't notice his deep frown and his sagging posture?

“I had a difficult day at work,” he says. “Well, really, it was Marcus who had the difficult day. I shouldn't lay claim to it.”

Marcus is my father's coworker; they are both political leaders. The city is ruled by a council of fifty people, composed entirely of representatives from Abnegation, because our faction is regarded as incorruptible, due to our commitment to selflessness. Our leaders are selected by their peers for their impeccable character, moral fortitude, and leadership skills. Representatives from each of the other factions can speak in the meetings on behalf of a particular issue, but ultimately, the decision is the council's. And while the council technically makes decisions together, Marcus is particularly influential.

It has been this way since the beginning of the great peace, when the factions were formed. I think the system persists because we're afraid of what might happen if it didn't: war.

“Is this about that report Jeanine Matthews released?” my mother says. Jeanine Matthews is Erudite's sole representative, selected based on her IQ score. My father complains about her often.

I look up. “A report?”

Caleb gives me a warning look. We aren't supposed to speak at the dinner table unless our parents ask us a direct question, and they usually don't. Our listening ears are a gift to them, my father says. They give us their listening ears after dinner, in the family room.

“Yes,” my father says. His eyes narrow. “Those arrogant, self-righteous—” He stops and clears his throat. “Sorry. But she released a report attacking Marcus's character.”

I raise my eyebrows.

“What did it say?” I ask.

“Beatrice,” Caleb says quietly.

I duck my head, turning my fork over and over and over until the warmth leaves my cheeks. I don't like to be chastised. Especially by my brother.

“It said,” my father says, “that Marcus's violence and cruelty toward his son is the reason

his son chose Dauntless instead of Abnegation.”

Few people who are born into Abnegation choose to leave it. When they do, we remember. Two years ago, Marcus’s son, Tobias, left us for the Dauntless, and Marcus was devastated. Tobias was his only child—and his only family, since his wife died giving birth to their second child. The infant died minutes later.

I never met Tobias. He rarely attended community events and never joined his father at our house for dinner. My father often remarked that it was strange, but now it doesn’t matter.

“Cruel? Marcus?” My mother shakes her head. “That poor man. As if he needs to be reminded of his loss.”

“Of his son’s betrayal, you mean?” my father says coldly. “I shouldn’t be surprised at this point. The Erudite have been attacking us with these reports for months. And this isn’t the end. There will be more, I guarantee it.”

I shouldn’t speak again, but I can’t help myself. I blurt out, “Why are they doing this?”

“Why don’t you take this opportunity to listen to your father, Beatrice?” my mother says gently. It is phrased like a suggestion, not a command. I look across the table at Caleb, who has that look of disapproval in his eyes.

I stare at my peas. I am not sure I can live this life of obligation any longer. I am not good enough.

“You know why,” my father says. “Because we have something they want. Valuing knowledge above all else results in a lust for power, and that leads men into dark and empty places. We should be thankful that we know better.”

I nod. I know I will not choose Erudite, even though my test results suggested that I could. I am my father’s daughter.

My parents clean up after dinner. They don’t even let Caleb help them, because we’re supposed to keep to ourselves tonight instead of gathering in the family room, so we can think about our results.

My family might be able to help me choose, if I could talk about my results. But I can’t. Tori’s warning whispers in my memory every time my resolve to keep my mouth shut falters.

Caleb and I climb the stairs and, at the top, when we divide to go to our separate bedrooms, he stops me with a hand on my shoulder.

“Beatrice,” he says, looking sternly into my eyes. “We should think of our family.” There is an edge to his voice. “But. But we must also think of ourselves.”

For a moment I stare at him. I have never seen him think of himself, never heard him insist on anything but selflessness.

I am so startled by his comment that I just say what I am supposed to say: “The tests don’t have to change our choices.”

He smiles a little. “Don’t they, though?”

He squeezes my shoulder and walks into his bedroom. I peer into his room and see an unmade bed and a stack of books on his desk. He closes the door. I wish I could tell him that we’re going through the same thing. I wish I could speak to him like I want to instead of like I’m supposed to. But the idea of admitting that I need help is too much to bear, so I turn away.

I walk into my room, and when I close my door behind me, I realize that the decision might be simple. It will require a great act of selflessness to choose Abnegation, or a great act of courage to choose Dauntless, and maybe just choosing one over the other will prove that I belong. Tomorrow, those two qualities will struggle within me, and only one can win.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE BUS WE take to get to the Choosing Ceremony is full of people in gray shirts and gray slacks. A pale ring of sunlight burns into the clouds like the end of a lit cigarette. I will never smoke one myself—they are closely tied to vanity—but a crowd of Candor smokes them in front of the building when we get off the bus.

I have to tilt my head back to see the top of the Hub, and even then, part of it disappears into the clouds. It is the tallest building in the city. I can see the lights on the two prongs on its roof from my bedroom window.

I follow my parents off the bus. Caleb seems calm, but so would I, if I knew what I was going to do. Instead I get the distinct impression that my heart will burst out of my chest any minute now, and I grab his arm to steady myself as I walk up the front steps.

The elevator is crowded, so my father volunteers to give a cluster of Amity our place. We climb the stairs instead, following him unquestioningly. We set an example for our fellow faction members, and soon the three of us are engulfed in the mass of gray fabric ascending cement stairs in the half light. I settle into their pace. The uniform pounding of feet in my ears and the homogeneity of the people around me makes me believe that I could choose this. I could be subsumed into Abnegation's hive mind, projecting always outward.

But then my legs get sore, and I struggle to breathe, and I am again distracted by myself. We have to climb twenty flights of stairs to get to the Choosing Ceremony.

My father holds the door open on the twentieth floor and stands like a sentry as every Abnegation walks past him. I would wait for him, but the crowd presses me forward, out of the stairwell and into the room where I will decide the rest of my life.

The room is arranged in concentric circles. On the edges stand the sixteen-year-olds of every faction. We are not called members yet; our decisions today will make us initiates, and we will become members if we complete initiation.

We arrange ourselves in alphabetical order, according to the last names we may leave behind today. I stand between Caleb and Danielle Pohler, an Amity girl with rosy cheeks and a yellow dress.

Rows of chairs for our families make up the next circle. They are arranged in five sections, according to faction. Not everyone in each faction comes to the Choosing Ceremony, but enough of them come that the crowd looks huge.

The responsibility to conduct the ceremony rotates from faction to faction each year, and this year is Abnegation's. Marcus will give the opening address and read the names in reverse alphabetical order. Caleb will choose before me.

In the last circle are five metal bowls so large they could hold my entire body, if I curled up. Each one contains a substance that represents each faction: gray stones for Abnegation, water for Erudite, earth for Amity, lit coals for Dauntless, and glass for Candor.

When Marcus calls my name, I will walk to the center of the three circles. I will not speak. He will offer me a knife. I will cut into my hand and sprinkle my blood into the bowl of the

faction I choose.

My blood on the stones. My blood sizzling on the coals.

Before my parents sit down, they stand in front of Caleb and me. My father kisses my forehead and claps Caleb on the shoulder, grinning.

“See you soon,” he says. Without a trace of doubt.

My mother hugs me, and what little resolve I have left almost breaks. I clench my jaw and stare up at the ceiling, where globe lanterns hang and fill the room with blue light. She holds me for what feels like a long time, even after I let my hands fall. Before she pulls away, she turns her head and whispers in my ear, “I love you. No matter what.”

I frown at her back as she walks away. She knows what I might do. She must know, or she wouldn't feel the need to say that.

Caleb grabs my hand, squeezing my palm so tightly it hurts, but I don't let go. The last time we held hands was at my uncle's funeral, as my father cried. We need each other's strength now, just as we did then.

The room slowly comes to order. I should be observing the Dauntless; I should be taking in as much information as I can, but I can only stare at the lanterns across the room. I try to lose myself in the blue glow.

Marcus stands at the podium between the Erudite and the Dauntless and clears his throat into the microphone. “Welcome,” he says. “Welcome to the Choosing Ceremony. Welcome to the day we honor the democratic philosophy of our ancestors, which tells us that every man has the right to choose his own way in this world.”

Or, it occurs to me, one of five predetermined ways. I squeeze Caleb's fingers as hard as he is squeezing mine.

“Our dependents are now sixteen. They stand on the precipice of adulthood, and it is now up to them to decide what kind of people they will be.” Marcus's voice is solemn and gives equal weight to each word. “Decades ago our ancestors realized that it is not political ideology, religious belief, race, or nationalism that is to blame for a warring world. Rather, they determined that it was the fault of human personality—of humankind's inclination toward evil, in whatever form that is. They divided into factions that sought to eradicate those qualities they believed responsible for the world's disarray.”

My eyes shift to the bowls in the center of the room. What do I believe? I do not know; I do not know; I do not know.

“Those who blamed aggression formed Amity.”

The Amity exchange smiles. They are dressed comfortably, in red or yellow. Every time I see them, they seem kind, loving, free. But joining them has never been an option for me.

“Those who blamed ignorance became the Erudite.”

Ruling out Erudite was the only part of my choice that was easy.

“Those who blamed duplicity created Candor.”

I have never liked Candor.

“Those who blamed selfishness made Abnegation.”

I blame selfishness; I do.

“And those who blamed cowardice were the Dauntless.”

But I am not selfless enough. Sixteen years of trying and I am not enough.

My legs go numb, like all the life has gone out of them, and I wonder how I will walk when my name is called.

“Working together, these five factions have lived in peace for many years, each contributing to a different sector of society. Abnegation has fulfilled our need for selfless leaders in government; Candor has provided us with trustworthy and sound leaders in law; Erudite has supplied us with intelligent teachers and researchers; Amity has given us understanding counselors and caretakers; and Dauntless provides us with protection from threats both within and without. But the reach of each faction is not limited to these areas. We give one another far more than can be adequately summarized. In our factions, we find meaning, we find purpose, we find life.”

I think of the motto I read in my Faction History textbook: *Faction before blood*. More than family, our factions are where we belong. Can that possibly be right?

Marcus adds, “Apart from them, we would not survive.”

The silence that follows his words is heavier than other silences. It is heavy with our worst fear, greater even than the fear of death: to be factionless.

Marcus continues, “Therefore this day marks a happy occasion—the day on which we receive our new initiates, who will work with us toward a better society and a better world.”

A round of applause. It sounds muffled. I try to stand completely still, because if my knees are locked and my body is stiff, I don’t shake. Marcus reads the first names, but I can’t tell one syllable from the other. How will I know when he calls my name?

One by one, each sixteen-year-old steps out of line and walks to the middle of the room. The first girl to choose decides on Amity, the same faction from which she came. I watch her blood droplets fall on soil, and she stands behind their seats alone.

The room is constantly moving, a new name and a new person choosing, a new knife and a new choice. I recognize most of them, but I doubt they know me.

“James Tucker,” Marcus says.

James Tucker of the Dauntless is the first person to stumble on his way to the bowls. He throws his arms out and regains his balance before hitting the floor. His face turns red and he walks fast to the middle of the room. When he stands in the center, he looks from the Dauntless bowl to the Candor bowl—the orange flames that rise higher each moment, and the glass reflecting blue light.

Marcus offers him the knife. He breathes deeply—I watch his chest rise—and, as he exhales, accepts the knife. Then he drags it across his palm with a jerk and holds his arm out to the side. His blood falls onto glass, and he is the first of us to switch factions. The first faction transfer. A mutter rises from the Dauntless section, and I stare at the floor.

They will see him as a traitor from now on. His Dauntless family will have the option of visiting him in his new faction, a week and a half from now on Visiting Day, but they won’t, because he left them. His absence will haunt their hallways, and he will be a space they can’t fill. And then time will pass, and the hole will be gone, like when an organ is removed and the

body's fluids flow into the space it leaves. Humans can't tolerate emptiness for long.

"Caleb Prior," says Marcus.

Caleb squeezes my hand one last time, and as he walks away, casts a long look at me over his shoulder. I watch his feet move to the center of the room, and his hands, steady as they accept the knife from Marcus, are deft as one presses the knife into the other. Then he stands with blood pooling in his palm, and his lip snags on his teeth.

He breathes out. And then in. And then he holds his hand over the Erudite bowl, and his blood drips into the water, turning it a deeper shade of red.

I hear mutters that lift into outraged cries. I can barely think straight. My brother, my selfless brother, a faction transfer? My brother, born for Abnegation, *Erudite*?

When I close my eyes, I see the stack of books on Caleb's desk, and his shaking hands sliding along his legs after the aptitude test. Why didn't I realize that when he told me to think of myself yesterday, he was also giving that advice to himself?

I scan the crowd of the Erudite—they wear smug smiles and nudge each other. The Abnegation, normally so placid, speak to one another in tense whispers and glare across the room at the faction that has become our enemy.

"Excuse me," says Marcus, but the crowd doesn't hear him. He shouts, "Quiet, please!"

The room goes silent. Except for a ringing sound.

I hear my name and a shudder propels me forward. Halfway to the bowls, I am sure that I will choose Abnegation. I can see it now. I watch myself grow into a woman in Abnegation robes, marrying Susan's brother, Robert, volunteering on the weekends, the peace of routine, the quiet nights spent in front of the fireplace, the certainty that I will be safe, and if not good enough, better than I am now.

The ringing, I realize, is in my ears.

I look at Caleb, who now stands behind the Erudite. He stares back at me and nods a little, like he knows what I'm thinking, and agrees. My footsteps falter. If Caleb wasn't fit for Abnegation, how can I be? But what choice do I have, now that he left us and I'm the only one who remains? He left me no other option.

I set my jaw. I will be the child that stays; I have to do this for my parents. I have to.

Marcus offers me my knife. I look into his eyes—they are dark blue, a strange color—and take it. He nods, and I turn toward the bowls. Dauntless fire and Abnegation stones are both on my left, one in front of my shoulder and one behind. I hold the knife in my right hand and touch the blade to my palm. Gritting my teeth, I drag the blade down. It stings, but I barely notice. I hold both hands to my chest, and my next breath shudders on the way out.

I open my eyes and thrust my arm out. My blood drips onto the carpet between the two bowls. Then, with a gasp I can't contain, I shift my hand forward, and my blood sizzles on the coals.

I am selfish. I am brave.

CHAPTER SIX

I TRAIN MY eyes on the floor and stand behind the Dauntless-born initiates who chose to return to their own faction. They are all taller than I am, so even when I lift my head, I see only black-clothed shoulders. When the last girl makes her choice—Amity—it’s time to leave. The Dauntless exit first. I walk past the gray-clothed men and women who were my faction, staring determinedly at the back of someone’s head.

But I have to see my parents one more time. I look over my shoulder at the last second before I pass them, and immediately wish I hadn’t. My father’s eyes burn into mine with a look of accusation. At first, when I feel the heat behind my eyes, I think he’s found a way to set me on fire, to punish me for what I’ve done, but no—I’m about to cry.

Beside him, my mother is smiling.

The people behind me press me forward, away from my family, who will be the last ones to leave. They may even stay to stack the chairs and clean the bowls. I twist my head around to find Caleb in the crowd of Erudite behind me. He stands among the other initiates, shaking hands with a faction transfer, a boy who was Candor. The easy smile he wears is an act of betrayal. My stomach wrenches and I turn away. If it’s so easy for him, maybe it should be easy for me, too.

I glance at the boy to my left, who was Erudite and now looks as pale and nervous as I should feel. I spent all my time worrying about which faction I would choose and never considered what would happen if I chose Dauntless. What waits for me at Dauntless headquarters?

The crowd of Dauntless leading us go to the stairs instead of the elevators. I thought only the Abnegation used the stairs.

Then everyone starts running. I hear whoops and shouts and laughter all around me, and dozens of thundering feet moving at different rhythms. It is not a selfless act for the Dauntless to take the stairs; it is a wild act.

“What the hell is going on?” the boy next to me shouts.

I just shake my head and keep running. I am breathless when we reach the first floor, and the Dauntless burst through the exit. Outside, the air is crisp and cold and the sky is orange from the setting sun. It reflects off the black glass of the Hub.

The Dauntless sprawl across the street, blocking the path of a bus, and I sprint to catch up to the back of the crowd. My confusion dissipates as I run. I have not run anywhere in a long time. Abnegation discourages anything done strictly for my own enjoyment, and that is what this is: my lungs burning, my muscles aching, the fierce pleasure of a flat-out sprint. I follow the Dauntless down the street and around the corner and hear a familiar sound: the train horn.

“Oh no,” mumbles the Erudite boy. “Are we supposed to hop on that thing?”

“Yes,” I say, breathless.

