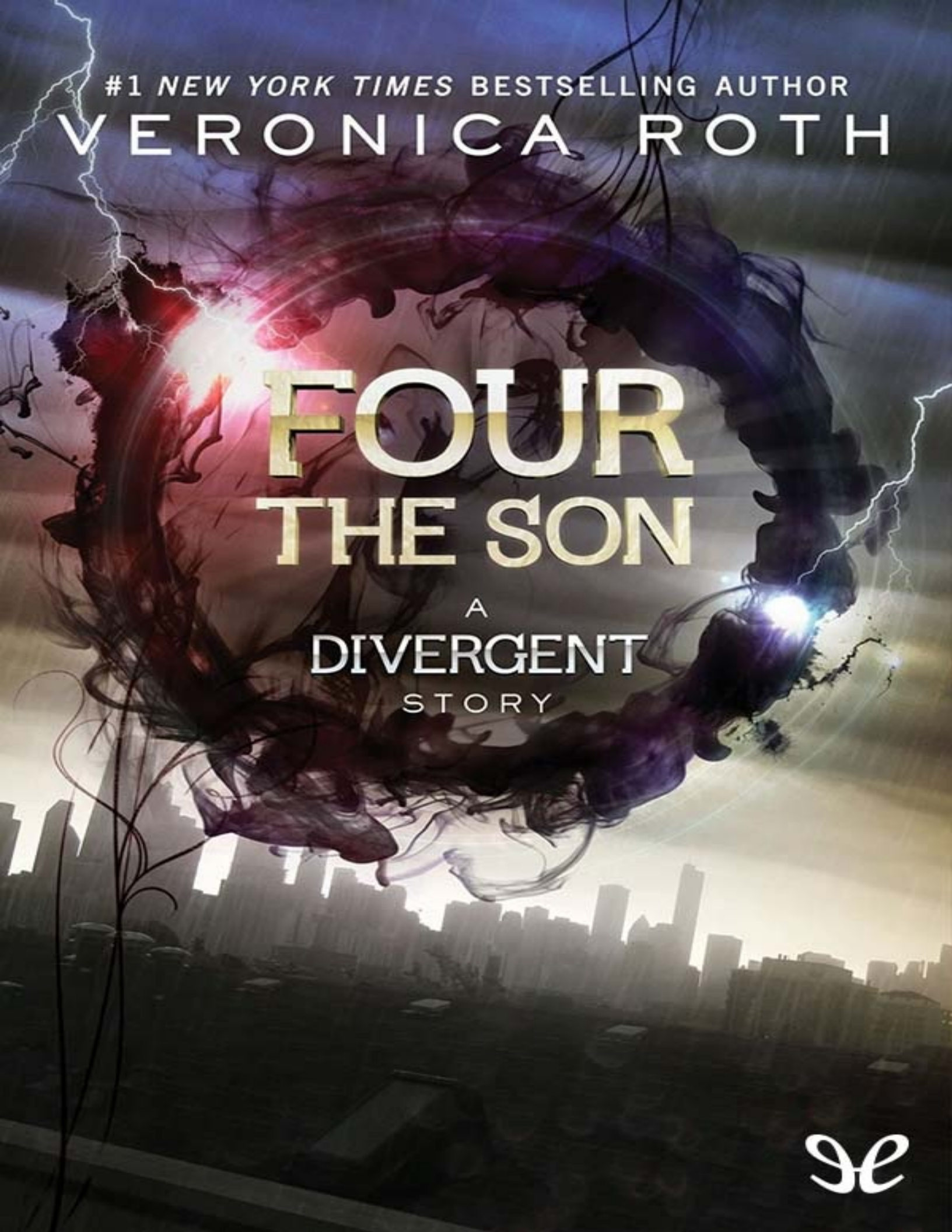
#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR
VERONICA ROTH
FOUR
THE SON
A
DIVERGENT
STORY

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

In “The Son,” Tobias struggles to find a place in the hierarchy of the Dauntless. He also begins to suspect that a foul plan may be brewing within the Dauntless leadership and discovers a truth about his past that could greatly affect his future.



Veronica Roth

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THE SMALL APARTMENT is bare, the floor still streaked with broom strokes at the corners. I don't own anything to fill the space except my Abnegation clothes, which are stuffed into the bottom of the bag at my side. I throw it on the bare mattress and check the drawers beneath the bed for sheets.

The Dauntless lottery was kind to me, because I was ranked first, and because unlike my outgoing fellow initiates, I wanted to live alone. The others, like Zeke and Shauna, grew up surrounded by Dauntless community, and to them the silence and the stillness of living alone would be unbearable.

I make the bed quickly, pulling the top sheet taut, so it almost has corners. The sheets are worn in places, from moths or from prior use, I'm not sure. The blanket, a blue quilt, smells like cedar and dust. When I open the bag that contains my meager possessions, I hold the Abnegation shirt—torn, from where I had to tear away fabric to bind the wound in my hand—in front of me. It looks small—I doubt I could even fit into it if I tried to put it on now, but I don't try, I just fold it and drop it in the drawer.

