#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

VERONICA ROTH



FOUR

THE INITIATE

A DIVERGENT STORY

Fans of the Divergent series by #1 *New York Times* bestselling author Veronica Roth will be delighted by “Four: The Initiate,” the second of four stories set in the world of Divergent and told from Tobias’s point of view.

“The Initiate” provides readers with a glimpse into Tobias’s Dauntless initiation experience, including an epic game of late-night Dare; his first tattoo; the beginning of his passion for training new initiates; and his nascent understanding of the danger of being Divergent.



Veronica Roth

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THE TRAINING ROOM smells like effort, like sweat and dust and shoes. Every time my fist hits the punching bag it stings my knuckles, which are split open from a week of Dauntless fights.

"So I guess you saw the boards," Amar says, leaning against the door frame. He crosses his arms. "And realized that you're up against Eric tomorrow. Or else you would be in the fear landscape room instead of in here."

"I come in here, too," I say, and I back away from the bag, shaking out my hands. Sometimes I clench my hands so hard I start to lose feeling in my fingertips.

I almost lost my first fight, against the Amity girl, Mia. I didn't know how to beat her without hitting her, and I couldn't hit her—at least, not until she had me in a choke hold and my vision was starting to go black at the edges. My instincts took over, and just one hard elbow to her jaw knocked her down. I still feel guilt curling up inside me when I think about it.

I almost lost the second fight, too, against the bigger Candor boy Sean. I wore him out, crawling to my feet every time he thought I was finished. He didn't know that pushing through pain is one of my oldest habits, learned young, like chewing on my thumbnail, or holding my fork in my left hand instead of my right. Now my face is patchworked with bruises and cuts, but I proved myself.

Tomorrow my opponent is Eric. Beating him will take more than a clever move, or persistence. It will take skill I don't have, strength I haven't earned.

"Yeah, I know." Amar laughs. "See, I spend a lot of time trying to figure out what your deal is, so I've been asking around. Turns out you're in here every morning and in the fear landscape room every night. You never spend any time with the other initiates. You're always exhausted and you sleep like a corpse."

A drop of sweat rolls down the back of my ear. I wipe it away with my taped-up fingers, then drag my arm across my forehead.

"Joining a faction is about more than getting through initiation, you know," Amar says, and he hooks his fingers in the chain that the punching bag dangles from, testing its strength. "For most of the Dauntless, they meet their best friends during initiation, their girlfriends, boyfriends, whatever. Enemies, too. But you seem determined not to have any of those things."

I've seen the other initiates together, getting pierced together and showing up to training with red, studded noses and ears and lips, or building towers out of

food scraps at the breakfast table. It never even occurred to me that I could be one of them, or that I should try to be.

I shrug. “I’m used to being alone.”

“Well, I feel like you’re about to snap, and I don’t really want to be there when it happens,” he says. “Come on. A bunch of us are going to play a game tonight. A Dauntless game.”

I pick at the tape covering one of my knuckles. I shouldn’t go out and play games. I should stay here and work, and then sleep, so I’m ready to fight tomorrow.

But that voice, the one that says “should,” now sounds to me like my father’s voice, requiring me to behave, to isolate myself. And I came here because I was ready to *stop* listening to that voice.

“I’m offering you some Dauntless status for no particular reason other than that I feel bad for you,” he says. “Don’t be stupid and miss this opportunity.”

“Fine,” I say. “What’s the game?”

Amar just smiles.

“The game is Dare.” A Dauntless girl, Lauren, is holding on to the handle on the side of the train car, but she keeps swaying so she almost falls out, then giggling and pulling herself back in, like the train isn’t suspended two stories above the street, like she wouldn’t break her neck if she fell out.

In her free hand is a silver flask. It explains a lot.

She tilts her head. “First person picks someone and dares them to do something. Then that person has a drink, does the dare, and gets a chance to dare someone else to do something. And when everyone has done their dare—or died trying—we get a little drunk and stumble home.”

“How do you win?” one of the Dauntless calls out from the other side of the train car. A boy who sits slouched against Amar like they’re old friends, or brothers.

I’m not the only initiate in the train car. Sitting across from me is Zeke, the first jumper, and a girl with brown hair and bangs cut straight across her forehead, and a pierced lip. The others are older, Dauntless members all. They have a kind of ease with one another, leaning into one another, punching one

another's arms, tousling one another's hair. It's camaraderie and friendship and flirtation, and none of it is familiar to me. I try to relax, bending my arms around my knees.

I really am a Stiff.

"You win by not being a little pansycake," Lauren says. "And, hey, new rule, you also win by not asking dumb questions.

"I'm gonna go first, as the keeper of the alcohol," she adds. "Amar, I dare you to go into the Erudite library while all the Noses are studying and scream something obscene."

She screws the cap on the flask and tosses it to him. Everyone cheers as Amar takes the cap off and takes a swallow of whatever liquor is inside.

"Just tell me when we get to the right stop!" he shouts over the cheering.

Zeke waves a hand at me. "Hey, you're a transfer, right? Four?"

"Yeah," I say. "Nice first jump."

I realize, too late, that it might be a sore spot for him—his moment of triumph, stolen by a misstep and loss of balance. But he just laughs.

"Yeah, not my finest moment," he says.

"Not like anyone else stepped up," the girl at his side says. "I'm Shauna, by the way. Is it true you only had four fears?"

"Hence the name," I say.

"Wow." She nods. She looks impressed, which makes me sit up straighter. "Guess you were born Dauntless."

I shrug, like what she says might be true, even though I'm sure it's not. She doesn't know that I came here to escape the life I was meant for, that I'm fighting so hard to get through initiation so I don't have to admit that I'm an imposter. Abnegation-born, Abnegation result, in a Dauntless haven.

The corners of her mouth turn down, like she's sad about something, but I don't ask what it is.

"How are your fights going?" Zeke asks me.

"All right," I say. I wave a hand over my bruised face. "As you can clearly tell."

"Check it out." Zeke turns his head, showing me a large bruise on the underside of his jaw. "That's thanks to this girl over here."

He indicates Shauna with his thumb.

“He beat me,” Shauna says. “But I got a good shot in, for once. I keep losing.”

“It doesn’t bother you that he hit you?” I say.

“Why would it?” she says.

“I don’t know,” I say. “Because… you’re a girl?”

She raises her eyebrows. “What, you think I can’t take it just like every other initiate, just because I have girl parts?” She gestures to her chest, and I catch myself staring, just for a second, before I remember to look away, my face flushing.

“Sorry,” I say. “I didn’t mean it that way. I’m just not used to this. Any of it.”

“Sure, I get it,” she says, and she doesn’t sound angry. “But you should know that about Dauntless—girl, guy, whatever, it doesn’t matter here. What matters is what you’ve got in your gut.”

Then Amar gets up, putting his hands on his hips in a dramatic stance, and marches toward the open doorway. The train dips down and Amar doesn’t even hold on to anything, he just shifts and sways with the car’s movement. Everyone gets up, and Amar is the first one to jump, launching himself into the night. The others stream out behind him, and I let the people behind me carry me toward the opening. I’m not afraid of the speed of the train, just the heights, but here the train is close to the ground, so when I jump, I do it without fear. I land on two feet, stumbling for a few steps before I stop.

“Look at you, getting your train legs,” Amar says, elbowing me. “Here, have a sip. You look like you need it.”

He holds out the flask.

I’ve never tasted alcohol. The Abnegation don’t drink it, so it wasn’t even available. But I’ve seen how comfortable it seems to make people, and I desperately want to feel like I’m not wrapped up in skin that’s too tight for me to wear, so I don’t hesitate: I take the flask and drink.

The alcohol burns and tastes like medicine, but it goes down fast, leaving me warm.