It is good that I spent so much time watching the Dauntless arrive at school. The crowd spreads out in a long line. The train glides toward us on steel rails, its light flashing, its horn

blaring. The door of each car is open, waiting for the Dauntless to pile in, and they do, group by group, until only the new initiates are left. The Dauntless-born initiates are used to doing this by now, so in a second it's just faction transfers left.

I step forward with a few others and start jogging. We run with the car for a few steps and then throw ourselves sideways. I'm not as tall or as strong as some of them, so I can't pull myself into the car. I cling to a handle next to the doorway, my shoulder slamming into the car. My arms shake, and finally a Candor girl grabs me and pulls me in. Gasping, I thank her.

I hear a shout and look over my shoulder. A short Erudite boy with red hair pumps his arms as he tries to catch up to the train. An Erudite girl by the door reaches out to grab the boy's hand, straining, but he is too far behind. He falls to his knees next to the tracks as we sail away, and puts his head in his hands.

I feel uneasy. He just failed Dauntless initiation. He is factionless now. It could happen at any moment.

"You all right?" the Candor girl who helped me asks briskly. She is tall, with dark brown skin and short hair. Pretty.

I nod.

"I'm Christina," she says, offering me her hand.

I haven't shaken a hand in a long time either. The Abnegation greeted one another by bowing heads, a sign of respect. I take her hand, uncertainly, and shake it twice, hoping I didn't squeeze too hard or not hard enough.

"Beatrice," I say.

"Do you know where we're going?" She has to shout over the wind, which blows harder through the open doors by the second. The train is picking up speed. I sit down. It will be easier to keep my balance if I'm low to the ground. She raises an eyebrow at me.

"A fast train means wind," I say. "Wind means falling out. Get down."

Christina sits next to me, inching back to lean against the wall.

"I guess we're going to Dauntless headquarters," I say, "but I don't know where that is."

"Does anyone?" She shakes her head, grinning. "It's like they just popped out of a hole in the ground or something."

Then the wind rushes through the car, and the other faction transfers, hit with bursts of air, fall on top of one another. I watch Christina laugh without hearing her and manage a smile.

Over my left shoulder, orange light from the setting sun reflects off the glass buildings, and I can faintly see the rows of gray houses that used to be my home.

It's Caleb's turn to make dinner tonight. Who will take his place—my mother or my father? And when they clear out his room, what will they discover? I imagine books jammed between the dresser and the wall, books under his mattress. The Erudite thirst for knowledge filling all the hidden places in his room. Did he always know that he would choose Erudite? And if he did, how did I not notice?

What a good actor he was. The thought makes me sick to my stomach, because even though I left them too, at least I was no good at pretending. At least they all knew that I wasn't selfless.

I close my eyes and picture my mother and father sitting at the dinner table in silence. Is it a lingering hint of selflessness that makes my throat tighten at the thought of them, or is it selfishness, because I know I will never be their daughter again?

“They’re jumping off!”

I lift my head. My neck aches. I have been curled up with my back against the wall for at least a half hour, listening to the roaring wind and watching the city smear past us. I sit forward. The train has slowed down in the past few minutes, and I see that the boy who shouted is right: The Dauntless in the cars ahead of us are jumping out as the train passes a rooftop. The tracks are seven stories up.

The idea of leaping out of a moving train onto a rooftop, knowing there is a gap between the edge of the roof and the edge of the track, makes me want to throw up. I push myself up and stumble to the opposite side of the car, where the other faction transfers stand in a line.

“We have to jump off too, then,” a Candor girl says. She has a large nose and crooked teeth.

“Great,” a Candor boy replies, “because that makes perfect sense, Molly. Leap off a train onto a roof.”

“This is kind of what we signed up for, Peter,” the girl points out.

“Well, I’m not doing it,” says an Amity boy behind me. He has olive skin and wears a brown shirt—he is the *only* transfer from Amity. His cheeks shine with tears.

“You’ve got to,” Christina says, “or you fail. Come on, it’ll be all right.”

“No, it won’t! I’d rather be factionless than dead!” The Amity boy shakes his head. He sounds panicky. He keeps shaking his head and staring at the rooftop, which is getting closer by the second.

I don’t agree with him. I would rather be dead than empty, like the factionless.

“You can’t force him,” I say, glancing at Christina. Her brown eyes are wide, and she presses her lips together so hard they change color. She offers me her hand.

“Here,” she says. I raise an eyebrow at her hand, about to say that I don’t need help, but she adds, “I just...can’t do it unless someone drags me.”

I take her hand and we stand at the edge of the car. As it passes the roof, I count, “One...two...*three!*”

On three we launch off the train car. A weightless moment, and then my feet slam into solid ground and pain prickles through my shins. The jarring landing sends me sprawling on the rooftop, gravel under my cheek. I release Christina’s hand. She’s laughing.

“That was fun,” she says.

Christina will fit in with Dauntless thrill seekers. I brush grains of rock from my cheek. All the initiates except the Amity boy made it onto the roof, with varying levels of success. The Candor girl with crooked teeth, Molly, holds her ankle, wincing, and Peter, the Candor boy with shiny hair, grins proudly—he must have landed on his feet.

Then I hear a wail. I turn my head, searching for the source of the sound. A Dauntless girl stands at the edge of the roof, staring at the ground below, screaming. Behind her a Dauntless

boy holds her at the waist to keep her from falling off.

“Rita,” he says. “Rita, calm down. Rita—”

I stand and look over the edge. There is a body on the pavement below us; a girl, her arms and legs bent at awkward angles, her hair spread in a fan around her head. My stomach sinks and I stare at the railroad tracks. Not everyone made it. And even the Dauntless aren’t safe.

Rita sinks to her knees, sobbing. I turn away. The longer I watch her, the more likely I am to cry, and I can’t cry in front of these people.

I tell myself, as sternly as possible, *that is how things work here*. We do dangerous things and people die. People die, and we move on to the next dangerous thing. The sooner that lesson sinks in, the better chance I have at surviving initiation.

I’m no longer sure that I will survive initiation.

I tell myself I will count to three, and when I’m done, I will move on. *One*. I picture the girl’s body on the pavement, and a shudder goes through me. *Two*. I hear Rita’s sobs and the murmured reassurance of the boy behind her. *Three*.

My lips pursed, I walk away from Rita and the roof’s edge.

My elbow stings. I pull my sleeve up to examine it, my hand shaking. Some of the skin is peeling off, but it isn’t bleeding.

“Ooh. *Scandalous!* A Stiff’s flashing some skin!”

I lift my head. “Stiff” is slang for Abnegation, and I’m the only one here. Peter points at me, smirking. I hear laughter. My cheeks heat up, and I let my sleeve fall.

“Listen up! My name is Max! I am one of the leaders of your new faction!” shouts a man at the other end of the roof. He is older than the others, with deep creases in his dark skin and gray hair at his temples, and he stands on the ledge like it’s a sidewalk. Like someone didn’t just fall to her death from it. “Several stories below us is the members’ entrance to our compound. If you can’t muster the will to jump off, you don’t belong here. Our initiates have the privilege of going first.”

“You want us to jump off a *ledge?*” asks an Erudite girl. She is a few inches taller than I am, with mousy brown hair and big lips. Her mouth hangs open.

I don’t know why it shocks her.

“Yes,” Max says. He looks amused.

“Is there water at the bottom or something?”

“Who knows?” He raises his eyebrows.

The crowd in front of the initiates splits in half, making a wide path for us. I look around. No one looks eager to leap off the building—their eyes are everywhere but on Max. Some of them nurse minor wounds or brush gravel from their clothes. I glance at Peter. He is picking at one of his cuticles. Trying to act casual.

I am proud. It will get me into trouble someday, but today it makes me brave. I walk toward the ledge and hear snickers behind me.

Max steps aside, leaving my way clear. I walk up to the edge and look down. Wind whips through my clothes, making the fabric snap. The building I’m on forms one side of a square with three other buildings. In the center of the square is a huge hole in the concrete. I can’t see

what's at the bottom of it.

This is a scare tactic. I will land safely at the bottom. That knowledge is the only thing that helps me step onto the ledge. My teeth chatter. I can't back down now. Not with all the people betting I'll fail behind me. My hands fumble along the collar of my shirt and find the button that secures it shut. After a few tries, I undo the hooks from collar to hem, and pull it off my shoulders.

Beneath it, I wear a gray T-shirt. It is tighter than any other clothes I own, and no one has ever seen me in it before. I ball up my outer shirt and look over my shoulder, at Peter. I throw the ball of fabric at him as hard as I can, my jaw clenched. It hits him in the chest. He stares at me. I hear catcalls and shouts behind me.

I look at the hole again. Goose bumps rise on my pale arms, and my stomach lurches. If I don't do it now, I won't be able to do it at all. I swallow hard.

I don't think. I just bend my knees and jump.

The air howls in my ears as the ground surges toward me, growing and expanding, or I surge toward the ground, my heart pounding so fast it hurts, every muscle in my body tensing as the falling sensation drags at my stomach. The hole surrounds me and I drop into darkness.

I hit something hard. It gives way beneath me and cradles my body. The impact knocks the wind out of me and I wheeze, struggling to breathe again. My arms and legs sting.

A net. There is a net at the bottom of the hole. I look up at the building and laugh, half relieved and half hysterical. My body shakes and I cover my face with my hands. I just jumped off a roof.

I have to stand on solid ground again. I see a few hands stretching out to me at the edge of the net, so I grab the first one I can reach and pull myself across. I roll off, and I would have fallen face-first onto a wood floor if he had not caught me.

"He" is the young man attached to the hand I grabbed. He has a spare upper lip and a full lower lip. His eyes are so deep-set that his eyelashes touch the skin under his eyebrows, and they are dark blue, a dreaming, sleeping, waiting color.

His hands grip my arms, but he releases me a moment after I stand upright again.

"Thank you," I say.

We stand on a platform ten feet above the ground. Around us is an open cavern.

"Can't believe it," a voice says from behind him. It belongs to a dark-haired girl with three silver rings through her right eyebrow. She smirks at me. "A Stiff, the first to jump? Unheard of."

"There's a reason why she left them, Lauren," he says. His voice is deep, and it rumbles. "What's your name?"

"Um..." I don't know why I hesitate. But "Beatrice" just doesn't sound right anymore.

"Think about it," he says, a faint smile curling his lips. "You don't get to pick again."

A new place, a new name. I can be remade here.

"Tris," I say firmly.

"Tris," Lauren repeats, grinning. "Make the announcement, Four."

The boy—Four—looks over his shoulder and shouts, "First jumper—Tris!"

A crowd materializes from the darkness as my eyes adjust. They cheer and pump their fists, and then another person drops into the net. Her screams follow her down. Christina. Everyone laughs, but they follow their laughter with more cheering.

Four sets his hand on my back and says, “Welcome to Dauntless.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

WHEN ALL THE initiates stand on solid ground again, Lauren and Four lead us down a narrow tunnel. The walls are made of stone, and the ceiling slopes, so I feel like I am descending deep into the heart of the earth. The tunnel is lit at long intervals, so in the dark space between each dim lamp, I fear that I am lost until a shoulder bumps mine. In the circles of light I am safe again.

The Erudite boy in front of me stops abruptly, and I smack into him, hitting my nose on his shoulder. I stumble back and rub my nose as I recover my senses. The whole crowd has stopped, and our three leaders stand in front of us, arms folded.

“This is where we divide,” Lauren says. “The Dauntless-born initiates are with me. I assume *you* don’t need a tour of the place.”

She smiles and beckons toward the Dauntless-born initiates. They break away from the group and dissolve into the shadows. I watch the last heel pass out of the light and look at those of us who are left. Most of the initiates were from Dauntless, so only nine people remain. Of those, I am the only Abnegation transfer, and there are no Amity transfers. The rest are from Erudite and, surprisingly, Candor. It must require bravery to be honest all the time. I wouldn’t know.

Four addresses us next. “Most of the time I work in the control room, but for the next few weeks, I am your instructor,” he says. “My name is Four.”

Christina asks, “Four? Like the number?”

“Yes,” Four says. “Is there a problem?”

“No.”

“Good. We’re about to go into the Pit, which you will someday learn to love. It—”

Christina snickers. “The Pit? Clever name.”

Four walks up to Christina and leans his face close to hers. His eyes narrow, and for a second he just stares at her.

“What’s your name?” he asks quietly.

“Christina,” she squeaks.

“Well, Christina, if I wanted to put up with Candor smart-mouths, I would have joined their faction,” he hisses. “The first lesson you will learn from me is to keep your mouth shut. Got that?”

She nods.

Four starts toward the shadow at the end of the tunnel. The crowd of initiates moves on in silence.

“What a jerk,” she mumbles.

“I guess he doesn’t like to be laughed at,” I reply.

It would probably be wise to be careful around Four, I realize. He seemed placid to me on the platform, but something about that stillness makes me wary now.

Four pushes a set of double doors open, and we walk into the place he called “the Pit.”

“Oh,” whispers Christina. “I get it.”

“Pit” is the best word for it. It is an underground cavern so huge I can’t see the other end of it from where I stand, at the bottom. Uneven rock walls rise several stories above my head. Built into the stone walls are places for food, clothing, supplies, leisure activities. Narrow paths and steps carved from rock connect them. There are no barriers to keep people from falling over the side.

A slant of orange light stretches across one of the rock walls. Forming the roof of the Pit are panes of glass and, above them, a building that lets in sunlight. It must have looked like just another city building when we passed it on the train.

Blue lanterns dangle at random intervals above the stone paths, similar to the ones that lit the Choosing room. They grow brighter as the sunlight dies.

People are everywhere, all dressed in black, all shouting and talking, expressive, gesturing. I don’t see any elderly people in the crowd. Are there any old Dauntless? Do they not last that long, or are they just sent away when they can’t jump off moving trains anymore?

A group of children run down a narrow path with no railing, so fast my heart pounds, and I want to scream at them to slow down before they get hurt. A memory of the orderly Abnegation streets appears in my mind: a line of people on the right passing a line of people on the left, small smiles and inclined heads and silence. My stomach squeezes. But there is something wonderful about Dauntless chaos.

“If you follow me,” says Four, “I’ll show you the chasm.”

He waves us forward. Four’s appearance seems tame from the front, by Dauntless standards, but when he turns around, I see a tattoo peeking out from the collar of his T-shirt. He leads us to the right side of the Pit, which is conspicuously dark. I squint and see that the floor I stand on now ends at an iron barrier. As we approach the railing, I hear a roar—water, fast-moving water, crashing against rocks.

I look over the side. The floor drops off at a sharp angle, and several stories below us is a river. Gushing water strikes the wall beneath me and sprays upward. To my left, the water is calmer, but to my right, it is white, battling with rock.

“The chasm reminds us that there is a fine line between bravery and idiocy!” Four shouts. “A daredevil jump off this ledge will end your life. It has happened before and it will happen again. You’ve been warned.”

“This is incredible,” says Christina, as we all move away from the railing.

“Incredible is the word,” I say, nodding.

Four leads the group of initiates across the Pit toward a gaping hole in the wall. The room beyond is well-lit enough that I can see where we’re going: a dining hall full of people and clattering silverware. When we walk in, the Dauntless inside stand. They applaud. They stamp their feet. They shout. The noise surrounds me and fills me. Christina smiles, and a second later, so do I.

We look for empty seats. Christina and I discover a mostly empty table at the side of the room, and I find myself sitting between her and Four. In the center of the table is a platter of

food I don't recognize: circular pieces of meat wedged between round bread slices. I pinch one between my fingers, unsure what to make of it.

Four nudges me with his elbow.

"It's beef," he says. "Put this on it." He passes me a small bowl full of red sauce.

"You've never had a hamburger before?" asks Christina, her eyes wide.

"No," I say. "Is that what it's called?"

"Stiffs eat plain food," Four says, nodding at Christina.

"Why?" she asks.

I shrug. "Extravagance is considered self-indulgent and unnecessary."

She smirks. "No wonder you left."

"Yeah," I say, rolling my eyes. "It was just because of the food."

The corner of Four's mouth twitches.

The doors to the cafeteria open, and a hush falls over the room. I look over my shoulder. A young man walks in, and it is quiet enough that I can hear his footsteps. His face is pierced in so many places I lose count, and his hair is long, dark, and greasy. But that isn't what makes him look menacing. It is the coldness of his eyes as they sweep across the room.

"Who's that?" hisses Christina.

"His name is Eric," says Four. "He's a Dauntless leader."

"Seriously? But he's so young."

Four gives her a grave look. "Age doesn't matter here."