I hear a knock, and I say, "Come in!" thinking it's Zeke or Shauna. But Max, a tall man with dark skin and bruised knuckles, walks into my apartment, his hands folded in front of him. He surveys the room once and curls his lip with disgust at the gray slacks folded on my bed. The reaction surprises me a little—there aren't many in this city who would choose Abnegation as their faction, but there aren't many who hate it, either. Apparently I've found one of them.

I stand, unsure what to say. There's a faction leader in my apartment.

"Hello," I say.

"Sorry to interrupt," he says. "I'm surprised you didn't choose to room with your fellow former initiates. You did make some friends, didn't you?"

"Yeah," I say. "This just feels more normal."

“I guess it’ll take you some time to let go of your old faction.” Max skims the counter in my small kitchen with a fingertip, looks at the dust he collected, then wipes his hand on his pants. He gives me a critical look—one that tells me to let go of my old faction faster. If I was still an initiate, I might worry about that look, but I’m a Dauntless member now, and he can’t take that away from me, no matter how “Stiff” I seem.

Can he?

“This afternoon you’ll pick your job,” Max says. “Did you have anything in mind?”

“I guess it depends on what’s available,” I say. “I’d like to do something with teaching. Like what Amar did, maybe.”

“I think the first-ranked initiate can do a little better than ‘initiation instructor,’ don’t you?” Max’s eyebrows lift, and I notice that one doesn’t move as much as the other—it’s crossed with a scar. “I came because an opportunity has opened up.”

He pulls a chair out from under the small table near the kitchen counter, turns it, and sits on it backward. His black boots are caked with light-brown mud and the laces are knotted and fraying at the ends. He might be the oldest Dauntless I’ve ever seen, but he may as well be made of steel.

“To be honest, one of my fellow leaders of Dauntless is getting a little old for the job,” Max says. I sit on the edge of the bed. “The remaining four of us think it would be a good idea to get some new blood in leadership. New ideas for new Dauntless members and initiation, specifically. That task is usually given to the youngest leader anyway, so it’s a good fit. We were thinking of drawing from the more recent initiate classes for a training program to see if anyone is a good candidate. You’re a natural choice.”

I feel like my skin is too tight for me, suddenly. Is he really suggesting that at the age of sixteen I could qualify as a Dauntless leader?

“The training program will last at least a year,” Max says. “It will be rigorous and it will test your skills in a lot of areas. We both know you’ll do just fine in the fear landscape portion.”

I nod without thinking. He must not mind my self-assuredness, because he smiles a little.

“You won’t need to go to the job selection meeting later today,” Max says.

“Training will start very soon—tomorrow morning, in fact.”

“Wait,” I say, a thought breaking through the muddle in my mind. “I don’t have a choice?”

“Of course you have a choice.” He looks puzzled. “I just assumed someone like you would rather train to be a leader than spend all day standing around a fence with a gun on his shoulder, or lecturing initiates about good fighting technique. But if I was wrong…”

I don’t know why I’m hesitating. I don’t want to spend my days guarding the fence, or patrolling the city, or even pacing the training room floor. I may have an aptitude for fighting, but that doesn’t mean I want to do it all day, every day. The chance to make a difference in Dauntless appeals to the Abnegation parts of me, the parts that are lingering around, occasionally demanding attention.

I think I just don’t like when I’m not given a choice.

I shake my head. “No, you weren’t wrong.” I clear my throat and try to sound stronger, more determined. “I want to do it. Thank you.”

“Excellent.” Max gets up and cracks one of his knuckles idly, like it’s an old habit. He holds out his hand for me to shake, and I take it, though the gesture is still unfamiliar to me—the Abnegation would never touch each other so casually. “Come to the conference room near my office tomorrow morning at eight. It’s in the Pire. Tenth floor.”

He leaves, scattering bits of dried earth from the bottom of his shoes as he walks out. I sweep them up with the broom that leans against the wall near the door. It’s not until I’m scooting the chair back under the table that I realize—if I become a Dauntless leader, a representative of my faction, I’ll have to come face-to-face with my father again. And not just once but constantly, until he finally retires into Abnegation obscurity.

My fingers start to go numb. I’ve faced my fears so many times in simulations, but that doesn’t mean I’m ready to face them in reality.

“Dude, you missed it!” Zeke is wide-eyed, concerned. “The only jobs left by the end were the gross jobs, like scrubbing toilets! Where *were* you?”

“It’s fine,” I say as I carry my tray back to our table near the doors. Shauna is there with her little sister, Lynn, and Lynn’s friend Marlene. When I first saw

them there, I wanted to turn around and leave immediately—Marlene is too cheerful for me even on a good day—but Zeke had already seen me, so it was too late. Behind us, Uriah jogs to catch up, his plate loaded with more food than he can possibly pack into his stomach. “I didn’t miss anything—Max came to see me earlier.”