“Good job,” Amar says, and he moves on to Zeke, hooking his arm around Zeke’s neck and dragging Zeke’s head against his chest. “I see you’ve met my young friend Ezekiel.”

“Just because my mom calls me that doesn’t mean you have to,” Zeke says,

throwing Amar off. He looks at me. “Amar’s grandparents were friends with my parents.”

“Were?”

“Well, my dad’s dead, and so are the grandparents,” Zeke says.

“What about your parents?” I ask Amar.

He shrugs. “Died when I was young. Train accident. Very sad.” He grins like it’s not. “And my grandparents took the jump after I became an official member of Dauntless.” He makes a careening gesture with his hand, suggesting a dive.

“The jump?”

“Oh, don’t tell him while I’m here,” Zeke says, shaking his head. “I don’t want to see the look on his face.”

Amar doesn’t pay attention. “Elderly Dauntless sometimes take a flying leap into the unknown of the chasm when they hit a certain age. It’s that or be factionless,” Amar says. “And my grandpa was really sick. Cancer. Grandma didn’t care to go on without him.”

He tilts his head up to the sky, and his eyes reflect the moonlight. For a moment I feel like he is showing me a secret self, one carefully hidden beneath layers of charm and humor and Dauntless bravado, and it scares me, because that secret self is hard, and cold, and sad.

“I’m sorry,” I say.

“At least this way, I got to say my good-byes,” Amar says. “Most of the time death just comes whether you’ve said good-bye or not.”

The secret self vanishes with the flash of a smile, and Amar jogs toward the rest of the group, flask in hand. I stay back with Zeke. He lopes along, somehow clumsy and graceful at once, like a wild dog.

“What about you?” Zeke says. “You have parents?”

“One,” I say. “My mother died a long time ago.”

I remember the funeral, with all the Abnegation filling our house with quiet chatter, staying with us in our grief. They carried us meals on metal trays, covered with tinfoil, and cleaned our kitchen, and boxed up all my mother’s clothes for us, so there were no traces of her left. I remember them murmuring that she died from complications with another child. But I had a memory of her, a few months before her death, standing in front of her dresser, buttoning up her loose second shirt over the tight undershirt, her stomach flat. I shake my head a

little, banishing the memory. She's dead. It's a child's memory, unreliable.

"And your dad, is he okay with your choice?" he says. "Visiting Day is coming up, you know."

"No," I say distantly. "He's not okay with it at all."

My father will not come on Visiting Day. I'm sure of it. He will never speak to me again.

The Erudite sector is cleaner than any other part of the city, every scrap of trash or rubble cleared from the pavement, every crack in the street shored up with tar. I feel like I need to step carefully rather than mar the sidewalk with my sneakers. The other Dauntless walk along carelessly, the soles of their shoes making slapping sounds like pattering rain.

Every faction headquarters is allowed to have the lights on in its lobby at midnight, but everything else is supposed to be dark. Here, in the Erudite sector, each building that makes up Erudite headquarters is like a pillar of light. The windows we walk past feature the Erudite sitting at long tables, their noses buried in books or screens, or talking quietly to one another. The young and the old mix together at every table, in their impeccable blue clothing, their smooth hair, more than half of them with gleaming spectacles. *Vanity*, my father would say. *They are so concerned with looking intelligent that they make themselves fools for it.*

I pause to watch them. They don't look vain to me. They look like people who make every effort to feel as smart as they are supposed to be. If that means wearing glasses with no prescription, it isn't my place to judge. They are a haven I might have chosen. Instead I chose the haven that mocks them through the windows, that sends Amar into their lobby to cause a stir.

Amar reaches the doors of the central Erudite building and pushes through them. We watch from just outside, snickering. I peer through the doors at the portrait of Jeanine Matthews hanging on the opposite wall. Her yellow hair is pulled back tight from her face, her blue jacket buttoned just beneath her throat. She's pretty, but that's not the first thing I notice about her. Her sharpness is.

And beyond that—it could just be my imagination, but does she look a little afraid?

Amar runs into the lobby, ignoring the protests of the Erudite at the front desk, and yells, "Hey, Noses! Check this out!"

All the Erudite in the lobby look up from their books or screens, and the Dauntless burst into laughter as Amar turns, mooning them. The Erudite behind the desk run around it to catch him, but Amar pulls up his pants and runs toward us. We all start running, too, sprinting away from the doors.

I can't help it—I'm laughing too, and it surprises me, how my stomach aches with it. Zeke runs at my shoulder, and we go toward the train tracks because there's nowhere else to run. The Erudite chasing us give up after a block, and we all stop in an alley, leaning against the brick to catch our breath.

Amar comes into the alley last, his hands raised, and we cheer for him. He holds up the flask like it's a trophy and points at Shauna.

"Young one," he says. "I dare you to scale the sculpture in front of the Upper Levels building."

She catches the flask when he throws it and takes a swig.

"You got it," she says, grinning.

By the time they get to me, almost everyone is drunk, lurching with each footstep and laughing at every joke, no matter how stupid it is. I feel warm, despite the cool air, but my mind is still sharp, taking in everything about the night, the rich smell of marsh and the sound of bubbling laughter, the blue-black of the sky and the silhouette of each building against it. My legs are sore from running and walking and climbing, and still I haven't fulfilled a dare.

We're close to Dauntless headquarters now. The buildings are sagging where they stand.

"Who's left?" Lauren says, her bleary eyes skipping over each face until she reaches mine. "Ah, the numerically named initiate from Abnegation. Four, is it?"

"Yeah," I say.

"A Stiff?" The boy who sat so comfortably beside Amar looks at me, his words running together. He's the one holding the flask, the one determining the next dare. So far I've watched people scale tall structures, I've watched them jump into dark holes and wander into empty buildings to retrieve a faucet or a desk chair, I've watched them run naked down alleyways and stick needles through their earlobes without numbing them first. If I was asked to concoct a dare, I would not be able to think of one. It's a good thing I'm the last person to

go.

I feel a tremor in my chest, nerves. What will he tell me to do?

“Stiffs are uptight,” the boy says plainly, like it’s a fact. “So, to prove you’re really Dauntless now… I dare you to get a tattoo.”

I see their ink, creeping over wrists and arms and shoulders and throats. The metal studs through ears and noses and lips and eyebrows. My skin is blank, healed, whole. But it doesn’t match who I am—I should be scarred, marked, the way they are, but marked with memories of pain, scarred with the things I have survived.

I lift a shoulder. “Fine.”

He tosses me the flask, and I drain it, though it stings my throat and lips and tastes bitter as poison.

We start toward the Pire.

Tori is wearing a pair of men’s underwear and a T-shirt when she answers the door, her hair hanging over the left half of her face. She raises an eyebrow at me. We clearly woke her from a sound sleep, but she doesn’t seem angry—just a little grouchy.

“Please?” Amar says. “It’s for a game of Dare.”

“Are you sure you want a tired woman to tattoo your skin, Four? This ink doesn’t wash off,” she says to me.

“I trust you,” I say. I’m not going to back out of the dare, not after watching everyone else do theirs.

“Right.” Tori yawns. “The things I do for Dauntless tradition. I’ll be right back, I’m going to put on pants.”

She closes the door between us. On the way here I racked my brain for what I might want tattooed, and where. I couldn’t decide—my thoughts were too muddled. Still are.

A few seconds later Tori emerges wearing pants, her feet still bare. “If I get in trouble for turning on lights at this hour, I’m going to claim it was vandals and name names.”

“Got it,” I say.

“There’s a back way. Come on,” she says, beckoning to us. I follow her

through her dark living room, which is tidy except for the sheets of paper spread over her coffee table, each one marked with a different drawing. Some of them are harsh and simple, like most of the tattoos I've seen, and others are more intricate, detailed. Tori must be the Dauntless approximation of an artist.