I can tell she's about to ask what I want to ask: *Then what does matter?* But Eric's eyes stop scanning the room, and he starts toward a table. He starts toward *our* table and drops into the seat next to Four. He offers no greeting, so neither do we.

"Well, aren't you going to introduce me?" he asks, nodding to Christina and me.

Four says, "This is Tris and Christina."

"Ooh, a Stiff," says Eric, smirking at me. His smile pulls at the piercings in his lips, making the holes they occupy wider, and I wince. "We'll see how long you last."

I mean to say something—to assure him that I *will* last, maybe—but words fail me. I don't understand why, but I don't want Eric to look at me any longer than he already has. I don't want him to look at me ever again.

He taps his fingers against the table. His knuckles are scabbed over, right where they would split if he punched something too hard.

"What have you been doing lately, Four?" he asks.

Four lifts a shoulder. "Nothing, really," he says.

Are they friends? My eyes flick between Eric and Four. Everything Eric did—sitting here, asking about Four—suggests that they are, but the way Four sits, tense as pulled wire, suggests they are something else. Rivals, maybe, but how could that be, if Eric is a leader and Four is not?

"Max tells me he keeps trying to meet with you, and you don't show up," Eric says. "He requested that I find out what's going on with you."

Four looks at Eric for a few seconds before saying, "Tell him that I am satisfied with the position I currently hold."

"So he wants to give you a job."

The rings in Eric's eyebrow catch the light. Maybe Eric perceives Four as a potential threat to his position. My father says that those who want power and get it live in terror of losing it. That's why we have to give power to those who do not want it.

"So it would seem," Four says.

"And you aren't interested."

"I haven't been interested for two years."

"Well," says Eric. "Let's hope he gets the point, then."

He claps Four on the shoulder, a little too hard, and gets up. When he walks away, I slouch immediately. I had not realized that I was so tense.

"Are you two...friends?" I say, unable to contain my curiosity.

"We were in the same initiate class," he says. "He transferred from Erudite."

All thoughts of being careful around Four leave me. "Were you a transfer too?"

"I thought I would only have trouble with the Candor asking too many questions," he says coldly. "Now I've got Stiffs, too?"

"It must be because you're so approachable," I say flatly. "You know. Like a bed of nails."

He stares at me, and I don't look away. He isn't a dog, but the same rules apply. Looking away is submissive. Looking him in the eye is a challenge. It's my choice.

Heat rushes into my cheeks. What will happen when this tension breaks?

But he just says, "Careful, Tris."

My stomach drops like I just swallowed a stone. A Dauntless member at another table calls out Four's name, and I turn to Christina. She raises both eyebrows.

"What?" I ask.

"I'm developing a theory."

"And it is?"

She picks up her hamburger, grins, and says, "That you have a death wish."

After dinner, Four disappears without a word. Eric leads us down a series of hallways without telling us where we're going. I don't know why a Dauntless leader would be responsible for a group of initiates, but maybe it is just for tonight.

At the end of each hallway is a blue lamp, but between them it's dark, and I have to be careful not to stumble over uneven ground. Christina walks beside me in silence. No one told us to be quiet, but none of us speak.

Eric stops in front of a wooden door and folds his arms. We gather around him.

"For those of you who don't know, my name is Eric," he says. "I am one of five leaders of the Dauntless. We take the initiation process very seriously here, so I volunteered to oversee most of your training."

The thought makes me nauseous. The idea that a Dauntless leader will oversee our initiation

is bad enough, but the fact that it's Eric makes it seem even worse.

"Some ground rules," he says. "You have to be in the training room by eight o'clock every day. Training takes place every day from eight to six, with a break for lunch. You are free to do whatever you like after six. You will also get some time off between each stage of initiation."

The phrase "do whatever you like" sticks in my mind. At home, I could never do what I wanted, not even for an evening. I had to think of other people's needs first. I don't even know what I like to do.

"You are only permitted to leave the compound when accompanied by a Dauntless," Eric adds. "Behind this door is the room where you will be sleeping for the next few weeks. You will notice that there are ten beds and only nine of you. We anticipated that a higher proportion of you would make it this far."

"But we started with twelve," protests Christina. I close my eyes and wait for the reprimand. She needs to learn to stay quiet.

"There is always at least one transfer who doesn't make it to the compound," says Eric, picking at his cuticles. He shrugs. "Anyway, in the first stage of initiation, we keep transfers and Dauntless-born initiates separate, but that doesn't mean you are evaluated separately. At the end of initiation, your rankings will be determined in comparison with the Dauntless-born initiates. And they are better than you are already. So I expect—"

"*Rankings?*" asks the mousy-haired Erudite girl to my right. "Why are we ranked?"

Eric smiles, and in the blue light, his smile looks wicked, like it was cut into his face with a knife.

"Your ranking serves two purposes," he says. "The first is that it determines the order in which you will select a job after initiation. There are only a few *desirable* positions available."

My stomach tightens. I know by looking at his smile, like I knew the second I entered the aptitude test room, that something bad is about to happen.

"The second purpose," he says, "is that only the top ten initiates are made members."

Pain stabs my stomach. We all stand still as statues. And then Christina says, "*What?*"

"There are eleven Dauntless-borns, and nine of you," Eric continues. "Four initiates will be cut at the end of stage one. The remainder will be cut after the final test."

That means that even if we make it through each stage of initiation, six initiates will not be members. I see Christina look at me from the corner of my eye, but I can't look back at her. My eyes are fixed on Eric and will not move.

My odds, as the smallest initiate, as the only Abnegation transfer, are not good.

"What do we do if we're cut?" Peter says.

"You leave the Dauntless compound," says Eric indifferently, "and live factionless."

The mousy-haired girl clamps her hand over her mouth and stifles a sob. I remember the factionless man with the gray teeth, snatching the bag of apples from my hands. His dull, staring eyes. But instead of crying, like the Erudite girl, I feel colder. Harder.

I will be a member. I will.

"But that's...not fair!" the broad-shouldered Candor girl, Molly, says. Even though she

sounds angry, she looks terrified. “If we had *known*—”

“Are you saying that if you had known this before the Choosing Ceremony, you wouldn’t have chosen Dauntless?” Eric snaps. “Because if that’s the case, you should get out now. If you are really one of us, it won’t matter to you that you might fail. And if it does, you are a coward.”

Eric pushes the door to the dormitory open.

“You chose us,” he says. “Now we have to choose you.”

I lie in bed and listen to nine people breathing.

I have never slept in the same room as a boy before, but here I have no other option, unless I want to sleep in the hallway. Everyone else changed into the clothes the Dauntless provided for us, but I sleep in my Abnegation clothes, which still smell like soap and fresh air, like home.

I used to have my own room. I could see the front lawn from the window, and beyond it, the foggy skyline. I am used to sleeping in silence.

Heat swells behind my eyes as I think of home, and when I blink, a tear slips out. I cover my mouth to stifle a sob.

I can’t cry, not here. I have to calm down.

It will be all right here. I can look at my reflection whenever I want. I can befriend Christina, and cut my hair short, and let other people clean up their own messes.

My hands shake and the tears come faster now, blurring my vision.

It doesn’t matter that the next time I see my parents, on Visiting Day, they will barely recognize me—if they come at all. It doesn’t matter that I ache at even a split-second memory of their faces. Even Caleb’s, despite how much his secrets hurt me. I match my inhaleds to the inhaleds of the other initiates, and my exhaleds to their exhaleds. It doesn’t matter.

A strangled sound interrupts the breathing, followed by a heavy sob. Bed springs squeal as a large body turns, and a pillow muffles the sobs, but not enough. They come from the bunk next to mine—they belong to a Candor boy, Al, the largest and broadest of all the initiates. He is the last person I expected to break down.

His feet are just inches from my head. I should comfort him—I should *want* to comfort him, because I was raised that way. Instead I feel disgust. Someone who looks so strong shouldn’t act so weak. Why can’t he just keep his crying quiet like the rest of us?

I swallow hard.

If my mother knew what I was thinking, I know what look she would give me. The corners of her mouth turned down. Her eyebrows set low over her eyes—not scowling, almost tired. I drag the heel of my hand over my cheeks.

Al sobs again. I almost feel the sound grate in my own throat. He is just inches away from me—I should touch him.

No. I put my hand down and roll onto my side, facing the wall. No one has to know that I don’t want to help him. I can keep that secret buried. My eyes shut and I feel the pull of sleep, but every time I come close, I hear Al again.

Maybe my problem isn't that I can't go home. I will miss my mother and father and Caleb and evening firelight and the clack of my mother's knitting needles, but that is not the only reason for this hollow feeling in my stomach.

My problem might be that even if I did go home, I wouldn't belong there, among people who give without thinking and care without trying.

The thought makes me grit my teeth. I gather the pillow around my ears to block out Al's crying, and fall asleep with a circle of moisture pressed to my cheek.

CHAPTER EIGHT

“**T**HE FIRST THING you will learn today is how to shoot a gun. The second thing is how to win a fight.” Four presses a gun into my palm without looking at me and keeps walking. “Thankfully, if you are here, you already know how to get on and off a moving train, so I don’t need to teach you that.”

I shouldn’t be surprised that the Dauntless expect us to hit the ground running, but I anticipated more than six hours of rest before the running began. My body is still heavy from sleep.

“Initiation is divided into three stages. We will measure your progress and rank you according to your performance in each stage. The stages are not weighed equally in determining your final rank, so it is possible, though difficult, to drastically improve your rank over time.”

I stare at the weapon in my hand. Never in my life did I expect to hold a gun, let alone fire one. It feels dangerous to me, as if just by touching it, I could hurt someone.

“We believe that preparation eradicates cowardice, which we define as the failure to act in the midst of fear,” says Four. “Therefore each stage of initiation is intended to prepare you in a different way. The first stage is primarily physical; the second, primarily emotional; the third, primarily mental.”

“But what...” Peter yawns through his words. “What does firing a gun have to do with... bravery?”

Four flips the gun in his hand, presses the barrel to Peter’s forehead, and clicks a bullet into place. Peter freezes with his lips parted, the yawn dead in his mouth.

“Wake. Up,” Four snaps. “You are holding a loaded gun, you idiot. Act like it.”

He lowers the gun. Once the immediate threat is gone, Peter’s green eyes harden. I’m surprised he can stop himself from responding, after speaking his mind all his life in Candor, but he does, his cheeks red.

“And to answer your question...you are far less likely to soil your pants and cry for your mother if you’re prepared to defend yourself.” Four stops walking at the end of the row and turns on his heel. “This is also information you may need later in stage one. So, watch me.”

He faces the wall with the targets on it—one square of plywood with three red circles on it for each of us. He stands with his feet apart, holds the gun in both hands, and fires. The bang is so loud it hurts my ears. I crane my neck to look at the target. The bullet went through the middle circle.

I turn to my own target. My family would never approve of me firing a gun. They would say that guns are used for self-defense, if not violence, and therefore they are self-serving.

I push my family from my mind, set my feet shoulder-width apart, and delicately wrap both hands around the handle of the gun. It’s heavy and hard to lift away from my body, but I want it to be as far from my face as possible. I squeeze the trigger, hesitantly at first and then harder, cringing away from the gun. The sound hurts my ears and the recoil sends my hands back,

toward my nose. I stumble, pressing my hand to the wall behind me for balance. I don't know where my bullet went, but I know it's not near the target.

I fire again and again and again, and none of the bullets come close.

"Statistically speaking," the Erudite boy next to me—his name is Will—says, grinning at me, "you should have hit the target at least *once* by now, even by accident." He is blond, with shaggy hair and a crease between his eyebrows.

"Is that so," I say without inflection.

"Yeah," he says. "I think you're actually defying nature."

I grit my teeth and turn toward the target, resolving to at least stand still. If I can't master the first task they give us, how will I ever make it through stage one?

I squeeze the trigger, hard, and this time I'm ready for the recoil. It makes my hands jump back, but my feet stay planted. A bullet hole appears at the edge of the target, and I raise an eyebrow at Will.

"So you see, I'm right. The stats don't lie," he says.

I smile a little.

It takes me five rounds to hit the middle of the target, and when I do, a rush of energy goes through me. I am awake, my eyes wide open, my hands warm. I lower the gun. There is power in controlling something that can do so much damage—in controlling something, period.

Maybe I do belong here.

By the time we break for lunch, my arms throb from holding up the gun and my fingers are hard to straighten. I massage them on my way to the dining hall. Christina invites Al to sit with us. Every time I look at him, I hear his sobs again, so I try not to look at him.

I move my peas around with my fork, and my thoughts drift back to the aptitude tests. When Tori warned me that being Divergent was dangerous, I felt like it was branded on my face, and if I so much as turned the wrong way, someone would see it. So far it hasn't been a problem, but that doesn't make me feel safe. What if I let my guard down and something terrible happens?

"Oh, come on. You don't remember me?" Christina asks Al as she makes a sandwich. "We were in Math together just a few *days* ago. And I am *not* a quiet person."

"I slept through Math most of the time," Al replies. "It was first hour!"

What if the danger doesn't come soon—what if it strikes years from now and I never see it coming?

"Tris," says Christina. She snaps her fingers in front of my face. "You in there?"

"What? What is it?"

"I asked if you remember ever taking a class with me," she says. "I mean, no offense, but I probably wouldn't remember if you did. All the Abnegation looked the same to me. I mean, they still do, but now you're not one of them."

I stare at her. As if I need her to remind me.

"Sorry, am I being rude?" she asks. "I'm used to just saying whatever is on my mind. Mom

used to say that politeness is deception in pretty packaging.”

“I think that’s why our factions don’t usually associate with each other,” I say, with a short laugh. Candor and Abnegation don’t hate each other the way Erudite and Abnegation do, but they avoid each other. Candor’s real problem is with Amity. Those who seek peace above all else, they say, will always deceive to keep the water calm.

“Can I sit here?” says Will, tapping the table with his finger.

“What, you don’t want to hang out with your Erudite buddies?” says Christina.

“They aren’t my buddies,” says Will, setting his plate down. “Just because we were in the same faction doesn’t mean we get along. Plus, Edward and Myra are dating, and I would rather not be the third wheel.”

Edward and Myra, the other Erudite transfers, sit two tables away, so close they bump elbows as they cut their food. Myra pauses to kiss Edward. I watch them carefully. I’ve only seen a few kisses in my life.

Edward turns his head and presses his lips to Myra’s. Air hisses between my teeth, and I look away. Part of me waits for them to be scolded. Another part wonders, with a touch of desperation, what it would feel like to have someone’s lips against mine.

“Do they have to be so *public*?” I say.

“She just kissed him.” Al frowns at me. When he frowns, his thick eyebrows touch his eyelashes. “It’s not like they’re stripping naked.”

“A kiss is not something you do in public.”

Al, Will, and Christina all give me the same knowing smile.

“What?” I say.

“Your Abnegation is showing,” says Christina. “The rest of us are all right with a little affection in public.”

“Oh.” I shrug. “Well...I guess I’ll have to get over it, then.”

“Or you can stay frigid,” says Will, his green eyes glinting with mischief. “You know. If you want.”

Christina throws a roll at him. He catches it and bites it.

“Don’t be mean to her,” she says. “Frigidity is in her nature. Sort of like being a know-it-all is in yours.”

“I am not *frigid*!” I exclaim.

“Don’t worry about it,” says Will. “It’s endearing. Look, you’re all red.”

The comment only makes my face hotter. Everyone else chuckles. I force a laugh and, after a few seconds, it comes naturally.

It feels good to laugh again.

After lunch, Four leads us to a new room. It’s huge, with a wood floor that is cracked and creaky and has a large circle painted in the middle. On the left wall is a green board—a chalkboard. My Lower Levels teacher used one, but I haven’t seen one since then. Maybe it has something to do with Dauntless priorities: training comes first, technology comes second.

Our names are written on the board in alphabetical order. Hanging at three-foot intervals along one end of the room are faded black punching bags.

We line up behind them and Four stands in the middle, where we can all see him.

“As I said this morning,” says Four, “next you will learn how to fight. The purpose of this is to prepare you to act; to prepare your body to respond to threats and challenges—which you will need, if you intend to survive life as a Dauntless.”

I can’t even think of life as a Dauntless. All I can think about is making it through initiation.

“We will go over technique today, and tomorrow you will start to fight each other,” says Four. “So I recommend that you pay attention. Those who don’t learn fast will get hurt.”

Four names a few different punches, demonstrating each one as he does, first against the air and then against the punching bag.