As we take our seats at the table, under one of the bright-blue lamps that hang from the wall, I tell him about Max’s offer, careful not to make it sound too impressive. I only just found friends; I don’t want to create jealous tension between us for no reason. When I finish, Shauna leans her face into one of her hands and says to Zeke, “I guess we should have tried harder during initiation, huh?”

“Or killed him before he could take his final test.”

“Or both.” Shauna grins at me. “Congrats, Four. You deserve it.”

I feel everyone’s eyes on me like distinct, powerful beams of heat, and hurry to change the subject. “Where did you guys end up?”

“Control room,” Zeke says. “My mom used to work there, and she taught me most of what I’ll need to know already.”

“I’m in the patrol leadership track… thing,” Shauna says. “Not the most exciting job ever, but at least I’ll get to be outside.”

“Yeah, let’s hear you say that in the dead of winter when you’re trudging through a foot of snow and ice,” Lynn says sourly. She stabs at a pile of mashed potatoes with her fork. “I better do well in initiation. I don’t want to get stuck at the fence.”

“Didn’t we talk about this?” Uriah says. “Don’t say the ‘I’ word until at most two weeks before it happens. It makes me want to throw up.”

I look at the pile of food on his tray. “Stuffing yourself up to your eyeballs with food, though, that’s fine?”

He rolls his eyes at me and bends over his tray to keep eating. I poke at my own food—I haven’t had any appetite since this morning, too worried about tomorrow to stand a full stomach.

Zeke spots someone across the cafeteria. “I’ll be right back.”

Shauna watches him cross the room to greet a few young Dauntless members. They don’t look much older than he is, but I don’t recognize them from initiation, so they must be a year or two older. Zeke says something to the

group—mostly made up of girls—that sends them into fits of laughter, and he jabs one of the girls in the ribs, making her squeal. Beside me, Shauna glowers and misses her mouth with her fork, smearing sauce from the chicken all over her cheek. Lynn snorts into her food, and Marlene kicks her—audibly—under the table.

"So," Marlene says loudly. "Do you know of anyone else who's doing that leadership program, Four?"

"Come to think of it, I didn't see Eric there today, either," Shauna says. "I was hoping he tripped and fell into the chasm, but…"

I shove a bite of food in my mouth and try not to think about it. The blue light makes my hands look blue, too, like the hands of a corpse. I haven't spoken to Eric since I accused him of being indirectly responsible for Amar's death—someone reported Amar's simulation awareness to Jeanine Matthews, leader of Erudite, and as a former Erudite, Eric is the most likely suspect. I haven't decided what I'll do the next time I have to talk to him, either. Beating him up again isn't going to prove that he's a faction traitor. I'll have to find some way to connect his recent activities to the Erudite and take the information to one of the Dauntless leaders—Max, probably, since I know him best.

Zeke walks back to the table and slides into his seat. "Four. What are you doing tomorrow night?"

"I don't know," I say. "Nothing?"

"Not anymore," he says. "You're coming with me on a date."

I choke on my next bite of potatoes. "What?"

"Um, hate to tell you this, big brother," Uriah says, "but you're supposed to go on dates alone, not bring a friend."

"It's a double date, obviously," Zeke says. "I asked Maria out, and she said something about finding a date for her friend Nicole, and I indicated that you would be interested."

"Which one's Nicole?" Lynn says, craning her neck to look at the group of girls.

"The redhead," Zeke says. "So, eight o'clock. You're in, I'm not even asking."

"I don't—" I say. I look at the redheaded girl across the room. She's fair-skinned, with wide eyes smeared with black, and wearing a tight shirt, which

shows off the bend in her waist and… other things my inner Abnegation voice tells me not to notice. I do anyway.

I've never been on a date, thanks to my former faction's strict courtship rituals, involving engaging in acts of service together and maybe—*maybe*—having dinner with someone else's family and helping them clean up afterward. I've never even thought about whether I wanted to date anyone; it was such an impossibility. "Zeke, I've never—"

Uriah frowns and pokes my arm, hard, with one finger. I slap his hand away. *"What?"*

"Oh, nothing," Uriah says cheerfully. "You were just sounding *Stiffer* than usual, so I thought I would check—"

Marlene laughs. "Yeah, right."

Zeke and I exchange a look. We've never explicitly talked about not sharing my faction of origin, but as far as I know, he's never mentioned it to anyone. Uriah knows, but despite his loud mouth, he seems to understand when to withhold information. Still, I'm not sure why Marlene hasn't figured it out—maybe she's not very observant.

"It's not a big deal, Four," Zeke says. He eats his last bite of food. "You'll go, you'll talk to her like she's a normal human being—which she *is*—maybe she'll let you—*gasp—hold her hand—*"

Shauna gets up suddenly, her chair screeching on the stone floor. She tucks her hair behind one ear and walks toward the tray return, head down. Lynn glares at Zeke—which hardly looks different from her normal facial expression—and follows her sister across the cafeteria.

"Okay, you don't have to hold hands with anyone," Zeke says, like nothing happened. "Just go, all right? I'll owe you one."