I pause by the table. One of the pages depicts all the faction symbols, without the circles that usually bind them. The Amity tree is at the bottom, forming a kind of root system for the eye of Erudite and the Candor scales. Above them, the Abnegation hands seem almost to cradle the Dauntless flames. It's like the symbols are growing into one another.

The others have moved past me. I jog to catch up, walking through Tori's kitchen—also immaculate, though the appliances are out of date, the faucet rusted, and the refrigerator door held closed by a large clamp. The back door is open and leads into a short, dank hallway that opens up to the tattoo parlor.

I've walked past it before but never cared to go inside, sure I wasn't going to find a reason to attack my own body with needles. I guess I have one now—those needles are a way for me to separate myself from my past, not just in the eyes of my fellow Dauntless, but in my own eyes, every time I look at my own reflection.

The room's walls are covered in pictures. The wall by the door is entirely dedicated to Dauntless symbols, some black and simple, some colorful and barely recognizable. Tori turns on the light over one of the chairs and arranges her tattoo needles on a tray next to it. The other Dauntless gather on benches and chairs around us, like they're getting ready to see a performance of some kind. My face gets hot.

"Basic principles of tattooing," Tori says. "The less cushion under the skin, or the bonier you are in a particular area, the more painful the tattoo. For your first one it's probably best to get it done on, I don't know, your arm, or—"

"Your butt cheek," Zeke suggests, with a snort of laughter.

Tori shrugs. "It wouldn't be the first time. Or the last."

I look at the boy who dared me. He raises his eyebrows at me. I know what he expects, what they all expect—that I'll get something small, on an arm or a leg, something that's easily hidden. I glance at the wall with all the symbols. One of the drawings in particular catches my eye, an artistic rendering of the flames themselves.

“That one,” I say, pointing to it.

“Got it,” Tori says. “Got a location in mind?”

I have a scar—a faint gouge in my knee from when I fell down on the sidewalk as a child. It’s always seemed stupid to me that none of the pain I’ve experienced has left a visible mark; sometimes, without a way to prove it to myself, I began to doubt that I had lived through it at all, with the memories becoming hazy over time. I want to have some kind of reminder that while wounds heal, they don’t disappear forever—I carry them everywhere, always, and that is the way of things, the way of scars.

That is what this tattoo will be, for me: a scar. And it seems fitting that it should document the worst memory of pain that I have.

I rest my hand on my rib cage, remembering the bruises that were, and the fear I felt for my own life. My father had a series of bad nights right after my mother died.

“You sure?” Tori says. “That’s maybe the most painful place possible.”

“Good,” I say, and I sit down in the chair.

The crowd of Dauntless cheer and start passing around another flask, this one bigger than the last, and bronze instead of silver.

“So we have a masochist in the chair tonight. Lovely.” Tori sits on the stool next to me and puts on a pair of rubber gloves. I sit forward, lifting up the hem of my shirt, and she soaks a cotton ball in rubbing alcohol, covering my ribs with it. She’s about to move away when she frowns and pulls at my skin with her fingertip. Rubbing alcohol bites into the still-healing skin of my back, and I wince.

“How did this happen, Four?” she asks.

I look up and notice that Amar is staring at me, frowning.

“He’s an initiate,” Amar says. “They’re *all* cut and bruised at this point. You should see them all limping around together. It’s sad.”

“I have a giant one on my knee,” volunteers Zeke. “It’s the sickest blue color __”

Zeke rolls up his pant leg to display his bruise to the others, and they all start sharing their own bruises, their own scars: “Got this when they *dropped* me after the zip line.” “Well, I’ve got a stab wound from your grip slipping during knife-throwing, so I think we’re even.” Tori eyes me for a few seconds, and I’m sure

she doesn’t accept Amar’s explanation for the marks on my back, but she doesn’t ask again. Instead, she turns on the needle, filling the air with the sound of buzzing, and Amar tosses me the flask.

The alcohol is still burning my throat when the tattoo needle touches my ribs, and I wince, but somehow I don’t mind the pain.

I relish it.

The next day, when I wake up, everything hurts. Especially my head.

Oh God, my head.

Eric is perched on the edge of the mattress next to mine, tying his shoelaces. The skin around the rings in his lip looks red—he must have pierced it recently. I haven’t been paying attention.

He looks at me. “You look like hell.”

I sit up, and the sudden motion makes my head throb more.

“I hope that when you lose, you don’t use it as an excuse,” he says, sneering a little. “Because I would have beat you anyway.”

He gets up, stretches, and leaves the dormitory. I cradle my head in my hands for a few seconds, then get up to take a shower. I have to stand with half my body under the water and half out, because of the ink on my side. The Dauntless stayed with me for hours, waiting for the tattoo to be finished, and by the time we left, all the flasks were empty. Tori gave me a thumbs-up as I stumbled out of the tattoo parlor, and Zeke slung an arm across my shoulders and said, “I think you’re Dauntless now.”

Last night I found myself relishing the words. Now I wish I could have my old head back, the one that was focused and determined and didn’t feel like tiny men with hammers had taken up residence inside it. I let the cool water spill over me for a few more minutes, then check the clock on the bathroom wall.

Ten minutes to the fight. I’m going to be late. And Eric is right—I’m going to lose.

I push my hand into my forehead as I run toward the training room, my feet halfway out of my shoes. When I burst through the doors, the transfer initiates and some of the Dauntless-born initiates are standing around the edge of the room. Amar is in the center of the arena, checking his watch. He gives me a

pointed look.

“Nice of you to join us,” he says. I see in his raised eyebrows that the camaraderie of the night before does not extend to the training room. He points at my shoes. “Tie your shoes, and don’t waste any more of my time.”

Across the arena, Eric cracks each one of his knuckles, carefully, staring at me the whole time. I tie my shoes in a hurry and tuck the ends of the laces under so they don’t get in my way.

As I face Eric I can feel only the pounding of my heart, the throbbing of my head, the burning in my side. Then Amar steps back, and Eric rushes forward, fast, his fist hitting me square in the jaw.

I stumble back, holding my face. All the pain runs together in my mind. I put up my hands to block the next punch. My head throbs and I see his leg move. I try to twist away from the kick, but his foot hits me hard in the ribs. I feel a sensation like an electric shock through the left side of my body.

“This is easier than I thought it would be,” Eric says.

I feel hot with embarrassment, and in the arrogant opening he leaves me, I uppercut him in the stomach.

The flat of his hand smacks into my ear, making it ring, and I lose my balance, my fingers touching the ground to steady me.

“You know,” Eric says quietly, “I think I’ve figured out your real name.”

My eyes are blurry with half a dozen different kinds of pain. I didn’t know it came in so many varieties, like flavors, acid and fire and ache and sting.

He hits me again, this time trying for my face but getting my collarbone instead. He shakes out his hand and says, “Should I tell them? Get everything out in the open?”

He has my name between his teeth, *Eaton*, a far more threatening weapon than his feet or his elbows or his fists. The Abnegation say, in hushed voices, that the problem with many Erudite is their selfishness, but I think it is their arrogance, the pride they take in knowing things that others do not. In that moment, overwhelmed with fear, I recognize it as Eric’s weakness. He doesn’t believe that I can hurt him as much as he can hurt me. He believes that I am everything he assumed me to be at the outset, humble and selfless and passive.

I feel my pain disappear into rage, and I grab his arm to hold him in place as I swing at him again, and again, and again. I don’t even see where I’m hitting

him; I don’t see or feel or hear anything. I am empty, alone, nothing.

Then I finally hear his screams, see him clutching his face with both hands. Blood soaks his chin, runs into his teeth. He tries to wrench away but I am holding on as hard as I can, holding on for dear life.

I kick him hard in the side, so he topples. Over his clutched hands, I meet his eyes.