I catch on as we practice. Like with the gun, I need a few tries to figure out how to hold myself and how to move my body to make it look like his. The kicks are more difficult, though he only teaches us the basics. The punching bag stings my hands and feet, turning my skin red, and barely moves no matter how hard I hit it. All around me is the sound of skin hitting tough fabric.

Four wanders through the crowd of initiates, watching us as we go through the movements again. When he stops in front of me, my insides twist like someone’s stirring them with a fork. He stares at me, his eyes following my body from my head to my feet, not lingering anywhere—a practical, scientific gaze.

“You don’t have much muscle,” he says, “which means you’re better off using your knees and elbows. You can put more power behind them.”

Suddenly he presses a hand to my stomach. His fingers are so long that, though the heel of his hand touches one side of my rib cage, his fingertips still touch the other side. My heart pounds so hard my chest hurts, and I stare at him, wide-eyed.

“Never forget to keep tension here,” he says in a quiet voice.

Four lifts his hand and keeps walking. I feel the pressure of his palm even after he’s gone. It’s strange, but I have to stop and breathe for a few seconds before I can keep practicing again.

When Four dismisses us for dinner, Christina nudges me with her elbow.

“I’m surprised he didn’t break you in half,” she says. She wrinkles her nose. “He scares the hell out of me. It’s that quiet voice he uses.”

“Yeah. He’s...” I look over my shoulder at him. He is quiet, and remarkably self-possessed. But I wasn’t afraid that he would hurt me. “...definitely intimidating,” I finally say.

Al, who was in front of us, turns around once we reach the Pit and announces, “I want to get a tattoo.”

From behind us, Will asks, “A tattoo of what?”

“I don’t know.” Al laughs. “I just want to feel like I’ve actually left the old faction. Stop crying about it.” When we don’t respond, he adds, “I know you’ve heard me.”

“Yeah, learn to quiet down, will you?” Christina pokes Al’s thick arm. “I think you’re right. We’re half in, half out right now. If we want all the way in, we should look the part.”

She gives me a look.

“No. I will not cut my hair,” I say, “or dye it a strange color. Or pierce my face.”

“How about your bellybutton?” she says.

“Or your nipple?” Will says with a snort.

I groan.

Now that training is done for the day, we can do whatever we want until it's time to sleep. The idea makes me feel almost giddy, although that might be from fatigue.

The Pit is swarming with people. Christina announces that she and I will meet Al and Will at the tattoo parlor and drags me toward the clothing place. We stumble up the path, climbing higher above the Pit floor, scattering stones with our shoes.

“What is wrong with my clothes?” I say. “I'm not wearing gray anymore.”

“They're ugly and gigantic.” She sighs. “Will you just let me help you? If you don't like what I put you in, you never have to wear it again, I promise.”

Ten minutes later I stand in front of a mirror in the clothing place wearing a knee-length black dress. The skirt isn't full, but it isn't stuck to my thighs, either—unlike the first one she picked out, which I refused. Goose bumps appear on my bare arms. She slips the tie from my hair and I shake it out of its braid so it hangs wavy over my shoulders.

Then she holds up a black pencil.

“Eyeliner,” she says.

“You aren't going to be able to make me pretty, you know.” I close my eyes and hold still. She runs the tip of the pencil along the line of my eyelashes. I imagine standing before my family in these clothes, and my stomach twists like I might be sick.

“Who cares about pretty? I'm going for noticeable.”

I open my eyes and for the first time stare openly at my own reflection. My heart rate picks up as I do, like I am breaking the rules and will be scolded for it. It will be difficult to break the habits of thinking Abnegation instilled in me, like tugging a single thread from a complex work of embroidery. But I will find new habits, new thoughts, new rules. I will become something else.

My eyes were blue before, but a dull, grayish blue—the eyeliner makes them piercing. With my hair framing my face, my features look softer and fuller. I am not pretty—my eyes are too big and my nose is too long—but I can see that Christina is right. My face is noticeable.

Looking at myself now isn't like seeing myself for the first time; it's like seeing someone else for the first time. Beatrice was a girl I saw in stolen moments at the mirror, who kept quiet at the dinner table. This is someone whose eyes claim mine and don't release me; this is Tris.

“See?” she says. “You're...striking.”

Under the circumstances, it's the best compliment she could have given me. I smile at her in the mirror.

“You like it?” she says.

“Yeah.” I nod. “I look like...a different person.”

She laughs. “That a good thing or a bad thing?”

I look at myself head-on again. For the first time, the idea of leaving my Abnegation identity behind doesn't make me nervous; it gives me hope.

"A good thing." I shake my head. "Sorry, I've just never been allowed to stare at my reflection for this long."

"Really?" Christina shakes her head. "Abnegation is a strange faction, I have to tell you."

"Let's go watch Al get tattooed," I say. Despite the fact that I have left my old faction behind, I don't want to criticize it yet.

At home, my mother and I picked up nearly identical stacks of clothing every six months or so. It's easy to allocate resources when everyone gets the same thing, but everything is more varied at the Dauntless compound. Every Dauntless gets a certain amount of points to spend per month, and the dress costs one of them.

Christina and I race down the narrow path to the tattoo place. When we get there, Al is sitting in the chair already, and a small, narrow man with more ink than bare skin is drawing a spider on his arm.

Will and Christina flip through books of pictures, elbowing each other when they find a good one. When they sit next to each other, I notice how opposite they are, Christina dark and lean, Will pale and solid, but alike in their easy smiles.

I wander around the room, looking at the artwork on the walls. These days, the only artists are in Amity. Abnegation sees art as impractical, and its appreciation as time that could be spent serving others, so though I have seen works of art in textbooks, I have never been in a decorated room before. It makes the air feel close and warm, and I could get lost here for hours without noticing. I skim the wall with my fingertips. A picture of a hawk on one wall reminds me of Tori's tattoo. Beneath it is a sketch of a bird in flight.

"It's a raven," a voice behind me says. "Pretty, right?"

I turn to see Tori standing there. I feel like I am back in the aptitude test room, with the mirrors all around me and the wires connected to my forehead. I didn't expect to see her again.

"Well, hello there." She smiles. "Never thought I would see you again. Beatrice, is it?"

"Tris, actually," I say. "Do you work here?"

"I do. I just took a break to administer the tests. Most of the time I'm here." She taps her chin. "I recognize that name. You were the first jumper, weren't you?"

"Yes, I was."

"Well done."

"Thanks." I touch the sketch of the bird. "Listen—I need to talk to you about..." I glance over at Will and Christina. I can't corner Tori now; they'll ask questions. "...something. Sometime."

"I am not sure that would be wise," she says quietly. "I helped you as much as I could, and now you will have to go it alone."

I purse my lips. She has answers; I know she does. If she won't give them to me now, I will have to find a way to make her tell me some other time.

"Want a tattoo?" she says.

The bird sketch holds my attention. I never intended to get pierced or tattooed when I came

here. I know that if I do, it will place another wedge between me and my family that I can never remove. And if my life here continues as it has been, it may soon be the least of the wedges between us.

But I understand now what Tori said about her tattoo representing a fear she overcame—a reminder of where she was, as well as a reminder of where she is now. Maybe there is a way to honor my old life as I embrace my new one.

“Yes,” I say. “Three of these flying birds.”

I touch my collarbone, marking the path of their flight—toward my heart. One for each member of the family I left behind.

CHAPTER NINE

“SINCE THERE ARE an odd number of you, one of you won’t be fighting today,” says Four, stepping away from the board in the training room. He gives me a look. The space next to my name is blank.

The knot in my stomach unravels. A reprieve.

“This isn’t good,” says Christina, nudging me with her elbow. Her elbow prods one of my sore muscles—I have more sore muscles than not-sore muscles, this morning—and I wince.

“Ow.”

“Sorry,” she says. “But look. I’m up against the Tank.”

Christina and I sat together at breakfast, and earlier she shielded me from the rest of the dormitory as I changed. I haven’t had a friend like her before. Susan was better friends with Caleb than with me, and Robert only went where Susan went.

I guess I haven’t really had a friend, period. It’s impossible to have real friendship when no one feels like they can accept help or even talk about themselves. That won’t happen here. I already know more about Christina than I ever knew about Susan, and it’s only been two days.

“The Tank?” I find Christina’s name on the board. Written next to it is “Molly.”

“Yeah, Peter’s slightly more feminine-looking minion,” she says, nodding toward the cluster of people on the other side of the room. Molly is tall like Christina, but that’s where the similarities end. She has broad shoulders, bronze skin, and a bulbous nose.

“Those three”—Christina points at Peter, Drew, and Molly in turn—“have been inseparable since they crawled out of the womb, practically. I hate them.”

Will and Al stand across from each other in the arena. They put their hands up by their faces to protect themselves, as Four taught us, and shuffle in a circle around each other. Al is half a foot taller than Will, and twice as broad. As I stare at him, I realize that even his facial features are big—big nose, big lips, big eyes. This fight won’t last long.

I glance at Peter and his friends. Drew is shorter than both Peter and Molly, but he’s built like a boulder, and his shoulders are always hunched. His hair is orange-red, the color of an old carrot.

“What’s wrong with them?” I say.

“Peter is pure evil. When we were kids, he would pick fights with people from other factions and then, when an adult came to break it up, he’d cry and make up some story about how the other kid started it. And of course, they believed him, because we were Candor and we couldn’t lie. Ha ha.”

Christina wrinkles her nose and adds, “Drew is just his sidekick. I doubt he has an independent thought in his brain. And Molly...she’s the kind of person who fries ants with a magnifying glass just to watch them flail around.”

In the arena, Al punches Will hard in the jaw. I wince. Across the room, Eric smirks at Al,

and turns one of the rings in his eyebrow.

Will stumbles to the side, one hand pressed to his face, and blocks Al's next punch with his free hand. Judging by his grimace, blocking the punch is as painful as a blow would have been. Al is slow, but powerful.

Peter, Drew, and Molly cast furtive looks in our direction and then pull their heads together, whispering.

"I think they know we're talking about them," I say.

"So? They already know I hate them."

"They do? How?"

Christina fakes a smile at them and waves. I look down, my cheeks warm. I shouldn't be gossiping anyway. Gossiping is self-indulgent.

Will hooks a foot around one of Al's legs and yanks back, knocking Al to the ground. Al scrambles to his feet.

"Because I've told them," she says, through the gritted teeth of her smile. Her teeth are straight on top and crooked on the bottom. She looks at me. "We try to be pretty honest about our feelings in Candor. Plenty of people have told me that they don't like me. And plenty of people haven't. Who cares?"

"We just...weren't supposed to hurt people," I say.

"I like to think I'm helping them by hating them," she says. "I'm reminding them that they aren't God's gift to humankind."

I laugh a little at that and focus on the arena again. Will and Al face each other for a few more seconds, more hesitant than they were before. Will flicks his pale hair from his eyes. They glance at Four like they're waiting for him to call the fight off, but he stands with his arms folded, giving no response. A few feet away from him, Eric checks his watch.

After a few seconds of circling, Eric shouts, "Do you think this is a leisure activity? Should we break for nap-time? Fight each other!"

"But..." Al straightens, letting his hands down, and says, "Is it scored or something? When does the fight end?"

"It ends when one of you is unable to continue," says Eric.

"According to Dauntless rules," Four says, "one of you could also concede."

Eric narrows his eyes at Four. "According to the *old* rules," he says. "In the *new* rules, no one concedes."

"A brave man acknowledges the strength of others," Four replies.

"A brave man never surrenders."

Four and Eric stare at each other for a few seconds. I feel like I am looking at two different kinds of Dauntless—the honorable kind, and the ruthless kind. But even I know that in this room, it's Eric, the youngest leader of the Dauntless, who has the authority.

Beads of sweat dot Al's forehead; he wipes them with the back of his hand.

"This is ridiculous," Al says, shaking his head. "What's the point of beating him up? We're in the same faction!"

“Oh, you think it’s going to be that easy?” Will asks, grinning. “Go on. Try to hit me, slowpoke.”

Will puts his hands up again. I see determination in Will’s eyes that wasn’t there before. Does he really believe he can win? One hard shot to the head and Al will knock him out cold.

That is, if he can actually hit Will. Al tries a punch, and Will ducks, the back of his neck shining with sweat. He dodges another punch, slipping around Al and kicking him hard in the back. Al lurches forward and turns.

When I was younger, I read a book about grizzly bears. There was a picture of one standing on its hind legs with its paws outstretched, roaring. That is how Al looks now. He charges at Will, grabbing his arm so he can’t slip away, and punches him hard in the jaw.

I watch the light leave Will’s eyes, which are pale green, like celery. They roll back into his head, and all the tension falls from his body. He slips from Al’s grasp, dead weight, and crumples to the floor. Cold rushes down my back and fills my chest.

Al’s eyes widen, and he crouches next to Will, tapping his cheek with one hand. The room falls silent as we wait for Will to respond. For a few seconds, he doesn’t, just lies on the ground with an arm bent beneath him. Then he blinks, clearly dazed.

“Get him up,” Eric says. He stares with greedy eyes at Will’s fallen body, like the sight is a meal and he hasn’t eaten in weeks. The curl of his lip is cruel.

Four turns to the chalkboard and circles Al’s name. Victory.

“Next up—Molly and Christina!” shouts Eric. Al pulls Will’s arm across his shoulders and drags him out of the arena.

Christina cracks her knuckles. I would wish her luck, but I don’t know what good that would do. Christina isn’t weak, but she’s much narrower than Molly. Hopefully her height will help her.

Across the room, Four supports Will from the waist and leads him out. Al stands for a moment by the door, watching them go.

Four leaving makes me nervous. Leaving us with Eric is like hiring a babysitter who spends his time sharpening knives.

Christina tucks her hair behind her ears. It is chin-length, black, and pinned back with silver clips. She cracks another knuckle. She looks nervous, and no wonder—who wouldn’t be nervous after watching Will collapse like a rag doll?

If conflict in Dauntless ends with only one person standing, I am unsure of what this part of initiation will do to me. Will I be Al, standing over a man’s body, knowing I’m the one who put him on the ground, or will I be Will, lying in a helpless heap? And is it selfish of me to crave victory, or is it brave? I wipe my sweaty palms on my pants.

I snap to attention when Christina kicks Molly in the side. Molly gasps and grits her teeth like she’s about to growl through them. A lock of stringy black hair falls across her face, but she doesn’t brush it away.

Al stands next to me, but I’m too focused on the new fight to look at him, or congratulate him on winning, assuming that’s what he wants. I am not sure.

Molly smirks at Christina, and without warning, dives, hands outstretched, at Christina’s

midsection. She hits her hard, knocking her down, and pins her to the ground. Christina thrashes, but Molly is heavy and doesn't budge.

She punches, and Christina moves her head out of the way, but Molly just punches again, and again, until her fist hits Christina's jaw, her nose, her mouth. Without thinking, I grab Al's arm and squeeze it as tightly as I can. I just need something to hold on to. Blood runs down the side of Christina's face and splatters on the ground next to her cheek. This is the first time I have ever prayed for someone to fall unconscious.

But she doesn't. Christina screams and drags one of her arms free. She punches Molly in the ear, knocking her off-balance, and wriggles free. She comes to her knees, holding her face with one hand. The blood streaming from her nose is thick and dark and covers her fingers in seconds. She screams again and crawls away from Molly. I can tell by the heaving of her shoulders that she's sobbing, but I can barely hear her over the throbbing in my ears.

Please go unconscious.

Molly kicks Christina's side, sending her sprawling on her back. Al frees his hand and pulls me tight to his side. I clench my teeth to keep from crying out. I had no sympathy for Al the first night, but I am not cruel yet; the sight of Christina clutching her rib cage makes me want to stand between her and Molly.

"Stop!" wails Christina as Molly pulls her foot back to kick again. She holds out a hand. "Stop! I'm..." She coughs. "I'm done."

Molly smiles, and I sigh with relief. Al sighs too, his rib cage lifting and falling against my shoulder.

Eric walks toward the center of the arena, his movements slow, and stands over Christina with his arms folded. He says quietly, "I'm sorry, what did you say? You're done?"

Christina pushes herself to her knees. When she takes her hand from the ground, it leaves a red handprint behind. She pinches her nose to stop the bleeding and nods.

"Get up," he says. If he had yelled, I might not have felt like everything inside my stomach was about to come out of it. If he had yelled, I would have known that the yelling was the worst he planned to do. But his voice is quiet and his words precise. He grabs Christina's arm, yanks her to her feet, and drags her out the door.

"Follow me," he says to the rest of us.

And we do.

I feel the roar of the river in my chest.