I look at Nicole. She's sitting at a table near the tray return and laughing at someone else's joke again. Maybe Zeke's right—maybe it's not that big a deal, and maybe this is another way that I can unlearn my Abnegation past and learn to embrace my Dauntless future. And besides—she's pretty.

"Okay," I say. "I'll go. But if you make some kind of joke about hand holding, I'm going to break your nose."

When I get back to my apartment that night, it still smells like dust and a hint of mold. I turn on one of the lamps, and a glimmer of light reflects off the countertop. I run my hand over it, and a small piece of glass pricks my finger, making it bleed. I pinch it between my fingertips and carry it to the trash can, which I put a bag in this morning. But resting at the bottom of the bag now is a pile of shards in the shape of a drinking glass.

I haven't used one of those yet.

A shiver goes down my spine, and I scan the rest of the apartment for signs of disruption. The sheets aren't rumpled, none of the drawers are open, none of the chairs seem to have moved. But I would know if I had broken a glass that morning.

So who was in my apartment?

I don't know why, but the first thing my hands find in the morning when I stumble into the bathroom is the set of hair clippers I got with my Dauntless credits yesterday. And then while I'm still blinking the clouds from my eyes, I turn them on and touch them to my head the way I've done since I was young. I bend my ear forward to protect it from the blades; I know just how to twist and shift so that I can see as much of the back of my head as possible. The ritual calms my nerves, makes me feel focused and steady. I brush the trimmed hairs from my shoulders and neck and sweep them into the wastebasket.

It's an Abnegation morning. A quick shower, a plain breakfast, a clean house. Except I'm wearing Dauntless black, boots and pants and shirt and jacket. I avoid looking in the mirror on my way out, and it makes me grit my teeth, knowing how deep these Stiff roots go, and how hard it will be to excise them from my mind, as tangled up in everything as they are. I left that place out of fear and defiance, and that will make it harder to assimilate than anyone knows, harder than if I had actually chosen Dauntless for the right reasons.

I walk quickly toward the Pit, emerging through an arch halfway up the wall. I stay away from the edge of the path, though Dauntless children, shrieking with laughter, sometimes run right along it, and I should be braver than they are. I'm

not sure bravery is something you acquire more of with age, like wisdom—but maybe here, in Dauntless, bravery is the highest form of wisdom, the acknowledgment that life can and should be lived without fear.

It's the first time I've found myself being thoughtful about Dauntless life, so I hold on to the thought as I ascend the paths around the Pit. I reach the staircase that hangs from the glass ceiling and keep my eyes up, away from the space opening up beneath me, so I don't start to panic. But my heart is pounding by the time I reach the top anyway; I can feel it even in my throat. Max said his office was on the tenth floor, so I ride the elevator up with a group of Dauntless going to work. They don't all seem to know one another, unlike the Abnegation—it's not as important to them to memorize names and faces and needs and wants, so maybe they just keep to their friends and families, forming rich but separate communities within their faction. Like the one I'm forming myself.

When I reach the tenth floor, I'm not sure where to go, but then I spot a dark head turning a corner in front of me. Eric. I follow him, partly because he probably knows where he's going, but partly because I want to know what he's doing even if he's not going to the same place I am. But when I turn the corner, I see Max standing in a conference room that has glass walls, surrounded by young Dauntless. The oldest one is maybe twenty, and the youngest is probably not much older than I am. Max sees me through the glass and motions for me to come in. Eric sits close to him—*Suck-up,* I think—but I sit at the other end of the table, between a girl with a ring through her nostrils and a boy whose hair is such a bright shade of green I can't look straight at him. I feel plain by comparison—I may have gotten Dauntless flames tattooed on my side during initiation, but it's not like they're on display.

"I think everyone is here, so let's get started." Max closes the door to the conference room and stands before us. He looks strange in such an ordinary environment, like he's here to break all the glass and cause chaos rather than lead this meeting. "You're all here because you've shown potential, first, but also because you've displayed enthusiasm for our faction and its future." I don't know how I've done that. "Our city is changing, faster now than ever before, and in order to keep up with it, we'll have to change, too. We'll have to become stronger, braver, better than we are now. And among you are the people who can get us there, but we'll have to figure out who they are. We'll be doing a

combination of instruction and skills tests for the next several months, to teach you what you'll need to know if you make it through this program, but also to see how quickly you learn." That sounds a little like something the Erudite would value, not the Dauntless—strange.

"The first thing you'll do is fill out this info sheet," he says, and I almost laugh. There's something ridiculous about a tough, hardened Dauntless warrior with a stack of papers he calls "info sheets," but of course some things have to be ordinary, because it's more efficient that way. He sends the stack around the table, along with a bundle of pens. "All this will do is tell us more about you and give us a starting point by which to measure your progress. So it's in your best interest to be honest, and not to make yourself sound better than you are."

I feel unsettled, staring at the sheet of paper. I fill out my name—which is the first question—and my age—the second. The third asks for my faction of origin, and the fourth asks for my number of fears. The fifth asks what those fears are.