His eyes are glassy and unfocused. His blood is bright against his skin. It occurs to me that I did that, it was me, and fear creeps back in, a different kind of fear this time. A fear of what I am, what I might be becoming.

My knuckles throb, and I walk out of the arena without being dismissed.

The Dauntless compound is a good place to recover, dark and full of secret, quiet places.

I find a hallway near the Pit and sit against the wall, letting the cold from the stone seep into me. My headache has returned, as well as various aches and pains from the fight, but I barely register any of them. My knuckles are tacky with blood, Eric’s. I try to rub it off but it’s been drying too long. I won the fight, and that means my place in Dauntless is secure for the time being—I should feel satisfied, not afraid. Maybe even happy, to finally belong somewhere, to be among people whose eyes don’t skirt mine at the lunch table. But I know that for every good thing that comes along, there is always a cost. What is the cost of being Dauntless?

“Hey.” I look up and see Shauna knocking on the stone wall like it’s a door. She grins. “This is not quite the victory dance I was expecting.”

“I don’t dance,” I say.

“Yeah, I should have known better.” She sits across from me, her back against the opposite wall. She draws her knees up to her chest and wraps her arms around them. Our feet are just a few inches apart. I don’t know why I notice that. Well, yes I do—she’s a girl.

I don’t know how to talk to girls. Especially not a Dauntless girl. Something tells me you can never know what to expect from a Dauntless girl.

“Eric’s in the hospital,” she says, and there’s a grin on her face. “They think you broke his nose. You definitely knocked out one of his teeth.”

I look down. I knocked out someone's tooth?

"I was wondering if you could help me," she says, nudging my shoe with her toe.

As I suspected: Dauntless girls are unpredictable. "Help you with what?"

"Fighting. I'm no good at it. I keep getting humiliated in the arena." She shakes her head. "I have to face off with this girl in two days, her name's Ashley but she makes everyone call her Ash." Shauna rolls her eyes. "You know, Dauntless flames, ash, whatever. Anyway, she's one of the best people in our group, and I'm afraid she's going to kill me. Like actually kill me."

"Why do you want my help?" I say, suddenly suspicious. "Because you know I'm a Stiff and we're supposed to help people?"

"What? No, of course not," she says. Her eyebrows furrow in confusion. "I want your help because you're the best in *your* group, obviously."

I laugh. "No, I'm not."

"You and Eric were the only undefeated ones and you just beat him, so yeah, you are. Listen, if you don't want to help me, all you have to do is—"

"I'll help," I say. "I just don't really know how."

"We'll figure it out," she says. "Tomorrow afternoon? Meet you in the arena?"

I nod. She grins, gets up, and starts to leave. But a few steps away and she turns around, moving backward down the hallway.

"Quit sulking, Four," she says. "Everyone's impressed with you. Embrace it."

I watch her silhouette turn the corner at the end of the hallway. I was so disturbed by the fight that I never thought about what beating Eric meant—that I am now first in my initiate class. I may have chosen Dauntless as a haven, but I'm not just surviving here, I'm excelling.

I stare at Eric's blood on my knuckles and smile.

The next morning I decide to take a risk. I sit with Zeke and Shauna at breakfast. Shauna mostly just slumps over her food and answers questions in grunts. Zeke yawns into his coffee, but he points out his family to me: his little brother, Uriah, sits at one of the other tables with Lynn, Shauna's little sister. His mother, Hana

—the tamest Dauntless I've ever seen, her faction indicated only by the color of her clothing—is still in the breakfast line.

"Do you miss living at home?" I say.

The Dauntless have a proclivity for baked goods, I've noticed. There are always at least two different kinds of cake at dinner, and a mountain of muffins rests on a table near the end of the breakfast line. When I got there, all the good flavors were gone, so I was left with bran.

"Not really," he says. "I mean, they're right there. Dauntless-born initiates aren't really supposed to talk to family until Visiting Day, but I know if I really needed something, they'd be there."

I nod. Beside him, Shauna's eyes close, and she falls asleep with her chin resting on her hand.

"What about you?" he says. "Do you miss home?"

I am about to answer no, but right at that moment Shauna's chin slips off her hand and she smashes her chocolate muffin with her face. Zeke laughs so hard he cries, and I can't help but grin as I finish my juice.

Later that morning I meet Shauna in the training room. She has her short hair pulled back from her face, and her Dauntless boots, normally untied and flapping when she walks, laced up tight. She's punching at nothing, pausing between each hit to adjust her position, and for a moment I watch her, not sure how to start. I only just learned to throw a punch myself; I'm hardly qualified to teach her anything.

But as I watch her, I start to notice things. How she stands with her knees locked, how she doesn't hold up a hand to protect her jaw, how she punches from her elbow instead of throwing her body weight behind each hit. She stops, wiping her forehead with the back of her hand. When she notices me, she jumps like she just touched a live wire.

"Rule number one for not being creepy," she says. "Announce your presence in a room if another person doesn't see you come in."

"Sorry," I say. "I was coming up with some pointers for you."

"Oh." She chews on the inside of her cheek. "What are they?"

I tell her what I noticed, and then we face off in the fighting arena. We begin

slowly, pulling back on each hit so we don't hurt each other. I have to keep tapping her elbow with my fist to remind her to keep her hand up by her face, but a half hour later, she's at least moving better than she was before.

"This girl you have to fight tomorrow," I say. "I'd get her right here, in the jaw." I touch the underside of my jaw. "A good uppercut should do it. Let's practice those."

She squares off, and I notice with satisfaction that her knees are bent, and there's a bounce in her stance that wasn't there before. We shuffle around each other for a few seconds, and then she punches up. As she does, her left hand drops from her face. I block the first punch, then start to attack the hole she left in her guard. At the last second, I stop my fist in the air and raise my eyebrows at her.

"You know, maybe I would learn my lesson if you actually hit me," she says, straightening. Her skin is flushed from exertion, and sweat shines along her hairline. Her eyes are bright and critical. It occurs to me, for the first time, that she's pretty. Not in the way I usually think of—she's not soft, delicate—but in a way that's strong, capable.

I say, "I would really rather not."

"What you think is some kind of lingering Abnegation chivalry is really kind of insulting," she says. "I can take care of myself. I can take a little pain."

"It's not that," I say. "It's not because you're a girl. I just… I'm not really into violence for no reason."

"Some kind of Stiff thing, huh?" she says.

"Not really. Stiffs aren't into violence, period. Put a Stiff in Dauntless and they just let themselves get punched a lot," I say, letting myself smile a little. I'm not used to using Dauntless slang, but it feels good to claim it as my own, to let myself relax into their rhythms of speech. "It just doesn't feel like a game to me, that's all."

It's the first time I've expressed that to anyone. I know why it doesn't feel like a game—because for so long, it was my reality, it was my waking and my sleeping. Here, I've learned to defend myself, I've learned to be stronger, but one thing I haven't learned, won't let myself learn, is how to enjoy causing someone else pain. If I'm going to become Dauntless, I'm going to do it on my terms, even if that means that a part of me will always be a Stiff.

“All right,” she says. “Let’s go again.”

We spar until she’s mastered the uppercut and we’ve almost missed dinner. When we leave, she thanks me, and casually, she wraps an arm around me. It’s just a quick embrace, but she laughs at how tense it makes me.

“How to Be Dauntless: An Introductory Course,” she says. “Lesson one: It’s okay to hug your friends here.”

“We’re friends?” I say, only halfway joking.

“Oh, shut up,” she says, and she jogs down the hallway toward the dormitory.

The next morning, all the transfer initiates follow Amar past the training room to a grim hallway with a heavy door at the end of it. He tells us to sit against the wall, and then disappears behind the door without saying anything. I check my watch. Shauna will be fighting any minute now—it’s taking the Dauntless-borns longer to get through the first phase of initiation than us, since there are more of them.