We stand near the railing. The Pit is almost empty; it is the middle of the afternoon, though it feels like it's been night for days.

If there were people around, I doubt any of them would help Christina. We are with Eric, for one thing, and for another, the Dauntless have different rules—rules that brutality does not violate.

Eric shoves Christina against the railing.

"Climb over it," he says.

"What?" She says it like she expects him to relent, but her wide eyes and ashen face suggest

otherwise. Eric will not back down.

“Climb over the railing,” says Eric again, pronouncing each word slowly. “If you can hang over the chasm for five minutes, I will forget your cowardice. If you can’t, I will not allow you to continue initiation.”

The railing is narrow and made of metal. The spray from the river coats it, making it slippery and cold. Even if Christina is brave enough to hang from the railing for five minutes, she may not be able to hold on. Either she decides to be factionless, or she risks death.

When I close my eyes, I imagine her falling onto the jagged rocks below and shudder.

“Fine,” she says, her voice shaking.

She is tall enough to swing her leg over the railing. Her foot shakes. She puts her toe on the ledge as she lifts her other leg over. Facing us, she wipes her hands on her pants and holds on to the railing so hard her knuckles turn white. Then she takes one foot off the ledge. And the other. I see her face between the bars of the barrier, determined, her lips pressed together.

Next to me, Al sets his watch.

For the first minute and a half, Christina is fine. Her hands stay firm around the railing and her arms don’t shake. I start to think she might make it and show Eric how foolish he was to doubt her.

But then the river hits the wall, and white water sprays against Christina’s back. Her face strikes the barrier, and she cries out. Her hands slip so she’s just holding on by her fingertips. She tries to get a better grip, but now her hands are wet.

If I help her, Eric would make my fate the same as hers. Will I let her fall to her death, or will I resign myself to being factionless? What’s worse: to be idle while someone dies, or to be exiled and empty-handed?

My parents would have no problem answering that question.

But I am not my parents.

As far as I know, Christina hasn’t cried since we got here, but now her face crumples and she lets out a sob that is louder than the river. Another wave hits the wall and the spray coats her body. One of the droplets hits my cheek. Her hands slip again, and this time, one of them falls from the railing, so she’s hanging by four fingertips.

“Come on, Christina,” says Al, his low voice surprisingly loud. She looks at him. He claps. “Come on, grab it again. You can do it. Grab it.”

Would I even be strong enough to hold on to her? Would it be worth my effort to try to help her if I know I’m too weak to do any good?

I know what those questions are: excuses. *Human reason can excuse any evil; that is why it’s so important that we don’t rely on it.* My father’s words.

Christina swings her arm, fumbling for the railing. No one else cheers her on, but Al brings his big hands together and shouts, his eyes holding hers. I wish I could; I wish I could move, but I just stare at her and wonder how long I have been this disgustingly selfish.

I stare at Al’s watch. Four minutes have passed. He elbows me hard in the shoulder.

“Come on,” I say. My voice is a whisper. I clear my throat. “One minute left,” I say, louder this time. Christina’s other hand finds the railing again. Her arms shake so hard I wonder if the

earth is quaking beneath me, jiggling my vision, and I just didn't notice.

"Come on, Christina," Al and I say, and as our voices join, I believe I might be strong enough to help her.

I will help her. If she slips again, I will.

Another wave of water splashes against Christina's back, and she shrieks as both her hands slip off the railing. A scream launches from my mouth. It sounds like it belongs to someone else.

But she doesn't fall. She grabs the bars of the barrier. Her fingers slide down the metal until I can't see her head anymore; they are all I see.

Al's watch reads 5:00.

"Five minutes are up," he says, almost spitting the words at Eric.

Eric checks his own watch. Taking his time, tilting his wrist, all while my stomach twists and I can't breathe. When I blink, I see Rita's sister on the pavement below the train tracks, limbs bent at strange angles; I see Rita screaming and sobbing; I see myself turning away.

"Fine," Eric says. "You can come up, Christina."

Al walks toward the railing.

"No," Eric says. "She has to do it on her own."

"No, she doesn't," Al growls. "She did what you said. She's not a coward. She did what you said."

Eric doesn't respond. Al reaches over the railing, and he's so tall that he can reach Christina's wrist. She grabs his forearm. Al pulls her up, his face red with frustration, and I run forward to help. I'm too short to do much good, as I suspected, but I grip Christina under the shoulder once she's high enough, and Al and I haul her over the barrier. She drops to the ground, her face still blood-smearred from the fight, her back soaking wet, her body quivering.

I kneel next to her. Her eyes lift to mine, then shift to Al, and we all catch our breath together.

CHAPTER TEN

THAT NIGHT I dream that Christina hangs from the railing again, by her toes this time, and someone shouts that only someone who is Divergent can help her. So I run forward to pull her up, but someone shoves me over the edge, and I wake before I hit the rocks.

Sweat-soaked and shaky from the dream, I walk to the girls' bathroom to shower and change. When I come back, the word "Stiff" is spray-painted across my mattress in red. The word is written smaller along the bed frame, and again on my pillow. I look around, my heart pounding with anger.

Peter stands behind me, whistling as he fluffs his pillow. It's hard to believe I could hate someone who looks so kind—his eyebrows turn upward naturally, and he has a wide, white smile.

"Nice decorations," he says.

"Did I do something to you that I'm unaware of?" I demand. I grab the corner of a sheet and yank it away from the mattress. "I don't know if you've noticed, but we are in the same faction now."

"I don't know what you're referring to," he says lightly. Then he glances at me. "And you and I will *never* be in the same faction."

I shake my head as I remove my pillowcase from the pillow. *Don't get angry*. He wants to get a rise out of me; he won't. But every time he fluffs his pillow, I think about punching him in the gut.

Al walks in, and I don't even have to ask him to help me; he just walks over and strips bedding with me. I will have to scrub the bed frame later. Al carries the stack of sheets to the trash can and together we walk toward the training room.

"Ignore him," Al says. "He's an idiot, and if you don't get angry, he'll stop eventually."

"Yeah." I touch my cheeks. They are still warm with an angry blush. I try to distract myself. "Did you talk to Will?" I ask quietly. "After...you know."

"Yeah. He's fine. He isn't angry." Al sighs. "Now I'll always be remembered as the first guy who knocked someone out cold."

"There are worse ways to be remembered. At least they won't antagonize you."

"There are better ways too." He nudges me with his elbow, smiling. "First jumper."

Maybe I was the first jumper, but I suspect that's where my Dauntless fame begins and ends.

I clear my throat. "One of you had to get knocked out, you know. If it hadn't been him, it would have been you."

"Still, I don't want to do it again." Al shakes his head, too many times, too fast. He sniffs. "I really don't."

We reach the door to the training room and I say, "But you have to."

He has a kind face. Maybe he is too kind for Dauntless.

I look at the chalkboard when I walk in. I didn't have to fight yesterday, but today I definitely will. When I see my name, I stop in the middle of the step.

My opponent is Peter.

"Oh no," says Christina, who shuffles in behind us. Her face is bruised, and she looks like she is trying not to limp. When she sees the board, she crumples the muffin wrapper she is holding into her fist. "Are they serious? They're really going to make *you* fight *him*?"

Peter is almost a foot taller than I am, and yesterday, he beat Drew in less than five minutes. Today Drew's face is more black-and-blue than flesh-toned.

"Maybe you can just take a few hits and pretend to go unconscious," suggests Al. "No one would blame you."

"Yeah," I say. "Maybe."

I stare at my name on the board. My cheeks feel hot. Al and Christina are just trying to help, but the fact that they don't believe, not even in a tiny corner of their minds, that I have a chance against Peter bothers me.

I stand at the side of the room, half listening to Al and Christina's chatter, and watch Molly fight Edward. He's much faster than she is, so I'm sure Molly will not win today.

As the fight goes on and my irritation fades, I start to get nervous. Four told us yesterday to exploit our opponent's weaknesses, and aside from his utter lack of likable qualities, Peter doesn't have any. He's tall enough to be strong but not so big that he's slow; he has an eye for other people's soft spots; he's vicious and won't show me any mercy. I would like to say that he underestimates me, but that would be a lie. I am as unskilled as he suspects.

Maybe Al is right, and I should just take a few hits and pretend to be unconscious.

But I can't afford not to try. I can't be ranked last.

By the time Molly peels herself off the ground, looking only half-conscious thanks to Edward, my heart is pounding so hard I can feel it in my fingertips. I can't remember how to stand. I can't remember how to punch. I walk to the center of the arena and my guts writhe as Peter comes toward me, taller than I remembered, arm muscles standing at attention. He smiles at me. I wonder if throwing up on him will do me any good.

I doubt it.

"You okay there, Stiff?" he says. "You look like you're about to cry. I might go easy on you if you cry."

Over Peter's shoulder, I see Four standing by the door with his arms folded. His mouth is puckered, like he just swallowed something sour. Next to him is Eric, who taps his foot faster than my heartbeat.

One second Peter and I are standing there, staring at each other, and the next Peter's hands are up by his face, his elbows bent. His knees are bent too, like he's ready to spring.

"Come on, Stiff," he says, his eyes glinting. "Just one little tear. Maybe some begging."

The thought of begging Peter for mercy makes me taste bile, and on an impulse, I kick him in the side. Or I would have kicked him in the side, if he hadn't caught my foot and yanked it forward, knocking me off-balance. My back smacks into the floor, and I pull my foot free, scrambling to my feet.

I have to stay on my feet so he can't kick me in the head. That's the only thing I can think about.

"Stop playing with her," snaps Eric. "I don't have all day."

Peter's mischievous look disappears. His arm twitches and pain stabs my jaw and spreads across my face, making my vision go black at the edges and my ears ring. I blink and lurch to the side as the room dips and sways. I don't remember his fist coming at me.

I am too off-balance to do anything but move away from him, as far as the arena will allow. He darts in front of me and kicks me hard in the stomach. His foot forces the air from my lungs and it hurts, hurts so badly I can't breathe, or maybe that's because of the kick, I don't know, I just fall.

On your feet is the only thought in my mind. I push myself up, but Peter is already there. He grabs my hair with one hand and punches me in the nose with the other. This pain is different, less like a stab and more like a crackle, crackling in my brain, spotting my vision with different colors, blue, green, red. I try to shove him off, my hands slapping at his arms, and he punches me again, this time in the ribs. My face is wet. Bloody nose. More red, I guess, but I'm too dizzy to look down.

He shoves me and I fall again, scraping my hands on the ground, blinking, sluggish and slow and hot. I cough and drag myself to my feet. I really should be lying down if the room is spinning this fast. And Peter spins around me; I am the center of a spinning planet, the only thing staying still. Something hits me from the side and I almost fall over again.

On my feet on my feet. I see a solid mass in front of me, a body. I punch as hard as I can, and my fist hits something soft. Peter barely groans, and smacks my ear with the flat of his palm, laughing under his breath. I hear ringing and try to blink some of the black patches out of my eyes; how did something get in my eye?

Out of my peripheral vision, I see Four shove the door open and walk out. Apparently this fight isn't interesting enough for him. Or maybe he's going to find out why everything's spinning like a top, and I don't blame him; I want to know the answer too.

My knees give out and the floor is cool against my cheek. Something slams into my side and I scream for the first time, a high screech that belongs to someone else and not me, and it slams into my side again, and I can't see anything at all, not even whatever is right in front of my face, the lights out. Someone shouts, "Enough!" and I think *too much* and *nothing at all*.

When I wake up, I don't feel much, but the inside of my head is fuzzy, like it's packed with cotton balls.

I know that I lost, and the only thing keeping the pain at bay is what is making it difficult to think straight.

"Is her eye already black?" someone asks.

I open one eye—the other stays shut like it's glued that way. Sitting to my right are Will and Al; Christina sits on the bed to my left with an ice pack on her jaw.

"What happened to your face?" I say. My lips feel clumsy and too large.

She laughs. "Look who's talking. Should we get you an eye patch?"

“Well, I already know what happened to *my* face,” I say. “I was there. Sort of.”

“Did you just make a *joke*, Tris?” Will says, grinning. “We should get you on painkillers more often if you’re going to start cracking jokes. Oh, and to answer your question—I beat her up.”

“I can’t believe you couldn’t beat Will,” Al says, shaking his head.

“What? He’s *good*,” she says, shrugging. “Plus, I think I’ve finally learned how to stop losing. I just need to stop people from punching me in the jaw.”

“You know, you’d think you would have figured that out already.” Will winks at her. “Now I know why you aren’t Erudite. Not too bright, are you?”

“You feeling okay, Tris?” Al says. His eyes are dark brown, almost the same color as Christina’s skin. His cheek looks rough, like if he didn’t shave it, he would have a thick beard. Hard to believe he’s only sixteen.

“Yeah,” I say. “Just wish I could stay here forever so I never have to see Peter again.”

But I don’t know where “here” is. I am in a large, narrow room with a row of beds on either side. Some of the beds have curtains between them. On the right side of the room is a nurse’s station. This must be where the Dauntless go when they’re sick or hurt. The woman there looks at us over a clipboard. I’ve never seen a nurse with so many piercings in her ear before. Some Dauntless must volunteer to do jobs that traditionally belong to other factions. After all, it wouldn’t make sense for the Dauntless to make the trek to the city hospital every time they get hurt.

The first time I went to the hospital, I was six years old. My mother fell on the sidewalk in front of our house and broke her arm. Hearing her scream made me burst into tears, but Caleb just ran for my father without saying a word. At the hospital, an Amity woman in a yellow shirt with clean fingernails took my mother’s blood pressure and set her bone with a smile.

I remember Caleb telling her that it would only take a month to mend, because it was a hairline fracture. I thought he was reassuring her, because that’s what selfless people do, but now I wonder if he was repeating something he had studied; if all his Abnegation tendencies were just Erudite traits in disguise.

“Don’t worry about Peter,” says Will. “He’ll at least get beat up by Edward, who has been studying hand-to-hand combat since we were ten years old. For fun.”

“Good,” says Christina. She checks her watch. “I think we’re missing dinner. Do you want us to stay here, Tris?”

I shake my head. “I’m fine.”

Christina and Will get up, but Al waves them ahead. He has a distinct smell—sweet and fresh, like sage and lemongrass. When he tosses and turns at night, I get a whiff of it and I know he’s having a nightmare.

“I just wanted to tell you that you missed Eric’s announcement. We’re going on a field trip tomorrow, to the fence, to learn about Dauntless jobs,” he says. “We have to be at the train by eight fifteen.”

“Good,” I say. “Thanks.”

“And don’t pay attention to Christina. Your face doesn’t look that bad.” He smiles a little.

“I mean, it looks good. It always looks good. I mean—you look brave. Dauntless.”

His eyes skirt mine, and he scratches the back of his head. The silence seems to grow between us. It was a nice thing to say, but he acts like it meant more than just the words. I hope I am wrong. I could not be attracted to Al—I could not be attracted to anyone that fragile. I smile as much as my bruised cheek will allow, hoping that will diffuse the tension.

“I should let you rest,” he says. He gets up to leave, but before he can go, I grab his wrist.

“Al, are you okay?” I say. He stares blankly at me, and I add, “I mean, is it getting any easier?”

“Uh...” He shrugs. “A little.”

He pulls his hand free and shoves it in his pocket. The question must have embarrassed him, because I’ve never seen him so red before. If I spent my nights sobbing into my pillow, I would be a little embarrassed too. At least when I cry, I know how to hide it.

“I lost to Drew. After your fight with Peter.” He looks at me. “I took a few hits, fell down, and stayed there. Even though I didn’t have to. I figure...I figure that since I beat Will, if I lose all the rest, I won’t be ranked last, but I won’t have to hurt anyone anymore.”

“Is that really what you want?”

He looks down. “I just can’t do it. Maybe that means I’m a coward.”

“You’re not a coward just because you don’t want to hurt people,” I say, because I know it’s the right thing to say, even if I’m not sure I mean it.

For a moment we are both still, looking at each other. Maybe I do mean it. If he is a coward, it isn’t because he doesn’t enjoy pain. It is because he refuses to act.

He gives me a pained look and says, “You think our families will visit us? They say transfer families never come on Visiting Day.”

“I don’t know,” I say. “I don’t know if it would be good or bad if they did.”

“I think bad.” He nods. “Yeah, it’s already hard enough.” He nods again, as if confirming what he just said, and walks away.

In less than a week, the Abnegation initiates will be able to visit their families for the first time since the Choosing Ceremony. They will go home and sit in their living rooms and interact with their parents for the first time as adults.