I'm not sure how to describe them. The first two are easy—heights, confinement—but the next one? And what am I supposed to write about my father, that I'm afraid of Marcus Eaton? Eventually I scribble *losing control* for my third fear and *physical threats in confined spaces* for my fourth, knowing that that's far from true.

But the next few questions are strange, confusing. They're statements, trickily worded, that I'm supposed to agree or disagree with. *It's okay to steal if it's to help someone else.* Well, that's easy enough—agree. *Some people are more deserving of rewards than others.* Maybe. It depends on the rewards. *Power should be given only to those who earn it. Difficult circumstances form stronger people. You don't know how strong a person really is until they're tested.* I glance around the table at the others. Some people seem puzzled, but no one looks the way I feel—disturbed, almost afraid to circle an answer beneath each statement.

I don't know what to do, so I circle "agree" for each one and pass my sheet back with everyone else's.

Zeke and his date, Maria, are pressed up against a wall in a hallway next to the Pit. I can see their silhouettes from here. It looks like they're still just as pressed-

up-against-each-other as they were five minutes ago when they first went back there, giggling like idiots the whole time. I cross my arms and look back at Nicole.

"So," I say.

"So," she says, tipping forward onto the balls of her feet and back onto her heels again. "This is a little awkward, right?"

"Yeah," I say, relieved. "It is."

"How long have you been friends with Zeke?" she says. "I haven't seen you around much."

"A few weeks," I say. "We met during initiation."

"Oh," she says. "Were you a transfer?"

"Um…" I don't want to admit that I transferred from Abnegation, partly because whenever I admit that, people start thinking I'm uptight, and partly because I don't like to toss out hints about my parentage when I can avoid it. I decide to lie. "No, just… kept to myself before then, I guess."

"Oh." She narrows her eyes a little. "You must have been really good at it."

"One of my specialties," I say. "How long have you been friends with Maria?"

"Since we were kids. She could trip and fall and land on a date with someone," Nicole says. "Others of us aren't as talented."

"Yeah." I shake my head. "Zeke had to push me into this a little."

"Really." Nicole raises an eyebrow. "Did he at least show you what you were in for?"

She points at herself.

"Um, yeah," I say. "I wasn't sure if you were my type, but I thought maybe __"

"Not your type." She sounds cold, suddenly. I try to backtrack.

"I mean, I don't think that's that important," I say. "Personality is much more important than—"

"Than my unsatisfactory looks?" She raises both eyebrows.

"That's not what I said," I say. "I'm… really terrible at this."

"Yeah," she says. "You are."

She grabs the small black bag that was resting against her feet and tucks it under her arm. "Tell Maria I had to go home early."

She stalks away from the railing and disappears into one of the paths next to the Pit. I sigh and look at Zeke and Maria again. I can tell by the faint movements I'm able to detect that they haven't slowed down at all. I tap my fingers against the railing. Now that our double date has become an awkward, triangle-shaped date, it must be all right for me to leave.

I spot Shauna coming out of the cafeteria and wave to her.

"Isn't tonight your big date night with Ezekiel?" she says.

"*Ezekiel*," I say, cringing. "I forgot that was his whole name. Yeah, my date just stormed off."

"Good one," she says, laughing. "What'd you last, ten minutes?"

"Five," I say, and I find myself laughing, too. "Apparently I'm insensitive."

"No," she says with mock surprise. "You? But you're so sentimental and sweet!"

"Funny," I say. "Where's Lynn?"

"She started arguing with Hector. Our little brother," she says. "And I've been listening to them do that for, oh, my whole life. So I left. I thought I'd go to the training room, get some exercise in. Want to go?"

"Yeah," I say. "Let's go."

We head toward the training room, but then I realize that we have to walk down the same hallway that Zeke and Maria currently occupy to get there. I try to stop Shauna with a hand, but I'm too late—she sees their two bodies pressed together, her eyes wide. She pauses for a moment, and I hear smacking noises I wish I hadn't heard. Then she moves down the hallway again, walking so fast I have to jog to catch up to her.

"Shauna—"

"Training room," she says.

When we get there, she starts immediately on the punching bag, and I've never seen her hit so hard before.

"Though it might seem strange, it's important for high-level Dauntless to understand how a few programs work," Max says. "The surveillance program in the control room is an obvious one—a Dauntless leader will sometimes have to monitor the things happening in the faction. Then there's the simulation

programs, which you have to understand in order to evaluate Dauntless initiates. Also the currency tracking program, which keeps commerce in our faction running smoothly, among others. Some of these programs are pretty sophisticated, which means you'll have to be able to learn computer skills easily, if you don't already have them. That's what we'll be doing today."

He gestures to the woman standing at his left shoulder. I recognize her from the game of Dare. She's young, with purple streaks in her short hair and more piercings than I can easily count.

"Lauren here will be teaching you some of the basics, and then we'll test you," Max says. "Lauren is one of our initiation instructors, but in her downtime she works as a computer technician in Dauntless headquarters. It's a little Erudite of her, but we'll let it slide for the sake of convenience."