Eric sits as far away from me as he can, and I am glad for the distance. The night after I fought him, it occurred to me that he might tell everyone that I’m Marcus Eaton’s son just to spite me for beating him, but he hasn’t done it. I wonder if he’s just waiting for the right opportunity to strike, or if he’s holding back for another reason. No matter what, it’s probably better for me to stay away from him as much as possible.

“What do you think is in there?” Mia, the Amity transfer, sounds nervous.

No one answers. For some reason I don’t feel nervous. There’s nothing behind that door that can hurt me. So when Amar steps into the hallway again and calls my name first, I don’t cast desperate looks at my fellow initiates. I just follow him in.

The room is dim and grungy, with just a chair and a computer in it. The chair is reclined, like the one I sat in for my aptitude test. The computer screen is bright and running a program that amounts to lines of dark text on a white background. When I was younger, I used to volunteer at the school in the computer labs, maintaining the facilities, and sometimes even fixing the computers themselves when they failed. I worked under the supervision of an

Erudite woman named Katherine, and she taught me far more than she had to, happy to share her knowledge with someone who was willing to listen. So I know, looking at that code, what kind of program I'm looking at, though I would never be able to do much with it.

"A simulation?" I say.

"The less you know, the better," he says. "Sit down."

I sit, leaning back in the chair and setting my arms on the armrests. Amar prepares a syringe, holding it up to the light to make sure the vial is locked in place. He sticks the needle into my neck without warning and presses down on the plunger. I flinch.

"Let's see which of your four fears comes up first," he says. "You know, I'm getting kind of bored of them, you might try to show me something new."

"I'll work on it," I say.

The simulation swallows me.

I am sitting on the hard wooden bench at an Abnegation kitchen table, an empty plate in front of me. All the shades are drawn over the windows, so the only light comes from the bulb dangling over the table, its filament glowing orange. I stare at the dark fabric covering my knee. *Why am I wearing black instead of gray?*

When I lift my head, he—Marcus—is across from me. For a split second, he's just like the man I saw across the Choosing Ceremony hall not long ago, his eyes dark blue to match mine, his mouth pressed into a frown.

I'm wearing black because I'm Dauntless now, I remind myself. *So why am I in an Abnegation house, sitting across from my father?*

I see the outline of the lightbulb reflected in my empty plate. *This must be a simulation*, I think.

Then the light above us flickers, and he turns into the man I always see in my fear landscape, a twisted monster with pits for eyes and a wide, empty mouth. He lunges across the table with both hands outstretched, and instead of fingernails he has razor blades embedded in his fingertips.

He swipes at me, and I lurch back, falling off the bench. I scramble on the floor for my balance, then run into the living room. There is another Marcus there, reaching for me from the wall. I search for the front door, but someone has

sealed it with cinder blocks, trapping me.

Gasping, I sprint up the stairs. At the top I trip, and sprawl on the wooden floor in the hallway. A Marcus opens the closet door from the inside; another one walks out of my parents' bedroom; yet another one claws across the floor from the bathroom. I shrink back against the wall. The house is dark. There are no windows.

This place is full of him.

Suddenly one of the Marcuses is right in front of me, pressing me to the wall with both hands around my throat. Another one drags his fingernails down my arms, provoking a stinging pain that brings tears to my eyes.

I am paralyzed, panicking.

I swallow air. I can't scream. I feel pain and my pounding heart and I kick as hard as I can, hitting only air. The Marcus with his hands around my throat shoves me up the wall, so my toes drag along the floor. My limbs are limp, like a rag doll's. I can't move.

This place, this place is full of him. *It's not real*, I realize. *It's a simulation. It's just like the fear landscape*.

There are more Marcuses now, waiting below me with their hands outstretched, so I'm staring down at a sea of blades. Their fingers clutch at my legs, cutting me, and I feel a hot trail down the side of my neck as the Marcus who is choking me digs in harder.

Simulation, I remind myself. I try to send life into every one of my limbs. I imagine my blood on fire, racing through me. I slap my hand against the wall, searching for a weapon. One of the Marcuses reaches up, his fingers poised over my eyes. I scream and thrash as the blades dig into my eyelids.

My hands find not a weapon but a doorknob. I twist it, hard, and fall back into another closet. The Marcuses lose their hold on me. In the closet is a window, just big enough for my body. As they chase me into the darkness, I throw my shoulder against the glass, and it shatters. Fresh air fills my lungs.

I sit upright in the chair, gasping.

I put my hands against my throat, on my arms, on my legs, checking for wounds that aren't there. I can still feel the cuts and the unfurling of blood from my veins, but my skin is intact.

My breaths slow down, and with them, my thoughts. Amar is sitting at the

computer, hooked up to the simulation, and he's staring at me.

"What?" I say, breathless.

"You were in there for five minutes," Amar says.

"Is that long?"

"No." He frowns at me. "No, it's not long at all. It's very good, actually."

I put my feet on the floor and hold my head in my hands. I may not have panicked for that long during the simulation, but the image of my warped father trying to claw my eyes out keeps flashing in my mind, causing my heart rate to spike again and again.

"Is the serum still in effect?" I say, clenching my teeth. "Making me panic?"

"No, it should have gone dormant when you exited the simulation," he says. "Why?"

I shake my hands, which are tingling, like they're going numb. I shake my head. *It wasn't real*, I tell myself. *Let it go.*

"Sometimes the simulation causes lingering panic, depending on what you see in it," Amar says. "Let me walk you back to the dormitory."

"No." I shake my head. "I'll be fine."

He gives me a hard look.

"It wasn't a request," he says. He gets up and opens a door behind the chair. I follow him down a short, dark hallway and into the stone corridors that lead back to the transfer dormitory. The air is cool there, and moist, from being underground. I hear our footsteps echo, and my own breaths, but nothing else.

I think I see something—movement—on my left, and I flinch away from it, pulling back against the wall. Amar stops me, putting his hands on my shoulders so I have to look at his face.

"Hey," he says. "Get it together, Four."

I nod, heat rushing into my face. I feel a deep twinge of shame in my stomach. I am supposed to be Dauntless. I am not supposed to be afraid of monster Marcuses creeping up on me in the dark. I lean against the stone wall and take a deep breath.

"Can I ask you something?" Amar says. I cringe, thinking he's going to ask me about my father, but he doesn't. "How did you get out of that hallway?"

"I opened a door," I say.

"Was there a door behind you the whole time? Is there one in your old

house?”

I shake my head.

Amar’s usually amiable face is serious. “So you created one out of nowhere?”

“Yeah,” I say. “Simulations are all in your head. So my head made a door so I could get out. All I had to do was concentrate.”

“Strange,” he says.

“What? Why?”

“Most initiates can’t make something impossible happen in these simulations, because unlike in the fear landscape, they don’t recognize that they are *in* a simulation,” he says. “And they don’t get out of simulations that fast, as a result.”

I feel my pulse in my throat. I didn’t realize these simulations were supposed to be different from the fear landscape—I thought everyone was aware of this simulation while they were in it. But judging by what Amar is saying, this was supposed to be like the aptitude test, and before the aptitude test, my father warned me against my simulation awareness, coached me to hide it. I still remember how insistent he was, how tense his voice was and how he grabbed my arm a little too hard.

At the time, I thought that he would never speak that way unless he was worried about me. Worried for my safety.

Was he just being paranoid, or is there still something dangerous about being aware during simulations?

“I was like you,” Amar says quietly. “I could change the simulations. I just thought I was the only one.”

I want to tell him to keep it to himself, to protect his secrets. But the Dauntless don’t care about secrets the way the Abnegation do, with their tight-lipped smiles and identical, orderly houses.