I used to look forward to that day. I used to think about what I would say to my mother and father when I was allowed to ask them questions at the dinner table.

In less than a week, the Dauntless-born initiates will find their families on the Pit floor, or in the glass building above the compound, and do whatever it is the Dauntless do when they reunite. Maybe they take turns throwing knives at each other’s heads—it wouldn’t surprise me.

And the transfer initiates with forgiving parents will be able to see them again too. I suspect mine will not be among them. Not after my father’s cry of outrage at the ceremony. Not after both their children left them.

Maybe if I could have told them I was Divergent, and I was confused about what to choose, they would have understood. Maybe they would have helped me figure out what Divergent is, and what it means, and why it’s dangerous. But I didn’t trust them with that secret, so I will

never know.

I clench my teeth as the tears come. I am fed up. I am fed up with tears and weakness. But there isn't much I can do to stop them.

Maybe I drift off to sleep, and maybe I don't. Later that night, though, I slip out of the room and go back to the dormitory. The only thing worse than letting Peter put me in the hospital would be letting him put me there overnight.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE NEXT MORNING, I don't hear the alarm, shuffling feet, or conversations as the other initiates get ready. I wake to Christina shaking my shoulder with one hand and tapping my cheek with the other. She already wears a black jacket zipped up to her throat. If she has bruises from yesterday's fight, her dark skin makes them difficult to see.

"Come on," she says. "Up and at 'em."

I dreamt that Peter tied me to a chair and asked me if I was Divergent. I answered no, and he punched me until I said yes. I woke up with wet cheeks.

I mean to say something, but all I can do is groan. My body aches so badly it hurts to breathe. It doesn't help that last night's bout of crying made my eyes swell. Christina offers me her hand.

The clock reads eight. We're supposed to be at the tracks by eight fifteen.

"I'll run and get us some breakfast. You just...get ready. Looks like it might take you a while," she says.

I grunt. Trying not to bend at the waist, I fumble in the drawer under my bed for a clean shirt. Luckily Peter isn't here to see me struggle. Once Christina leaves, the dormitory is empty.

I unbutton my shirt and stare at my bare side, which is patched with bruises. For a second the colors mesmerize me, bright green and deep blue and brown. I change as fast as I can and let my hair hang loose because I can't lift my arms to tie it back.

I look at my reflection in the small mirror on the back wall and see a stranger. She is blond like me, with a narrow face like mine, but that's where the similarities stop. *I* do not have a black eye, and a split lip, and a bruised jaw. *I* am not as pale as a sheet. She can't possibly be me, though she moves when I move.

By the time Christina comes back, a muffin in each hand, I'm sitting on the edge of my bed, staring at my untied shoes. I will have to bend over to tie them. It will hurt when I bend over.

But Christina just passes me a muffin and crouches in front of me to tie my shoes. Gratitude surges in my chest, warm and a little like an ache. Maybe there is some Abnegation in everyone, even if they don't know it.

Well, in everyone but Peter.

"Thank you," I say.

"Well, we would never get there on time if you had to tie them yourself," she says. "Come on. You can eat and walk at the same time, right?"

We walk fast toward the Pit. The muffin is banana-flavored, with walnuts. My mother baked bread like this once to give to the factionless, but I never got to try it. I was too old for coddling at that point. I ignore the pinch in my stomach that comes every time I think of my mother and half walk, half jog after Christina, who forgets that her legs are longer than mine.

We climb the steps from the Pit to the glass building above it and run to the exit. Every

thump of my feet sends pain through my ribs, but I ignore it. We make it to the tracks just as the train arrives, its horn blaring.

“What took you so long?” Will shouts over the horn.

“Stumpy Legs over here turned into an old lady overnight,” says Christina.

“Oh, shut up.” I’m only half kidding.

Four stands at the front of the pack, so close to the tracks that if he shifted even an inch forward, the train would take his nose with it. He steps back to let some of the others get on first. Will hoists himself into the car with some difficulty, landing first on his stomach and then dragging his legs in behind him. Four grabs the handle on the side of the car and pulls himself in smoothly, like he doesn’t have more than six feet of body to work with.

I jog next to the car, wincing, then grit my teeth and grab the handle on the side. This is going to hurt.

Al grabs me under each arm and lifts me easily into the car. Pain shoots through my side, but it only lasts for a second. I see Peter behind him, and my cheeks get warm. Al was trying to be nice, so I smile at him, but I wish people didn’t want to be so nice. As if Peter didn’t have enough ammunition already.

“Feeling okay there?” Peter says, giving me a look of mock sympathy—his lips turned down, his arched eyebrows pulled in. “Or are you a little...*Stiff?*”

He bursts into laughter at his joke, and Molly and Drew join in. Molly has an ugly laugh, all snorting and shaking shoulders, and Drew’s is silent, so it almost looks like he’s in pain.

“We are all awed by your incredible wit,” says Will.

“Yeah, are you sure you don’t belong with the Erudite, Peter?” Christina adds. “I hear they don’t object to sissies.”

Four, standing in the doorway, speaks before Peter can retort. “Am I going to have to listen to your bickering all the way to the fence?”

Everyone gets quiet, and Four turns back to the car’s opening. He holds the handles on either side, his arms stretching wide, and leans forward so his body is mostly outside the car, though his feet stay planted inside. The wind presses his shirt to his chest. I try to look past him at what we’re passing—a sea of crumbling, abandoned buildings that get smaller as we go.

Every few seconds, though, my eyes shift back to Four. I don’t know what I expect to see, or what I want to see, if anything. But I do it without thinking.

I ask Christina, “What do you think is out there?” I nod to the doorway. “I mean, beyond the fence.”

She shrugs. “A bunch of farms, I guess.”

“Yeah, but I mean...past the farms. What are we guarding the city from?”

She wiggles her fingers at me. “Monsters!”

I roll my eyes.

“We didn’t even have guards near the fence until five years ago,” says Will. “Don’t you remember when Dauntless police used to patrol the factionless sector?”

“Yes,” I say. I also remember that my father was one of the people who voted to get the

Dauntless out of the factionless sector of the city. He said the poor didn't need policing; they needed help, and we could give it to them. But I would rather not mention that now, or here. It's one of the many things Erudite gives as evidence of Abnegation's incompetence.

"Oh, right," he says. "I bet you saw them all the time."

"Why do you say that?" I ask, a little too sharply. I don't want to be associated too closely with the factionless.

"Because you had to pass the factionless sector to get to school, right?"

"What did you do, memorize a map of the city for fun?" says Christina.

"Yes," says Will, looking puzzled. "Didn't you?"

The train's brakes squeal, and we all lurch forward as the car slows. I am grateful for the movement; it makes standing easier. The dilapidated buildings are gone, replaced by yellow fields and train tracks. The train stops under an awning. I lower myself to the grass, holding the handle to keep me steady.

In front of me is a chain-link fence with barbed wire strung along the top. When I walk forward, I notice that it continues farther than I can see, perpendicular to the horizon. Past the fence is a cluster of trees, most of them dead, some green. Milling around on the other side of the fence are Dauntless guards carrying guns.

"Follow me," says Four. I stay close to Christina. I don't want to admit it, not even to myself, but I feel calmer when I'm near her. If Peter tries to taunt me, she will defend me.

Silently I scold myself for being such a coward. Peter's insults shouldn't bother me, and I should focus on getting better at combat, not on how badly I did yesterday. And I should be willing, if not able, to defend myself instead of relying on other people to do it for me.

Four leads us toward the gate, which is as wide as a house and opens up to the cracked road that leads to the city. When I came here with my family as a child, we rode in a bus on that road and beyond, to Amity's farms, where we spent the day picking tomatoes and sweating through our shirts.

Another pinch in my stomach.

"If you don't rank in the top five at the end of initiation, you will probably end up here," says Four as he reaches the gate. "Once you are a fence guard, there is some potential for advancement, but not much. You may be able to go on patrols beyond Amity's farms, but—"

"Patrols for what purpose?" asks Will.

Four lifts a shoulder. "I suppose you'll discover that if you find yourself among them. As I was saying. For the most part, those who guard the fence when they are young continue to guard the fence. If it comforts you, some of them insist that it isn't as bad as it seems."

"Yeah. At least we won't be driving buses or cleaning up other people's messes like the factionless," Christina whispers in my ear.

"What rank were you?" Peter asks Four.

I don't expect Four to answer, but he looks levelly at Peter and says, "I was first."

"And you chose to do *this*?" Peter's eyes are wide and round and dark green. They would look innocent to me if I didn't know what a terrible person he is. "Why didn't you get a government job?"

“I didn’t want one,” Four says flatly. I remember what he said on the first day, about working in the control room, where the Dauntless monitor the city’s security. It is difficult for me to imagine him there, surrounded by computers. To me he belongs in the training room.

We learned about faction jobs in school. The Dauntless have limited options. We can guard the fence or work for the security of our city. We can work in the Dauntless compound, drawing tattoos or making weapons or even fighting each other for entertainment. Or we can work for the Dauntless leaders. That sounds like my best option.

The only problem is that my rank is terrible. And I might be factionless by the end of stage one.

We stop next to the gate. A few Dauntless guards glance in our direction but not many. They are too busy pulling the doors—which are twice as tall as they are and several times wider—open to admit a truck.

The man driving wears a hat, a beard, and a smile. He stops just inside the gate and gets out. The back of the truck is open, and a few other Amity sit among the stacks of crates. I peer at the crates—they hold apples.

“Beatrice?” an Amity boy says.

My head jerks at the sound of my name. One of the Amity in the back of the truck stands. He has curly blond hair and a familiar nose, wide at the tip and narrow at the bridge. Robert. I try to remember him at the Choosing Ceremony and nothing comes to mind but the sound of my heart in my ears. Who else transferred? Did Susan? Are there any Abnegation initiates this year? If Abnegation is fizzling, it’s our fault—Robert’s and Caleb’s and mine. Mine. I push the thought from my mind.

Robert hops down from the truck. He wears a gray T-shirt and a pair of blue jeans. After a second’s hesitation, he moves toward me and folds me in his arms. I stiffen. Only in Amity do people hug each other in greeting. I don’t move a muscle until he releases me.

His own smile fades when he looks at me again. “Beatrice, what happened to you? What happened to your face?”

“Nothing,” I say. “Just training. Nothing.”

“*Beatrice?*” demands a nasal voice next to me. Molly folds her arms and laughs. “Is that your real name, Stiff?”

I glance at her. “What did you *think* Tris was short for?”

“Oh, I don’t know...weakling?” She touches her chin. If her chin was bigger, it might balance out her nose, but it is weak and almost recedes into her neck. “Oh wait, *that* doesn’t start with Tris. My mistake.”

“There’s no need to antagonize her,” Robert says softly. “I’m Robert, and you are?”

“Someone who doesn’t care what your name is,” she says. “Why don’t you get back in your truck? We’re not supposed to fraternize with other faction members.”

“Why don’t you get away from us?” I snap.

“Right. Wouldn’t want to get between you and your boyfriend,” she says. She walks away smiling.

Robert gives me a sad look. “They don’t seem like nice people.”

“Some of them aren’t.”

“You could go home, you know. I’m sure Abnegation would make an exception for you.”

“What makes you think I want to go home?” I ask, my cheeks hot. “You think I can’t handle this or something?”

“It’s not that.” He shakes his head. “It’s not that you can’t, it’s that you shouldn’t have to. You should be happy.”

“This is what I chose. This is it.” I look over Robert’s shoulder. The Dauntless guards seem to have finished examining the truck. The bearded man gets back into the driver’s seat and closes the door behind him. “Besides, Robert. The goal of my life isn’t just...to be happy.”

“Wouldn’t it be easier if it was, though?” he says.

Before I can answer, he touches my shoulder and turns toward the truck. A girl in the back has a banjo on her lap. She starts to strum it as Robert hoists himself inside, and the truck starts forward, carrying the banjo sounds and her warbling voice away from us.

Robert waves to me, and again I see another possible life in my mind’s eye. I see myself in the back of the truck, singing with the girl, though I’ve never sung before, laughing when I am off-key, climbing trees to pick the apples, always peaceful and always safe.

The Dauntless guards close the gate and lock it behind them. The lock is on the outside. I bite my lip. Why would they lock the gate from the outside and not the inside? It almost seems like they don’t want to keep something out; they want to keep us in.

I push the thought out of my head. That makes no sense.

Four steps away from the fence, where he was talking to a female Dauntless guard with a gun balanced on her shoulder a moment before. “I am worried that you have a knack for making unwise decisions,” he says when he’s a foot away from me.

I cross my arms. “It was a two-minute conversation.”

“I don’t think a smaller time frame makes it any less unwise.” He furrows his eyebrows and touches the corner of my bruised eye with his fingertips. My head jerks back, but he doesn’t take his hand away. Instead he tilts his head and sighs. “You know, if you could just learn to attack first, you might do better.”

“Attack first?” I say. “How will that help?”

“You’re fast. If you can get a few good hits in before they know what’s going on, you could win.” He shrugs, and his hand falls.

“I’m surprised you know that,” I say quietly, “since you left halfway through my one and only fight.”

“It wasn’t something I wanted to watch,” he says.

What’s that supposed to mean?

He clears his throat. “Looks like the next train is here. Time to go, Tris.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

I CRAWL ACROSS my mattress and heave a sigh. It has been two days since my fight with Peter, and my bruises are turning purple-blue. I have gotten used to aching every time I move, so now I move better, but I am still far from healed.

Even though I am still injured, I had to fight again today. Luckily this time, I was paired against Myra, who couldn't throw a good punch if someone was controlling her arm for her. I got a good hit in during the first two minutes. She fell down and was too dizzy to get back up. I should feel triumphant, but there is no triumph in punching a girl like Myra.

The second I touch my head to the pillow, the door to the dormitory opens, and people stream into the room with flashlights. I sit up, almost hitting my head on the bed frame above me, and squint through the dark to see what's going on.

"Everybody up!" someone roars. A flashlight shines behind his head, making the rings in his ears glint. Eric. Surrounding him are other Dauntless, some of whom I have seen in the Pit, some of whom I have never seen before. Four stands among them.

His eyes shift to mine and stay there. I stare back and forget that all around me the transfers are getting out of bed.

"Did you go deaf, Stiff?" demands Eric. I snap out of my daze and slide out from beneath the blankets. I am glad I sleep fully clothed, because Christina stands next to our bunk wearing only a T-shirt, her long legs bare. She folds her arms and stares at Eric. I wish, suddenly, that I could stare so boldly at someone with hardly any clothes on, but I would never be able to do that.

"You have five minutes to get dressed and meet us by the tracks," says Eric. "We're going on another field trip."

I shove my feet into shoes and sprint, wincing, behind Christina on the way to the train. A drop of sweat rolls down the back of my neck as we run up the paths along the walls of the Pit, pushing past members on our way up. They don't seem surprised to see us. I wonder how many frantic, running people they see on a weekly basis.

We make it to the tracks just behind the Dauntless-born initiates. Next to the tracks is a black pile. I make out a cluster of long gun barrels and trigger guards.

"Are we going to *shoot* something?" Christina hisses in my ear.

Next to the pile are boxes of what looks like ammunition. I inch closer to read one of the boxes. Written on it is "PAINTBALLS."

I've never heard of them before, but the name is self-explanatory. I laugh.

"Everyone grab a gun!" shouts Eric.

We rush toward the pile. I am the closest to it, so I snatch the first gun I can find, which is heavy, but not too heavy for me to lift, and grab a box of paintballs. I shove the box in my pocket and sling the gun across my back so the strap crosses my chest.

"Time estimate?" Eric asks Four.

Four checks his watch. “Any minute now. How long is it going to take you to memorize the train schedule?”

“Why should I, when I have you to remind me of it?” says Eric, shoving Four’s shoulder.

A circle of light appears on my left, far away. It grows larger as it comes closer, shining against the side of Four’s face, creating a shadow in the faint hollow beneath his cheekbone.

He is the first to get on the train, and I run after him, not waiting for Christina or Will or Al to follow me. Four turns around as I fall into stride next to the car and holds out a hand. I grab his arm, and he pulls me in. Even the muscles in his forearm are taut, defined.

I let go quickly, without looking at him, and sit down on the other side of the car.

Once everyone is in, Four speaks up.

“We’ll be dividing into two teams to play capture the flag. Each team will have an even mix of members, Dauntless-born initiates, and transfers. One team will get off first and find a place to hide their flag. Then the second team will get off and do the same.” The car sways, and Four grabs the side of the doorway for balance. “This is a Dauntless tradition, so I suggest you take it seriously.”