Max winks at her, and she grins.

"Go ahead," he says. "I'll be back in an hour."

Max leaves, and Lauren claps her hands together.

"Right," she says. "Today we're going to talk about how programming works. Those of you who already have some experience with this, please feel free to tune out. The rest of you better keep focused because I'm not going to repeat myself. Learning this stuff is like learning a language—it's not enough to memorize the words; you also have to understand the rules and why they work the way they do."

When I was younger, I volunteered in the computer labs in the Upper Levels building to meet my faction-mandated volunteer hours—and to get out of the house—and I learned how to take a computer apart and put it back together. But I never learned about this. The next hour passes in a blur of technical terms I can barely keep up with. I try to jot some notes on a piece of scrap paper I found on the floor, but she's moving so fast it's hard for my hand to keep up with my ears, so I abandon the effort after a few minutes and just try to pay attention. She shows examples of what she's talking about on a screen at the front of the room, and it's hard not to be distracted by the view from the windows behind her—from this angle, the Pire displays the city's skyline, the prongs of the Hub piercing the sky, the marsh peeking from between the glimmering buildings.

I'm not the only one who seems overwhelmed—the other candidates lean over to one another to whisper frantically, asking for definitions they missed.

Eric, however, sits comfortably in his chair, drawing on the back of his hand. Smirking. I recognize that smirk. Of course he already knows all this stuff. He must have learned it in Erudite, probably when he was a child, or else he wouldn't look quite so smug.

Before I can really register the passage of time, Lauren is pressing a button for the display screen to withdraw into the ceiling.

"On the desktop of your computer, you'll find a file marked 'Programming Test,'" she says. "Open it. It will take you to a timed exam. You'll go through a series of small programs and mark the errors you find that are causing them to malfunction. They might be really big things, like the order of the code, or really small things, like a misplaced word or marking. You don't have to fix them right now, but you do have to be able to spot them. There will be one error per program. Go."

Everyone starts frantically tapping at their screens. Eric leans over to me and says, "Did your Stiff house even *have* a computer, Four?"

"No," I say.

"Well, you see, this is how you open a file," he says with an exaggerated tap on the file on his screen. "See, it looks like paper, but it's really just a picture on a screen—you know what a screen is, right?"

"Shut up," I say as I open the test.

I stare at the first program. *It's like learning a language*, I say to myself. *Everything has to start in the right order and finish in the reverse order. Just make sure that everything is in the right place.*

I don't start at the beginning of the code and make my way down—instead, I look for the innermost kernel of code inside all the wrappers. There, I notice that the line of code finishes in the wrong place. I mark the spot and press the arrow button that will allow me to continue the exam if I'm right. The screen changes, presenting me with a new program.

I raise my eyebrows. I must have absorbed more than I thought.

I start the next one in the same way, moving from the center of the code to the outside, checking the top of the program with the bottom, paying attention to quotation marks and periods and backslashes. Looking for code errors is strangely soothing, just a way of making sure that the world is still in the same order it's supposed to be, and as long as it is, everything will run smoothly.

I forget about all the people around me, even about the skyline beyond us, about what finishing this exam will mean. I just focus on what's in front of me, on the tangle of words on my screen. I notice that Eric finishes first, long before anyone else looks ready to complete their exam, but I try not to let it worry me. Even when he decides to stay next to me and look over my shoulder as I work.

Finally I touch the arrow button and a new image pops up. *EXAM COMPLETE*, it says.

"Good job," Lauren says, when she comes by to check my screen. "You're the third one to finish."

I turn toward Eric.

"Wait," I say. "Weren't you about to explain what a screen was? Obviously I have *no* computer skills at all, so I really need your help."

He glowers at me, and I grin.

My apartment door is open when I return. Just an inch, but I know I closed it before I left. I nudge it open with the toe of my shoe and enter with a pounding heart, expecting to find an intruder rifling through my things, though I'm not sure who—one of Jeanine's lackeys, searching for evidence that I'm different in the same way Amar was, maybe, or Eric, looking for a way to ambush me. But the apartment is empty and unchanged.

Unchanged—except for the piece of paper on the table. I approach it slowly, like it might burst into flames, or dissolve into the air. There's a message written on it in small, slanted handwriting.

On the day you hated most
At the time when she died
In the place where you first jumped on.

At first the words are nonsense to me, and I think they're a joke, something left here to rattle me, and it worked, because I feel unsteady on my feet. I sit in one of the rickety chairs, hard, without moving my eyes from the paper. I read it over and over again, and the message starts to take shape in my mind.

In the place where you first jumped on. That must mean the train platform I ascended after I had just joined Dauntless.

At the time when she died. There's only one "she" this could be: my mother. My mother died in the dead of night, so that by the time I awoke, her body was already gone, whisked away by my father and his Abnegation friends. Her time of death was estimated to be around two in the morning, he said.