Amar is giving me a strange look—eager, like he expects something from me. I shift, uncomfortable.

“It’s probably not something you should brag about,” Amar says. “The Dauntless are all about conformity, just like every other faction. It’s just not as obvious here.”

I nod.

“It’s probably just a fluke,” I say. “I couldn’t do that during my aptitude test. Next time I’ll probably be more normal.”

“Right.” He doesn’t sound convinced. “Well, next time, try not to do anything impossible, all right? Just face your fear in a logical way, a way that would always make sense to you whether you were aware or not.”

“Okay,” I say.

“You’re okay now, right? You can get back to the dorms on your own?”

I want to say that I could always get back to the dormitory on my own; I never needed him to take me there. But I just nod again. He claps me on the shoulder, good-naturedly, and walks back to the simulation room.

I can’t help but think that my father wouldn’t have warned me against displaying my simulation awareness just because of faction norms. He scolded me for embarrassing him in front of the Abnegation all the time, but he had never hissed warnings in my ears or taught me how to avoid a misstep before. He never stared at me, wide-eyed, until I promised to do as he said.

It feels strange, to know that he must have been trying to protect me. Like he’s not quite the monster I imagine, the one I see in my worst nightmares.

As I start toward the dorms, I hear something at the end of the hallway we just walked down—something like quiet, shuffling footsteps, moving in the opposite direction.

Shauna runs up to me in the cafeteria at dinner and punches me hard in the arm. She’s wearing a smile so wide it looks like it’s cutting into her cheeks. There’s some swelling just beneath her right eye—she’ll have a black eye later.

“I won!” she says. “I did what you said—got her right in the jaw within the first sixty seconds, and it totally threw her off her game. She still hit me in the eye because I let my guard down, but after that I pummeled her. She has a bloody nose. It was awesome.”

I grin. I’m surprised by how satisfying it is, to teach someone how to do something and then to hear that it actually worked.

“Well done,” I say.

“I couldn’t have done it without your help,” she says. Her smile changes, softens, less giddy and more sincere. She stands on her tiptoes and kisses my

cheek.

I stare at her as she pulls away. She laughs and drags me toward the table where Zeke and some of the other Dauntless-born initiates sit. My problem, I realize, isn't that I'm a Stiff, it's that I don't know what these gestures of affection mean to the Dauntless. Shauna is pretty, and funny, and in Abnegation I would go over to her house for dinner with her family if I was interested in her, I would find out what volunteering project she was working on and insinuate myself into it. In Dauntless I have no idea how to go about that, or how to know if I even like her that way.

I decide not to let it distract me, at least not now. I get a plate of food and sit down to eat it, listening to the others talk and laugh together. Everyone congratulates Shauna on her win, and they point out the girl she beat up, sitting at one of the other tables, her face still swollen. At the end of the meal, when I'm poking at a piece of chocolate cake with my fork, a pair of Erudite women walk into the room.

It takes a lot to make the Dauntless go quiet. Even the sudden appearance of the Erudite doesn't quite do it—there are still mutters everywhere, like the distant sound of running footsteps. But gradually, as the Erudite sit down with Max and nothing else happens, conversations pick up again. I don't participate in them. I keep stabbing the cake with the fork tines, watching.

Max stands and approaches Amar. They have a tense conversation between the tables, and then they start walking in my direction. Toward *me*.

Amar beckons to me. I leave my almost-empty tray behind.

"You and I have been called in for an evaluation," Amar says. His perpetually smiling mouth is now a flat line, his animated voice a monotone.

"Evaluation?" I say.

Max smiles at me, a little. "Your fear simulation results were a little abnormal. Our Erudite friends behind us—" I look over his shoulder at the Erudite women. With a start, I realize that one of them is Jeanine Matthews, representative of Erudite. She's dressed in a crisp blue suit, with a pair of spectacles dangling from a chain around her neck, a symbol of Erudite vanity pushed so far as to be illogical. Max continues, "Will observe another simulation to make sure that the abnormal result wasn't an error in the simulation program. Amar will take you all to the fear simulation room now."

I feel my father's fingers clamped around my arm, hear his hissing voice, warning me not to do anything strange in my aptitude test simulation. I feel tingling in my palms, the sign that I'm about to panic. I can't speak, so I just look at Max, and then at Amar, and nod. I don't know what it means, to be aware during a simulation, but I know it can't be good. I know that Jeanine Matthews would never come here just to observe my simulation if something wasn't seriously wrong with me.

We walk to the fear simulation room without speaking, Jeanine and her assistant—I'm assuming—talking quietly behind us. Amar opens the door and lets us file in.

"I'll go get the extra equipment so you can observe," Amar says. "Be right back."

Jeanine paces around the room with a thoughtful expression. I'm wary of her, as all Abnegation are, taught to distrust Erudite vanity, Erudite greed. It occurs to me, though, as I watch her, that what I was taught might not be right. The Erudite woman who taught me how to take apart a computer when I was volunteering in the computer labs at school wasn't greedy or vain; maybe Jeanine Matthews isn't, either.

"You were logged into the system as 'Four,'" Jeanine says after a few seconds. She stops pacing, folding her hands in front of her. "Which I found perplexing. Why do you not go by 'Tobias' here?"

She already knows who I am. Well, of course she does. She knows everything, doesn't she? I feel like my insides are shriveling up, collapsing into each other. She knows my name, she knows my father, and if she's seen one of my fear simulations, she knows some of the darkest parts of me, too. Her clear, almost watery eyes touch mine, and I look away.

"I wanted a clean slate," I say.

She nods. "I can appreciate that. Especially given what you've gone through."

She sounds almost… *gentle*. I bristle at her tone, staring her straight in the face. "I'm fine," I say coldly.

"Of course you are." She smiles a little.

Amar wheels a cart into the room. It carries more wires, electrodes, computer parts. I know what I'm supposed to do; I sit down in the reclining chair and put

my arms on the armrests as the others hook themselves up to the simulation. Amar approaches me with a needle, and I stay still as it pinches my throat.

I close my eyes, and the world falls away again.

When I open my eyes, I am standing on the roof of an impossibly high building, right near the ledge. Beneath me is the hard pavement, the streets all empty, no one around to help me down. Wind buffets me from all angles, and I tilt back, falling on my back on the gravel roof.

I don't even like being up here, seeing the wide, empty sky around me, reminding me that I am at the tallest point in the city. I remember that Jeanine Matthews is watching; I throw myself against the door to the roof, trying to pull it open as I form a strategy. My usual way to face this fear would be to leap off the ledge of the building, knowing that it's just a simulation and I won't actually die. But someone else in this simulation would never do that; they would find a safe way to get down.

I evaluate my options. I can try to get this door open, but there are no tools that will help me do that around here, just the gravel roof and the door and the sky. I can't create a tool to get through the door, because that's exactly the kind of simulation manipulation that Jeanine is probably looking for. I back up, kicking the door hard with my heel, and it doesn't budge.

My heart pounding in my throat, I walk to the ledge again. Instead of looking all the way down at the minuscule sidewalks beneath me, I look at the building itself. There are windows with ledges beneath me, hundreds of them. The fastest way down, the most Dauntless way, is to scale the side of the building.

I put my face in my hands. I know this isn't real, but it feels real, the wind whistling in my ears, crisp and cool, the concrete rough beneath my hands, the sound of the gravel scattered by my shoes. I put one leg over the ledge, shuddering, and turn to face the building as I lower myself down, one leg at a time, until I'm hanging by my fingertips from the ledge.

Panic bubbles up inside me, and I scream into my teeth. *Oh God*. I hate heights—I *hate* them. I blink tears from my eyes, internally blaming them on the wind, and feel with my toes for the window ledge beneath me. Finding it, I feel for the top of the window with one hand, and press up to keep my balance as I

lower myself onto the balls of my feet on the windowsill below me.