“What do we get if we win?” someone shouts.

“Sounds like the kind of question someone not from Dauntless would ask,” says Four, raising an eyebrow. “You get to win, of course.”

“Four and I will be your team captains,” says Eric. He looks at Four. “Let’s divide up transfers first, shall we?”

I tilt my head back. If they’re picking us, I will be chosen last; I can feel it.

“You go first,” Four says.

Eric shrugs. “Edward.”

Four leans against the door frame and nods. The moonlight makes his eyes bright. He scans the group of transfer initiates briefly, without calculation, and says, “I want the Stiff.”

A faint undercurrent of laughter fills the car. Heat rushes into my cheeks. I don’t know whether to be angry at the people laughing at me or flattered by the fact that he chose me first.

“Got something to prove?” asks Eric, with his trademark smirk. “Or are you just picking the weak ones so that if you lose, you’ll have someone to blame it on?”

Four shrugs. “Something like that.”

Angry. I should definitely be angry. I scowl at my hands. Whatever Four’s strategy is, it’s based on the idea that I am weaker than the other initiates. And it gives me a bitter taste in my mouth. I have to prove him wrong—I *have* to.

“Your turn,” says Four.

“Peter.”

“Christina.”

That throws a wrench in his strategy. Christina is not one of the weak ones. What exactly is he doing?

“Molly.”

“Will,” says Four, biting his thumbnail.

“Al.”

“Drew.”

“Last one left is Myra. So she’s with me,” says Eric. “Dauntless-born initiates next.”

I stop listening once they’re finished with us. If Four isn’t trying to prove something by choosing the weak, what is he doing? I look at each person he chooses. What do we have in common?

Once they’re halfway through the Dauntless-born initiates, I have an idea of what it is. With the exception of Will and a couple of the others, we all share the same body type: narrow shoulders, small frames. All the people on Eric’s team are broad and strong. Just yesterday, Four told me I was fast. We will all be faster than Eric’s team, which will probably be good for capture the flag—I haven’t played before, but I know it’s a game of speed rather than brute force. I cover a smile with my hand. Eric is more ruthless than Four, but Four is smarter.

They finish choosing teams, and Eric smirks at Four.

“Your team can get off second,” says Eric.

“Don’t do me any favors,” Four replies. He smiles a little. “You know I don’t need them to win.”

“No, I know that you’ll lose no matter when you get off,” says Eric, biting down briefly on one of the rings in his lip. “Take your scrawny team and get off first, then.”

We all stand up. Al gives me a forlorn look, and I smile back in what I hope is a reassuring way. If any of the four of us had to end up on the same team as Eric, Peter, and Molly, at least it was him. They usually leave him alone.

The train is about to dip to the ground. I am determined to land on my feet.

Just before I jump, someone shoves my shoulder, and I almost topple out of the train car. I don’t look back to see who it is—Molly, Drew, or Peter, it doesn’t matter which one. Before they can try it again, I jump. This time I am ready for the momentum the train gives me, and I run a few steps to diffuse it but keep my balance. Fierce pleasure courses through me and I smile. It’s a small accomplishment, but it makes me feel Dauntless.

One of the Dauntless-born initiates touches Four’s shoulder and asks, “When your team won, where did you put the flag?”

“Telling you wouldn’t really be in the spirit of the exercise, Marlene,” he says coolly.

“Come on, Four,” she whines. She gives him a flirtatious smile. He brushes her hand off his arm, and for some reason, I find myself grinning.

“Navy Pier,” another Dauntless-born initiate calls out. He is tall, with brown skin and dark eyes. Handsome. “My brother was on the winning team. They kept the flag at the carousel.”

“Let’s go there, then,” suggests Will.

No one objects, so we walk east, toward the marsh that was once a lake. When I was young, I tried to imagine what it would look like as a lake, with no fence built into the mud to keep the city safe. But it is difficult to imagine that much water in one place.

“We’re close to Erudite headquarters, right?” asks Christina, bumping Will’s shoulder with her own.

“Yeah. It’s south of here,” he says. He looks over his shoulder, and for a second his

expression is full of longing. Then it's gone.

I am less than a mile away from my brother. It has been a week since we were that close together. I shake my head a little to get the thought out of my mind. I can't think about him today, when I have to focus on making it through stage one. I can't think about him any day.

We walk across the bridge. We still need the bridges because the mud beneath them is too wet to walk on. I wonder how long it's been since the river dried up.

Once we cross the bridge, the city changes. Behind us, most of the buildings were in use, and even if they weren't, they looked well-tended. In front of us is a sea of crumbling concrete and broken glass. The silence of this part of the city is eerie; it feels like a nightmare. It's hard to see where I'm going, because it's after midnight and all the city lights are off.

Marlene takes out a flashlight and shines it at the street in front of us.

"Scared of the dark, Mar?" the dark-eyed Dauntless-born initiate teases.

"If you want to step on broken glass, Uriah, be my guest," she snaps. But she turns it off anyway.

I have realized that part of being Dauntless is being willing to make things more difficult for yourself in order to be self-sufficient. There's nothing especially brave about wandering dark streets with no flashlight, but we are not supposed to need help, even from light. We are supposed to be capable of anything.

I like that. Because there might come a day when there is no flashlight, there is no gun, there is no guiding hand. And I want to be ready for it.

The buildings end just before the marsh. A strip of land juts out into the marsh, and rising from it is a giant white wheel with dozens of red passenger cars dangling from it at regular intervals. The Ferris wheel.

"Think about it. People used to ride that thing. For *fun*," says Will, shaking his head.

"They must have been Dauntless," I say.

"Yeah, but a lame version of Dauntless." Christina laughs. "A Dauntless Ferris wheel wouldn't have cars. You would just hang on tight with your hands, and good luck to you."

We walk down the side of the pier. All the buildings on my left are empty, their signs torn down and their windows closed, but it is a clean kind of emptiness. Whoever left these places left them by choice and at their leisure. Some places in the city are not like that.

"Dare you to jump into the marsh," says Christina to Will.

"You first."

We reach the carousel. Some of the horses are scratched and weathered, their tails broken off or their saddles chipped. Four takes the flag out of his pocket.

"In ten minutes, the other team will pick their location," he says. "I suggest you take this time to formulate a strategy. We may not be Erudite, but mental preparedness is one aspect of your Dauntless training. Arguably, it is the most important aspect."

He is right about that. What good is a prepared body if you have a scattered mind?

Will takes the flag from Four.

"Some people should stay here and guard, and some people should go out and scout the other team's location," Will says.

“Yeah? You think?” Marlene plucks the flag from Will’s fingers. “Who put you in charge, transfer?”

“No one,” says Will. “But someone’s got to do it.”

“Maybe we should develop a more defensive strategy. Wait for them to come to us, then take them out,” suggests Christina.

“That’s the sissy way out,” Uriah says. “I vote we go all out. Hide the flag well enough that they can’t find it.”

Everyone bursts into the conversation at once, their voices louder with each passing second. Christina defends Will’s plan; the Dauntless-born initiates vote for offense; everyone argues about who should make the decision. Four sits down on the edge of the carousel, leaning against a plastic horse’s foot. His eyes lift to the sky, where there are no stars, only a round moon peeking through a thin layer of clouds. The muscles in his arms are relaxed; his hand rests on the back of his neck. He looks almost comfortable, holding that gun to his shoulder.

I close my eyes briefly. Why does he distract me so easily? I need to focus.

What would I say if I could shout above the sniping behind me? We can’t act until we know where the other team is. They could be anywhere within a two-mile radius, although I can rule out the empty marsh as an option. The best way to find them is not to argue about how to search for them, or how many to send out in a search party.

It’s to climb as high as possible.

I look over my shoulder to make sure no one is watching. None of them look at me, so I walk toward the Ferris wheel with light, quiet footsteps, pressing my gun to my back with one hand to keep it from making noise.

When I stare up at the Ferris wheel from the ground, my throat feels tighter. It is taller than I thought, so tall I can barely see the cars swinging at the top. The only good thing about its height is that it is built to support weight. If I climb it, it won’t collapse beneath me.

My heart pumps faster. Will I really risk my life for this—to win a game the Dauntless like to play?

It’s so dark I can barely see them, but when I stare at the huge, rusted supports holding the wheel in place, I see the rungs of a ladder. Each support is only as wide as my shoulders, and there are no railings to hold me in, but climbing a ladder is better than climbing the spokes of the wheel.

I grab a rung. It’s rusty and thin and feels like it might crumble in my hands. I put my weight on the lowest rung to test it and jump to make sure it will hold me up. The movement hurts my ribs, and I wince.

“Tris,” a low voice says behind me. I don’t know why it doesn’t startle me. Maybe because I am becoming Dauntless, and mental readiness is something I am supposed to develop. Maybe because his voice is low and smooth and almost soothing. Whatever the reason, I look over my shoulder. Four stands behind me with his gun slung across his back, just like mine.

“Yes?” I say.

“I came to find out what you think you’re doing.”

“I’m seeking higher ground,” I say. “I don’t *think* I’m doing anything.”

I see his smile in the dark. “All right. I’m coming.”

I pause a second. He doesn’t look at me the way Will, Christina, and Al sometimes do—like I am too small and too weak to be of any use, and they pity me for it. But if he insists on coming with me, it is probably because he doubts me.

“I’ll be fine,” I say.

“Undoubtedly,” he replies. I don’t hear the sarcasm, but I know it’s there. It has to be.

I climb, and when I’m a few feet off the ground, he comes after me. He moves faster than I do, and soon his hands find the rungs that my feet leave.

“So tell me...,” he says quietly as we climb. He sounds breathless. “What do you think the purpose of this exercise is? The game, I mean, not the climbing.”

I stare down at the pavement. It seems far away now, but I’m not even a third of the way up. Above me is a platform, just below the center of the wheel. That’s my destination. I don’t even think about how I will climb back down. The breeze that brushed my cheeks earlier now presses against my side. The higher we go, the stronger it will get. I need to be ready.

“Learning about strategy,” I say. “Teamwork, maybe.”

“Teamwork,” he repeats. A laugh hitches in his throat. It sounds like a panicked breath.

“Maybe not,” I say. “Teamwork doesn’t seem to be a Dauntless priority.”

The wind is stronger now. I press closer to the white support so I don’t fall, but that makes it hard to climb. Below me the carousel looks small. I can barely see my team under the awning. Some of them are missing—a search party must have left.

Four says, “It’s supposed to be a priority. It used to be.”

But I’m not really listening, because the height is dizzying. My hands ache from holding the rungs, and my legs are shaking, but I’m not sure why. It isn’t the height that scares me—the height makes me feel alive with energy, every organ and vessel and muscle in my body singing at the same pitch.

Then I realize what it is. It’s him. Something about him makes me feel like I am about to fall. Or turn to liquid. Or burst into flames.

My hand almost misses the next rung.

“Now tell me...,” he says through a bursting breath, “what do you think learning strategy has to do with...bravery?”

The question reminds me that he is my instructor, and I am supposed to learn something from this. A cloud passes over the moon, and the light shifts across my hands.

“It...it prepares you to act,” I say finally. “You learn strategy so you can use it.” I hear him breathing behind me, loud and fast. “Are you all right, Four?”

“Are you *human*, Tris? Being up this high...” He gulps for air. “It doesn’t scare you at all?”

I look over my shoulder at the ground. If I fall now, I will die. But I don’t think I will fall.

A gust of air presses against my left side, throwing my body weight to the right. I gasp and cling to the rungs, my balance shifting. Four’s cold hand clamps around one of my hips, one of his fingers finding a strip of bare skin just under the hem of my T-shirt. He squeezes, steadying me and pushing me gently to the left, restoring my balance.

Now *I* can’t breathe. I pause, staring at my hands, my mouth dry. I feel the ghost of where

his hand was, his fingers long and narrow.

“You okay?” he asks quietly.

“Yes,” I say, my voice strained.

I keep climbing, silently, until I reach the platform. Judging by the blunted ends of metal rods, it used to have railings, but it doesn't anymore. I sit down and scoot to the end of it so Four has somewhere to sit. Without thinking, I put my legs over the side. Four, however, crouches and presses his back to the metal support, breathing heavily.

“You're afraid of heights,” I say. “How do you survive in the Dauntless compound?”

“I ignore my fear,” he says. “When I make decisions, I pretend it doesn't exist.”

I stare at him for a second. I can't help it. To me there's a difference between not being afraid and acting in spite of fear, as he does.

I have been staring at him too long.

“What?” he says quietly.

“Nothing.”

I look away from him and toward the city. I have to focus. I climbed up here for a reason.

The city is pitch-black, but even if it wasn't, I wouldn't be able to see very far. A building stands in my way.

“We're not high enough,” I say. I look up. Above me is a tangle of white bars, the wheel's scaffolding. If I climb carefully, I can wedge my feet between the supports and the crossbars and stay secure. Or as secure as possible.

“I'm going to climb,” I say, standing up. I grab one of the bars above my head and pull myself up. Shooting pains go through my bruised sides, but I ignore them.

“For God's sake, Stiff,” he says.

“You don't have to follow me,” I say, staring at the maze of bars above me. I shove my foot onto the place where two bars cross and push myself up, grabbing another bar in the process. I sway for a second, my heart beating so hard I can't feel anything else. Every thought I have condenses into that heartbeat, moving at the same rhythm.

“Yes, I do,” he says.

This is crazy, and I know it. A fraction of an inch of mistake, half a second of hesitation, and my life is over. Heat tears through my chest, and I smile as I grab the next bar. I pull myself up, my arms shaking, and force my leg under me so I'm standing on another bar. When I feel steady, I look down at Four. But instead of seeing him, I see straight to the ground.

I can't breathe.

I imagine my body plummeting, smacking into the bars as it falls down, and my limbs at broken angles on the pavement, just like Rita's sister when she didn't make it onto the roof. Four grabs a bar with each hand and pulls himself up, easy, like he's sitting up in bed. But he is not comfortable or natural here—every muscle in his arm stands out. It is a stupid thing for me to think when I am one hundred feet off the ground.

I grab another bar, find another place to wedge my foot. When I look at the city again, the building isn't in my way. I'm high enough to see the skyline. Most of the buildings are black

against a navy sky, but the red lights at the top of the Hub are lit up. They blink half as fast as my heartbeat.

Beneath the buildings, the streets look like tunnels. For a few seconds I see only a dark blanket over the land in front of me, just faint differences between building and sky and street and ground. Then I see a tiny pulsing light on the ground.

“See that?” I say, pointing.

Four stops climbing when he’s right behind me and looks over my shoulder, his chin next to my head. His breaths flutter against my ear, and I feel shaky again, like I did when I was climbing the ladder.

“Yeah,” he says. A smile spreads over his face.

“It’s coming from the park at the end of the pier,” he says. “Figures. It’s surrounded by open space, but the trees provide some camouflage. Obviously not enough.”

“Okay,” I say. I look over my shoulder at him. We are so close I forget where I am; instead I notice that the corners of his mouth turn down naturally, just like mine, and that he has a scar on his chin.

“Um,” I say. I clear my throat. “Start climbing down. I’ll follow you.”

Four nods and steps down. His leg is so long that he finds a place for his foot easily and guides his body between the bars. Even in darkness, I see that his hands are bright red and shaking.

I step down with one foot, pressing my weight into one of the crossbars. The bar creaks beneath me and comes loose, clattering against half a dozen bars on the way down and bouncing on the pavement. I’m dangling from the scaffolding with my toes swinging in midair. A strangled gasp escapes me.

“Four!”

I try to find another place to put my foot, but the nearest foothold is a few feet away, farther than I can stretch. My hands are sweaty. I remember wiping them on my slacks before the Choosing Ceremony, before the aptitude test, before every important moment, and suppress a scream. I will slip. I will slip.

“Hold on!” he shouts. “Just hold on, I have an idea.”

He keeps climbing down. He’s moving in the wrong direction; he should be coming toward me, not going away from me. I stare at my hands, which are wrapped around the narrow bar so tightly my knuckles are white. My fingers are dark red, almost purple. They won’t last long.

I won’t last long.

I squeeze my eyes shut. Better not to look. Better to pretend that none of this exists. I hear Four’s sneakers squeak against metal and rapid footsteps on ladder rungs.

“Four!” I yell. Maybe he left. Maybe he abandoned me. Maybe this is a test of my strength, of my bravery. I breathe in my nose and out my mouth. I count my breaths to calm down. One, two. In, out. *Come on, Four* is all I can think. *Come on, do something.*

Then I hear something wheeze and creak. The bar I’m holding shudders, and I scream through my clenched teeth as I fight to keep my grip.