On the day you hated most. That's the hardest one—is it referring to a day of the year, a birthday or a holiday? None of those are coming up, and I don't see why someone would leave a note that far in advance. It must be referring to a day of the week, but what day of the week did I hate most? That's easy—council meeting days, because my father was out late and would return home in a foul mood. Wednesday.

Wednesday, two a.m., at the train platform near the Hub. That's tonight. And there's only one person in the world who would know all that information: Marcus.

I'm clutching the folded piece of paper in my fist, but I can't feel it. My hands have been tingling and mostly numb since I first thought his name.

I left my apartment door wide open, and my shoes are untied. I move along the walls of the Pit without noticing how high up I am and run up the stairs to the Pire without even feeling tempted to look down. Zeke mentioned the control room's location in passing a few days ago. I can only hope he's still there now, because I'll need his help if I want to access the footage of the hallway outside my apartment. I know where the camera is, hidden in the corner where they think no one will notice it. Well, I noticed it.

My mother used to notice things like that, too. When we walked through the Abnegation sector, just the two of us, she would point out the cameras, hidden in bubbles of dark glass or fixed to the edges of buildings. She never said anything about them, or seemed worried about them, but she always knew where they were, and when she passed them, she made a point to look directly at them, as if to say, *I see you, too.* So I grew up searching, scanning, watching for details in my surroundings.

I ride the elevator to the fourth floor, then follow signs for the control room. It's down a short corridor and around the bend, the door wide open. A wall of screens greets me—a few people sit behind it, at desks, and then there are other

desks along the walls where more people sit, each one with a screen of their own. The footage rotates every five seconds, showing different parts of the city —the Amity fields, the streets around the Hub, the Dauntless compound, even the Merciless Mart, with its grand lobby. I glimpse the Abnegation sector on one of the screens, then pull myself out of the daze, looking for Zeke. He's sitting at a desk on the right wall, typing something into a dialog box on the left half of his screen while footage of the Pit plays on the right half. Everyone in the room is wearing headphones—listening, I assume, to whatever they're supposed to be watching.

"Zeke," I say quietly. Some of the others look at me, as if scolding me for intruding, but no one says anything.

"Hey!" he says. "I'm glad you came, I'm bored out of my—what's wrong?"

He looks from my face to my fist, still clenched around the piece of paper. I don't know how to explain, so I don't try.

"I need to see footage from the hallway outside my apartment," I say. "From the last four or so hours. Can you help?"

"Why?" Zeke says. "What happened?"

"Someone was in my place," I say. "I want to know who it was."

He looks around, checking to make sure no one is watching. Or listening. "Listen, I can't do that—even we aren't allowed to pull up specific things unless we see something weird, it's all on a rotation—"

"You owe me a favor, remember?" I say. "I would never ask unless it was important."

"Yeah, I know." Zeke looks around again, then closes the dialog box he had open and opens another one. I watch the code he types in to call up the right footage, and I'm surprised to find that I understand some of it, after the day's lesson. An image appears on the screen, of one of the Dauntless corridors near the cafeteria. He taps it, and another image replaces it, this one of the inside of the cafeteria; the next one is of the tattoo parlor, then the hospital.

He keeps scrolling through the Dauntless compound, and I watch the images as they go past, showing momentary glimpses of ordinary Dauntless life, people playing with their piercings as they wait in line for new clothing, people practicing punches in the training room. I see a flash of Max in what appears to be his office, sitting in one of the chairs, a woman sitting across from him. A

woman with blond hair tied back in a tight knot. I put my hand on Zeke's shoulder.

"Wait." The piece of paper in my fist seems a little less urgent. "Go back."

He does, and I confirm what I suspected: Jeanine Matthews is in Max's office, a folder in her lap. Her clothes are perfectly pressed, her posture straight. I take the headphones from Zeke's head, and he scowls at me but doesn't stop me.

Max's and Jeanine's voices are quiet, but I can still hear them.

"I've narrowed it down to six," Max is saying. "I'd say that's pretty good for, what? The second day?"

"This is inefficient," Jeanine says. "We already have the candidate. I ensured it. This was always the plan."

"You never asked me what I thought of the plan, and this is my faction," Max says tersely. "I don't like him, and I don't want to spend all my days working with someone I don't like. So you'll have to let me at least try to find someone else who meets all the criteria—"

"Fine." Jeanine stands, pressing her folder to her stomach. "But when you fail to do so, I expect you to admit it. I have no patience for Dauntless pride."

"Yeah, because the Erudite are the picture of humility," Max says sourly.

"Hey," Zeke hisses. "My supervisor is looking. Give me back the headphones."

He snatches them from my head, and they snap around my ears in the process, making them sting.

"You have to get out of here or I'll lose my job," Zeke says.

He looks serious, and worried. I don't object, even though I didn't find out what I needed to know—it was my own fault for getting distracted anyway. I slip out of the control room, my mind racing, half of me still terrified at the thought that my father was in my apartment, that he wants me to meet him alone on an abandoned street in the middle of the night, the other half confused by what I just heard. *We already have the candidate. I ensured it.* They must have been talking about the candidate for Dauntless leadership.