My body tilts back, over the empty space, and I scream again, clenching my teeth so hard they squeak.

I have to do that again. And again. And again.

I bend, holding the top of the window with one hand and the bottom with the other. When I have a good grip, I slide my toes down the side of the building, listening to them scrape on the stone, and let myself dangle again.

This time, when I let myself drop onto the other ledge, I don't hold on hard enough with my hands. I lose my footing on the windowsill and tip back. I scramble, scratching at the concrete building with my fingertips, but it's too late; I plummet, and another scream rises up inside me, tearing from my throat. I could create a net beneath me; I could create a rope in the air to save me—no, I shouldn't create anything or they will know what I can do.

I let myself fall. I let myself die.

I wake with pain—created by my mind—singing in every part of my body, screaming, my eyes blurry with tears and terror. I jerk forward, gasping. My body is shaking; I'm ashamed to be acting this way with this audience, but I know that it's a good thing. It will show them that I'm not special—I'm just another reckless Dauntless who thought he could scale a building and failed.

"Interesting," Jeanine says, and I can barely hear her over my own breathing. "I never tire of seeing inside a person's mind—every detail suggests so much."

I put my legs—still shaking—over the edge of the chair and plant my feet on the ground.

"You did well," Amar says. "Your climbing skills are maybe a little wanting, but you still got out of the simulation quickly, like last time."

He smiles at me. I must have succeeded at pretending to be normal, because he doesn't look worried anymore.

I nod.

"Well, it appears that your abnormal test result was a program error. We will have to investigate the simulation program to find the flaw," Jeanine says. "Now, Amar. I'd like to see one of *your* fear simulations, if you wouldn't mind obliging."

"Mine? Why mine?"

Jeanine's mild smile doesn't change. "Our information suggests that you

were not alarmed by Tobias's abnormal result—that you were quite familiar with it, in fact. So I would like to see if that familiarity comes from experience."

"Your information," Amar says. "Information from where?"

"An initiate came forward to express his concerns for your and Tobias's well-being," Jeanine says. "I would like to respect his privacy. Tobias, you may leave now. Thank you for your assistance."

I look at Amar. He nods a little. I push myself to my feet, still a little unsteady, and walk out, leaving the door cracked open so I can stay and eavesdrop. But as soon as I'm in the hallway, Jeanine's assistant pushes the door shut, and I can't hear anything behind it, even when I press my ear to it.

An initiate came forward to express his concerns—and I'm sure I know who that initiate is. Our only former Erudite: Eric.

For a week, it seems that nothing will come of Jeanine Matthews's visit. All the initiates, Dauntless-born and transfer alike, go through fear simulations every day, and every day, I allow myself to be consumed by my own fears: heights, confinement, violence, Marcus. Sometimes they blur together, Marcus at the top of tall buildings, violence in confined spaces. I always wake half-delirious, shaking, embarrassed that even though I am the initiate with only four fears, I am also the one who can't dispel them when the simulations are done. They creep up on me when I least expect them, filling my sleep with nightmares and my waking with shudders and paranoia. I grind my teeth, I jump at small noises, my hands go numb without warning. I worry that I will go insane before initiation is done.

"You okay?" Zeke asks me at breakfast one morning. "You look… exhausted."

"I'm fine," I say, harsher than I mean to be.

"Oh, clearly," Zeke says, grinning. "It's okay to not be okay, you know."

"Yeah, right," I say, and I force myself to finish my food, even though it all tastes like dust to me, these days. If I have to feel like I'm losing my mind, I'm at least putting on weight—muscle, mostly. It's strange to take up so much space just by existing when I used to disappear so easily. It makes me feel just a little stronger, a little more stable.

Zeke and I put our trays away. When we're on our way out to the Pit, Zeke's little brother—Uriah is his name, I remember—runs up to us. He's taller than Zeke already, with a bandage behind his ear that covers up a fresh tattoo. Usually he looks like he's constantly on the verge of making a joke, but not right now. Right now he just looks stunned.

"Amar," he says, a little breathless. "Amar is…" He shakes his head. "Amar is dead."

I laugh a little. Distantly I'm aware that that's not an appropriate reaction, but I can't help it. "What? What do you mean, he's *dead*?"

"A Dauntless woman found a body on the ground near the Pire early this morning," Uriah says. "They just identified it. It was Amar. He… he must have…"

"Jumped?" Zeke says.

"Or fell, no one knows," Uriah says.

I move toward the paths climbing the walls of the Pit. Usually I almost press my body to the wall when I do this, afraid of the height, but this time I don't even think about what's below me. I brush past running, shrieking children and the people going into shops, coming out of them. I climb the staircase that dangles from the glass ceiling.

A crowd is gathered in the lobby of the Pire. I elbow my way through it. Some people curse at me, or elbow me back, but I don't really notice. I make my way to the edge of the room, to the glass walls above the streets that surround the Dauntless compound. Out there, there's an area sectioned off with tape, and a streak of dark red on the pavement.

I stare at the streak for a long time, until I feel myself comprehending that that streak comes from Amar's blood, from his body colliding with the ground.

Then I walk away.

I didn't know Amar well enough to feel grief, in the way I've taught myself to think of it. Grief was what I felt after my mother's death, a weight that made it impossible to move through each day. I remember stopping in the middle of simple tasks to rest, and forgetting to start them again, or waking up in the middle of the night with tears on my face.

I don’t carry Amar’s loss like that. I find myself feeling it every now and then, when I remember how he gave me my name, how he protected me when he didn’t even know me. But most of the time I just feel angry. His death had something to do with Jeanine Matthews and the evaluation of his fear simulation, I know it. And that means that whatever happened is also Eric’s responsibility, because he overheard our conversation and told his former faction leader about it.

They killed Amar, the Erudite. But everyone thinks that he jumped, or fell. It’s something a Dauntless would do.

The Dauntless have a memorial service for him that evening. Everyone is drunk by late afternoon. We gather by the chasm, and Zeke passes me a cup of dark liquid, and I swallow it all without thinking. As the liquid calm moves through me, I sway a little on my feet and pass the empty cup back to him.

“Yeah, that seems about right,” Zeke says, staring into the empty cup. “I’m going to get some more.”

I nod and listen to the roar of the chasm. Jeanine Matthews seemed to accept that my own abnormal results were just a problem with the program, but what if that was just an act? What if she comes after me the way she came after Amar? I try to push the thought down where I won’t find it again.

A dark, scarred hand falls on my shoulder, and Max stands beside me.

“You all right, Four?” he says.

“Yeah,” I say, and it’s true, I am all right. I am all right because I’m still on my feet and I’m not yet slurring my words.

“I know Amar took a particular interest in you. I think he saw strong potential.” Max smiles a little.

“I didn’t really know him,” I say.

“He was always a little troubled, a little unbalanced. Not like the rest of the initiates in his class,” Max says. “I think losing his grandparents really took a toll on him. Or maybe the problem was deeper… I don’t know. It could be that he’s better off this way.”

“Better off *dead*?” I say, scowling at him.

“That’s not exactly what I meant,” Max says. “But here in Dauntless, we encourage our members to choose their own paths through life. If this is what he chose… so much the better.” He puts his hand on my shoulder again.

“Depending on how you do in your final examination tomorrow, you and I should talk about the future you’d like to have here in Dauntless. You’re by far our most promising initiate, despite your background.”

I just keep staring at him. I don’t even understand what he’s saying, or why he’s saying it here, at Amar’s memorial service. Is he trying to *recruit* me? For what?

Zeke returns with two cups, and Max melts into the crowd like nothing ever happened. One of Amar’s friends stands on a chair and shouts something meaningless about Amar being brave enough to explore the unknown.