The wheel is moving.

Air wraps around my ankles and wrists as the wind gushes up, like a geyser. I open my eyes. I'm moving—toward the ground. I laugh, giddy with hysteria as the ground comes closer and closer. But I'm picking up speed. If I don't drop at the right time, the moving cars and metal scaffolding will drag at my body and carry me with them, and then I will really die.

Every muscle in my body tenses as I hurtle toward the ground. When I can see the cracks in the sidewalk, I drop, and my body slams into the ground, feet first. My legs collapse beneath me and I pull my arms in, rolling as fast as I can to the side. The cement scrapes my face, and I turn just in time to see a car bearing down on me, like a giant shoe about to crush me. I roll again, and the bottom of the car skims my shoulder.

I'm safe.

I press my palms to my face. I don't try to get up. If I did, I'm sure I would just fall back down. I hear footsteps, and Four's hands wrap around my wrists. I let him pry my hands from my eyes.

He encloses one of my hands perfectly between two of his. The warmth of his skin overwhelms the ache in my fingers from holding the bars.

"You all right?" he asks, pressing our hands together.

"Yeah."

He starts to laugh.

After a second, I laugh too. With my free hand, I push myself to a sitting position. I am aware of how little space there is between us—six inches at most. That space feels charged with electricity. I feel like it should be smaller.

He stands, pulling me up with him. The wheel is still moving, creating a wind that tosses my hair back.

"You could have told me that the Ferris wheel still worked," I say. I try to sound casual. "We wouldn't have had to climb in the first place."

"I would have, if I had known," he says. "Couldn't just let you hang there, so I took a risk. Come on, time to get their flag."

Four hesitates for a moment and then takes my arm, his fingertips pressing to the inside of my elbow. In other factions, he would give me time to recover, but he is Dauntless, so he smiles at me and starts toward the carousel, where our team members guard our flag. And I half run, half limp beside him. I still feel weak, but my mind is awake, especially with his hand on me.

Christina is perched on one of the horses, her long legs crossed and her hand around the pole holding the plastic animal upright. Our flag is behind her, a glowing triangle in the dark. Three Dauntless-born initiates stand among the other worn and dirty animals. One of them has his hand on a horse's head, and a scratched horse eye stares at me between his fingers. Sitting on the edge of the carousel is an older Dauntless, scratching her quadruple-pierced eyebrow with her thumb.

"Where'd the others go?" asks Four.

He looks as excited as I feel, his eyes wide with energy.

“Did you guys turn on the wheel?” the older girl says. “What the hell are you thinking? You might as well have just shouted ‘Here we are! Come and get us!’” She shakes her head. “If I lose again this year, the shame will be unbearable. Three years in a row?”

“The wheel doesn’t matter,” says Four. “We know where they are.”

“We?” says Christina, looking from Four to me.

“Yes, while the rest of you were twiddling your thumbs, Tris climbed the Ferris wheel to look for the other team,” he says.

“What do we do now, then?” asks one of the Dauntless-born initiates through a yawn.

Four looks at me. Slowly the eyes of the other initiates, including Christina, migrate from him to me. I tense my shoulders, about to shrug and say I don’t know, and then an image of the pier stretching out beneath me comes into my mind. I have an idea.

“Split in half,” I say. “Four of us go to the right side of the pier, three to the left. The other team is in the park at the end of the pier, so the group of four will charge as the group of three sneaks behind the other team to get the flag.”

Christina looks at me like she no longer recognizes me. I don’t blame her.

“Sounds good,” says the older girl, clapping her hands together. “Let’s get this night over with, shall we?”

Christina joins me in the group going to the right, along with Uriah, whose smile looks white against his skin’s bronze. I didn’t notice before, but he has a tattoo of a snake behind his ear. I stare at its tail curling around his earlobe for a moment, but then Christina starts running and I have to follow her.

I have to run twice as fast to match my short strides to her long ones. As I run, I realize that only one of us will get to touch the flag, and it won’t matter that it was my plan and my information that got us to it if I’m not the one who grabs it. Though I can hardly breathe as it is, I run faster, and I’m on Christina’s heels. I pull my gun around my body, holding my finger over the trigger.

We reach the end of the pier, and I clamp my mouth shut to keep my loud breaths in. We slow down so our footsteps aren’t as loud, and I look for the blinking light again. Now that I’m on the ground, it’s bigger and easier to see. I point, and Christina nods, leading the way toward it.

Then I hear a chorus of yells, so loud they make me jump. I hear puffs of air as paintballs go flying and splats as they find their targets. Our team has charged, the other team runs to meet us, and the flag is almost unguarded. Uriah takes aim and shoots the last guard in the thigh. The guard, a short girl with purple hair, throws her gun to the ground in a tantrum.

I sprint to catch up to Christina. The flag hangs from a tree branch, high above my head. I reach for it, and so does Christina.

“Come on, Tris,” she says. “You’re already the hero of the day. And you know you can’t reach it anyway.”

She gives me a patronizing look, the way people sometimes look at children when they act too adult, and snatches the flag from the branch. Without looking at me, she turns and gives a whoop of victory. Uriah’s voice joins hers and then I hear a chorus of yells in the distance.

Uriah claps my shoulder, and I try to forget about the look Christina gave me. Maybe she's right; I've already proved myself today. I do not want to be greedy; I do not want to be like Eric, terrified of other people's strength.

The shouts of triumph become infectious, and I lift my voice to join in, running toward my teammates. Christina holds the flag up high, and everyone clusters around her, grabbing her arm to lift the flag even higher. I can't reach her, so I stand off to the side, grinning.

A hand touches my shoulder.

"Well done," Four says quietly.

"I can't believe I missed it!" Will says again, shaking his head. Wind coming through the doorway of the train car blows his hair in every direction.

"You were performing the very important job of staying out of our way," says Christina, beaming.

Al groans. "Why did I have to be on the other team?"

"Because life's not fair, Albert. And the world is conspiring against you," says Will. "Hey, can I see the flag again?"

Peter, Molly, and Drew sit across from the members in the corner. Their chests and backs are splattered with blue and pink paint, and they look dejected. They speak quietly, sneaking looks at the rest of us, especially Christina. That is the benefit of not holding the flag right now—I am no one's target. Or at least, no more than usual.

"So you climbed the Ferris wheel, huh," says Uriah. He stumbles across the car and sits next to me. Marlene, the girl with the flirty smile, follows him.

"Yes," I say.

"Pretty smart of you. Like...Erudite smart," Marlene says. "I'm Marlene."

"Tris," I say. At home, being compared to an Erudite would be an insult, but she says it like a compliment.

"Yeah, I know who you are," she says. "The first jumper tends to stick in your head."

It has been years since I jumped off a building in my Abnegation uniform; it has been decades.

Uriah takes one of the paintballs from his gun and squeezes it between his thumb and index finger. The train lurches to the left, and Uriah falls against me, his fingers pinching the paintball until a stream of pink, foul-smelling paint sprays on my face.

Marlene collapses in giggles. I wipe some of the paint from my face, slowly, and then smear it on his cheek. The scent of fish oil wafts through the train car.

"Ew!" He squeezes the ball at me again, but the opening is at the wrong angle, and the paint sprays into his mouth instead. He coughs and makes exaggerated gagging sounds.

I wipe my face with my sleeve, laughing so hard my stomach hurts.

If my entire life is like this, loud laughter and bold action and the kind of exhaustion you feel after a hard but satisfying day, I will be content. As Uriah scrapes his tongue with his fingertips, I realize that all I have to do is get through initiation, and that life will be mine.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE NEXT MORNING, when I trudge into the training room, yawning, a large target stands at one end of the room, and next to the door is a table with knives strewn across it. Target practice again. At least it won't hurt.

Eric stands in the middle of the room, his posture so rigid it looks like someone replaced his spine with a metal rod. The sight of him makes me feel like all the air in the room is heavier, bearing down on me. At least when he was slouched against a wall, I could pretend he wasn't here. Today I can't pretend.

"Tomorrow will be the last day of stage one," Eric says. "You will resume fighting then. Today, you'll be learning how to aim. Everyone pick up three knives." His voice is deeper than usual. "And pay attention while Four demonstrates the correct technique for throwing them."

At first no one moves.

"Now!"

We scramble for daggers. They aren't as heavy as guns, but they still feel strange in my hands, like I am not allowed to hold them.

"He's in a bad mood today," mumbles Christina.

"Is he ever in a good mood?" I murmur back.

But I know what she means. Judging by the poisonous look Eric gives Four when he isn't paying attention, last night's loss must have bothered Eric more than he let on. Winning capture the flag is a matter of pride, and pride is important to the Dauntless. More important than reason or sense.

I watch Four's arm as he throws a knife. The next time he throws, I watch his stance. He hits the target each time, exhaling as he releases the knife.

Eric orders, "Line up!"

Haste, I think, will not help. My mother told me that when I was learning how to knit. I have to think of this as a mental exercise, not a physical exercise. So I spend the first few minutes practicing without a knife, finding the right stance, learning the right arm motion.

Eric paces too quickly behind us.

"I think the Stiff's taken too many hits to the head!" remarks Peter, a few people down. "Hey, Stiff! Remember what a *knife* is?"

Ignoring him, I practice the throw again with a knife in hand but don't release it. I shut out Eric's pacing, and Peter's jeering, and the nagging feeling that Four is staring at me, and throw the knife. It spins end over end, slamming into the board. The blade doesn't stick, but I'm the first person to hit the target.

I smirk as Peter misses again. I can't help myself.

"Hey, Peter," I say. "Remember what a *target* is?"

Next to me, Christina snorts, and her next knife hits the target.

A half hour later, Al is the only initiate who hasn't hit the target yet. His knives clatter to the floor, or bounce off the wall. While the rest of us approach the board to collect our weapons, he hunts the floor for his.

The next time he tries and misses, Eric marches toward him and demands, "How slow *are* you, Candor? Do you need glasses? Should I move the target closer to you?"

Al's face turns red. He throws another knife, and this one sails a few feet to the right of the target. It spins and hits the wall.

"What was that, initiate?" says Eric quietly, leaning closer to Al.

I bite my lip. This isn't good.

"It—it slipped," says Al.

"Well, I think you should go get it," Eric says. He scans the other initiates' faces—everyone has stopped throwing again—and says, "Did I tell you to stop?"

Knives start to hit the board. We have all seen Eric angry before, but this is different. The look in his eyes is almost rabid.

"Go get it?" Al's eyes are wide. "But everyone's still throwing."

"And?"

"And I don't want to get hit."

"I think you can trust your fellow initiates to aim better than you." Eric smiles a little, but his eyes stay cruel. "Go get your knife."

Al doesn't usually object to anything the Dauntless tell us to do. I don't think he's afraid to; he just knows that objecting is useless. This time Al sets his wide jaw. He's reached the limits of his compliance.

"No," he says.

"Why not?" Eric's beady eyes fix on Al's face. "Are you afraid?"

"Of getting stabbed by an airborne knife?" says Al. "Yes, I am!"

Honesty is his mistake. Not his refusal, which Eric might have accepted.

"Everyone stop!" Eric shouts.

The knives stop, and so does all conversation. I hold my small dagger tightly.

"Clear out of the ring." Eric looks at Al. "All except you."

I drop the dagger and it hits the dusty floor with a thud. I follow the other initiates to the edge of the room, and they inch in front of me, eager to see what makes my stomach turn: Al, facing Eric's wrath.

"Stand in front of the target," says Eric.

Al's big hands shake. He walks back to the target.

"Hey, Four." Eric looks over his shoulder. "Give me a hand here, huh?"

Four scratches one of his eyebrows with a knife point and approaches Eric. He has dark circles under his eyes and a tense set to his mouth—he's as tired as we are.

"You're going to stand there as he throws those knives," Eric says to Al, "until you learn not to flinch."

"Is this really necessary?" says Four. He sounds bored, but he doesn't look bored. His face

and body are tense, alert.

I squeeze my hands into fists. No matter how casual Four sounds, the question is a challenge. And Four doesn't often challenge Eric directly.

At first Eric stares at Four in silence. Four stares back. Seconds pass and my fingernails bite my palms.

"I have the authority here, remember?" Eric says, so quietly I can barely hear him. "Here, and everywhere else."

Color rushes into Four's face, though his expression does not change. His grip on the knives tightens and his knuckles turn white as he turns to face Al.

I look from Al's wide, dark eyes to his shaking hands to the determined set of Four's jaw. Anger bubbles in my chest, and bursts from my mouth: "*Stop* it."

Four turns the knife in his hand, his fingers moving painstakingly over the metal edge. He gives me such a hard look that I feel like he's turning me to stone. I know why. I am stupid for speaking up while Eric is here; I am stupid for speaking up at all.

"Any idiot can stand in front of a target," I say. "It doesn't prove anything except that you're bullying us. Which, as I recall, is a sign of *cowardice*."

"Then it should be easy for you," Eric says. "If you're willing to take his place."

The last thing I want to do is stand in front of that target, but I can't back down now. I didn't leave myself the option. I weave through the crowd of initiates, and someone shoves my shoulder.

"There goes your pretty face," hisses Peter. "Oh, wait. You don't have one."

I recover my balance and walk toward Al. He nods at me. I try to smile encouragingly, but I can't manage it. I stand in front of the board, and my head doesn't even reach the center of the target, but it doesn't matter. I look at Four's knives: one in his right hand, two in his left hand.

My throat is dry. I try to swallow, and then look at Four. He is never sloppy. He won't hit me. I'll be fine.

I tip my chin up. I will not flinch. If I flinch, I prove to Eric that this is not as easy as I said it was; I prove that I'm a coward.

"If you flinch," Four says, slowly, carefully, "Al takes your place. Understand?"

I nod.

Four's eyes are still on mine when he lifts his hand, pulls his elbow back, and throws the knife. It is just a flash in the air, and then I hear a thud. The knife is buried in the board, half a foot away from my cheek. I close my eyes. Thank God.

"You about done, Stiff?" asks Four.

I remember Al's wide eyes and his quiet sobs at night and shake my head. "No."

"Eyes open, then." He taps the spot between his eyebrows.

I stare at him, pressing my hands to my sides so no one can see them shake. He passes a knife from his left hand to his right hand, and I see nothing but his eyes as the second knife hits the target above my head. This one is closer than the last one—I feel it hovering over my skull.

"Come on, Stiff," he says. "Let someone else stand there and take it."

Why is he trying to goad me into giving up? Does he want me to fail?

“Shut *up*, Four!”

I hold my breath as he turns the last knife in his hand. I see a glint in his eyes as he pulls his arm back and lets the knife fly. It comes straight at me, spinning, blade over handle. My body goes rigid. This time, when it hits the board, my ear stings, and blood tickles my skin. I touch my ear. He nicked it.

And judging by the look he gives me, he did it on purpose.

“I would love to stay and see if the rest of you are as daring as she is,” says Eric, his voice smooth, “but I think that’s enough for today.”

He squeezes my shoulder. His fingers feel dry and cold, and the look he gives me claims me, like he’s taking ownership of what I did. I don’t return Eric’s smile. What I did had nothing to do with him.

“I should keep my eye on you,” he adds.

Fear prickles inside me, in my chest and in my head and in my hands. I feel like the word “DIVERGENT” is branded on my forehead, and if he looks at me long enough, he’ll be able to read it. But he just lifts his hand from my shoulder and keeps walking.

Four and I stay behind. I wait until the room is empty and the door is shut before looking at him again. He walks toward me.

“Is your—” he begins.

“You did that on *purpose!*” I shout.

“Yes, I did,” he says quietly. “And you should thank me for helping you.”

I grit my teeth. “*Thank* you? You almost stabbed my ear, and you spent the entire time taunting me. Why should I thank you?”

“You know, I’m getting a little tired of waiting for you to catch on!”

He glares at me, and even when he glares, his eyes look thoughtful. Their shade of blue is peculiar, so dark it is almost black, with a small patch of lighter blue on the left iris, right next to the corner of his eye.

“Catch on? Catch on to what? That you wanted to prove to Eric how tough you are? That you’re sadistic, just like he is?”

“I am not sadistic.” He doesn’t yell. I wish he would yell. It would scare me less. He leans his face close to mine, which reminds me of lying inches away from the attack dog’s fangs in the aptitude test, and says, “If I wanted to hurt you, don’t you think I would have already?”

He crosses the room and slams the point of a knife so hard into the table that it sticks there, handle toward the ceiling.

“I—” I start to shout, but he’s already gone. I scream, frustrated, and wipe some of the blood from my ear.