Everyone lifts their glasses and chants his name. *Amar, Amar, Amar*. They say it so many times that it loses all meaning, the noise relentless and repetitive and all-consuming.

Then we all drink. This is how the Dauntless mourn: by chasing grief into the oblivion of alcohol and leaving it there.

All right. Fine. I can chase it too.

My final examination, my fear landscape, is administered by Tori and observed by the Dauntless leaders, including Max. I go somewhere in the middle of the pack of the initiates, and for the first time, I’m not even a little bit nervous. In the fear landscape, everyone is aware during the simulation, so I have nothing to hide. I jab myself in the neck with the needle and let reality disappear.

I’ve done it dozens of times. I find myself at the top of a high building and run off the edge. I get shut into a box and allow myself a brief moment of panic before slamming my shoulder into the right wall, shattering the wood with the impact, impossibly. I pick up a gun and shoot an innocent person—this time a faceless man dressed in Dauntless black—in the head without even thinking about it.

This time, when the Marcuses surround me, they look more like him than they did before. His mouth is a mouth, though his eyes are still empty pits. And when he draws back his arm to hit me, he’s holding a belt, not a barbed chain or some other weapon that can tear me apart piece by piece. I take a few hits, then dive at the nearest Marcus, wrapping my hands around his throat. I punch wildly at his face, and the violence gives me just a brief moment of satisfaction before I

wake up, crouched on the floor of the fear landscape room.

The lights go on in the room beyond this one, so I can see the people inside it. There are two rows of waiting initiates, including Eric, who now has so many piercings in his lip that I find myself daydreaming about yanking them out one by one. Sitting in front of them are the three Dauntless leaders, including Max, all of whom are nodding and smiling. Tori gives me a thumbs-up.

I went into the examination thinking I didn't care anymore, not about passing, not about doing well, not about being Dauntless. But Tori's thumbs-up makes me swell with pride, and I let myself smile a little when I walk out. Amar may be dead, but he always wanted me to do well. I can't say I did it for him—I didn't really do it for anyone, not even myself. But at least I didn't embarrass him.

All the initiates who are finished with their final examination wait for the results in the transfer dormitory, Dauntless-borns and transfers alike. Zeke and Shauna whoop when I come in, and I sit down on the edge of my bed.

"How'd it go?" Zeke asks me.

"Fine," I say. "No surprises. Yours?"

"Awful, but I made it out alive," he says, shrugging. "Shauna got some new ones, though."

"I handled them," Shauna says with exaggerated nonchalance. She has a pillow across her knees, one of Eric's. He won't like that.

Her act breaks, and she grins. "I was pretty awesome."

"Yeah, yeah," Zeke says.

Shauna smacks him with the pillow, right in the face. He snatches it from her.

"What do you want me to say? Yes, you were awesome. Yes, you're the best Dauntless ever. Happy?" He hits her in the shoulder with the pillow. "She's been bragging nonstop since we started the fear sims because she's better at them than I am. It's annoying."

"It's just revenge for how much you bragged during combat training," she says. "'Did you see that great hit I got right in the beginning?' Blah, blah, blah."

She pushes him, and he grabs her wrists. She breaks free and flicks his ear, and they're laughing, fighting.

I may not understand Dauntless affection, but apparently I know flirtation when I see it. I smirk. I guess that resolves the Shauna question, not that it was

really plaguing me. That was probably an answer in and of itself.

We sit around for another hour as the others finish their final exams, trickling in one after another. The last one to come in is Eric, and he just stands in the doorway, looking smug.

“Time to get our results,” he says.

The others all get up and walk past him on their way out. Some of them seem nervous; others look cocky, sure of themselves. I wait until they’re all gone before I walk to the doorway, but I don’t go through it. I stop, crossing my arms and staring at Eric for a few seconds.

“Got something to say?” he says.

“I know it was you,” I say. “Who told the Erudite about Amar. I know.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he says, but it’s obvious that he does.

“You’re the reason he’s dead,” I say. I’m surprised by how quickly the anger comes on. My body quakes with it, my face hot.

“Did you get hit in the head during your exam, Stiff?” Eric says, smirking. “You’re not making any sense.”

I shove him back, hard, against the door. Then I hold him there with one arm —I’m surprised, for a moment, how much stronger I am—and lean in close to his face. “I know it was you,” I say, searching his black eyes for something, anything. I see nothing, just dead-fish eyes, impenetrable. “You’re the reason he’s dead, and you won’t get away with it.”

I let him go and walk down the hallway toward the cafeteria.

The dining hall is *packed* with people dressed in their Dauntless best—all piercings exaggerated by flashier rings, all tattoos on display, even if it means going without clothing. I try to keep my eyes on people’s faces as I navigate through the crush of bodies. The scents of cake and cooked meat and bread and spices are on the air, making my mouth water—I forgot to eat lunch.

When I reach my usual table, I steal a roll from Zeke’s plate when he’s not looking and stand with the others to wait for our results. I hope they won’t make us wait too long. I feel like I’m holding a live wire, my hands twitching and my thoughts frantic, scattered. Zeke and Shauna try to talk to me, but none of us can

shout loud enough over the noise for them to hear me, so we resign ourselves to waiting without speaking.

Max gets on one of the tables and holds up his hands for quiet. He mostly gets it, though even he can't completely silence the Dauntless, some of whom go on talking and joking like nothing ever happened. Still, I can hear him as he gives his speech.

"A few weeks ago, a group of scrawny, scared initiates gave their blood to the coals and made the big jump into Dauntless," Max says. "To be honest, I didn't think any of them would make it through the first day"—he pauses to allow for laughter, and it comes, even though it wasn't a very good joke—"but I'm pleased to announce that this year, all of our initiates attained the required scores necessary to become Dauntless!"

Everyone cheers. Despite the assurance that they won't be cut, Zeke and Shauna exchange nervous looks—the order in which we are ranked still determines what kind of job we can choose in Dauntless. Zeke puts his arm across Shauna's shoulders and squeezes.

I feel suddenly alone again.

"No more delays," Max says. "I know our initiates are jumping out of their skin. So, here are our twelve new Dauntless members!"

The initiates' names appear on a large screen behind him, large enough even for people at the back of the room to see. I search the list automatically for their names:

6. Zeke

7. Ash

8. Shauna

Instantly, some of my tension disappears. I follow the list up, and panic stabs me for just a second when I can't find my own name. But then, there it is, right at the top.

1. Four

2. Eric

Shauna lets out a yell, and she and Zeke crush me into a sloppy hug, their weight almost knocking me to the ground. I laugh and bring my arms up to return the gesture.

Somewhere in the chaos, I dropped my dinner roll—I crush it under my heel

and smile as people surround me, people I don't even know, slapping my shoulders and grinning and saying my name. My name, which is only "Four" now, all suspicions about my origin and my identity forgotten now that I am one of them, now that I am Dauntless.

I am not Tobias Eaton, not anymore, never again. I am Dauntless.

That night, dizzy with excitement and so full of food I can hardly walk, I slip away from the celebration and climb the paths to the top of the Pit, to the lobby of the Pire. I walk out of the doors and suck in a deep breath of the night air, which is cool and refreshing, unlike the hot, close air in the cafeteria.

I walk toward the train tracks, too full of manic energy to stay still. There is a train coming, the light fixed to its front car blinking as it comes toward me. It charges past with power and energy, loud as thunder in my ears. I lean closer to it, for the first time savoring the thrill of fear in my stomach, to be so close to such a dangerous thing.

Then I see something dark and human-like standing in one of the last cars. A tall, lean female figure, leaning out of the car, holding on to one of the handles. For just a second as the blur of the train passes me, I see dark, curly hair and a hooked nose.

She looks almost like my mother.

And then she's gone, gone with the train.