But why is Jeanine Matthews concerned with who is appointed as the next leader of Dauntless?

I make it all the way back to my apartment without noticing, then sit on the

edge of the bed and stare at the opposite wall. I keep thinking separate but equally frantic thoughts. *Why does Marcus want to meet with me? Why are the Erudite so involved in Dauntless politics? Does Marcus want to kill me without witnesses, or does he want to warn me about something, or threaten me…? Who was the candidate they were talking about?*

I press the heels of my hands to my forehead and try to calm down, though I feel each nervous thought like a prickle at the back of my head. I can't do anything about Max and Jeanine now. What I have to decide now is whether I'm going to this meeting tonight.

On the day you hated most. I never knew that Marcus even noticed me, noticed the things I liked or hated. He just seemed to view me as an inconvenience, an irritant. But didn't I learn a few weeks ago that he knew the simulations wouldn't work on me, and he tried to help me stay out of danger? Maybe, despite all the horrible things he's done and said to me, there's a part of him that is actually my father. Maybe that's the part of him that's inviting me to this meeting, and he's trying to show me by telling me he knows me, he knows what I hate, what I love, what I fear.

I'm not sure why that thought fills me with such hope when I've hated him for so long. But maybe, just as there's a part of him that's actually my father, there's also a part of me that's actually his son.

The sun's heat is still coming off the pavement at one thirty in the morning when I leave the Dauntless compound. I can feel it on my fingertips. The moon is covered in clouds, so the streets are darker than usual, but I'm not afraid of the dark, or the streets, not anymore. That's one thing beating up a bunch of Dauntless initiates can teach you.

I breathe in the smell of warm asphalt and set off at a slow run, my sneakers slapping the ground. The streets that surround the Dauntless sector of the city are empty; my faction lives huddled together, like a pack of sleeping dogs. That's why, I realize, Max seemed so concerned about my living alone. If I'm really Dauntless, shouldn't I want my life to overlap with theirs as much as possible, shouldn't I be looking for ways to fold myself into my faction until we are inextricable?

I consider it as I run. Maybe he's right. Maybe I'm not doing a very good job of integrating myself; maybe I'm not pushing myself hard enough. I find a steady rhythm, squinting at the street signs as I pass them, to keep track of where I'm going. I know when I reach the ring of buildings the factionless occupy because I can see their shadows moving around behind blacked-out and boarded windows. I move to run under the train tracks, the latticed wood stretching out far ahead of me and curving away from the street.

The Hub grows larger and larger in my sight as I get closer. My heart is pounding, but I don't think it's from the running. I stop abruptly when I reach the train platform, and as I stand at the foot of the stairs, catching my breath, I remember when I first climbed these steps, the sea of hooting Dauntless moving around me, pressing me forward. It was easy to be carried by their momentum then. I have to carry myself forward now. I start to climb, my footsteps echoing on the metal, and when I reach the top, I check my watch.

Two o'clock.

But the platform is empty.

I walk back and forth over it, to make sure no dark figures are hiding in dark corners. A train rumbles in the distance, and I pause to look for the light fixed to its nose. I didn't know the trains ran this late—all power in the city is supposed to shut off after midnight, to conserve energy. I wonder if Marcus asked the factionless for a special favor. But why would he travel on the train? The Marcus Eaton I know would never dare to associate himself so closely with Dauntless. He would sooner walk the streets barefoot.

The train light flashes, just once, before it careens past the platform. It pounds and churns, slowing but not stopping, and I see a person leap from the second-to-last car, lean and lithe. Not Marcus. A woman.

I squeeze the paper tighter into my fist, and tighter, until my knuckles ache.

The woman strides toward me, and when she's a few feet away, I can see her. Long curly hair. Prominent hooked nose. Black Dauntless pants, gray Abnegation shirt, brown Amity boots. Her face is lined, worn, thin. But I know her, I could never forget her face, my mother, Evelyn Eaton.

"Tobias," she breathes, wide-eyed, like she's as stunned by me as I am by her, but that's impossible. She knew I was alive, but I remember how the urn containing her ashes looked as it stood on my father's mantel, marked with his

fingerprints.

I remember the day I woke to a group of grave-faced Abnegation in my father's kitchen, and how they all looked up when I entered, and how Marcus explained to me, with sympathy I knew he didn't feel, that my mother had passed in the middle of the night, complications from early labor and a miscarriage.

She was pregnant? I remember asking.

Of course she was, son. He turned to the other people in our kitchen. *Just shock, of course. Bound to happen, with something like this.*

I remember sitting with a plate full of food, in the living room, with a group of murmuring Abnegation around me, the whole neighborhood packing my house to the brim and no one saying anything that mattered to me.

"I know this must be… alarming for you," she says. I hardly recognize her voice; it's lower and stronger and harder than in my memories of her, and that's how I know the years have changed her. I feel too many things to manage, too powerfully to handle, and then suddenly I feel nothing at all.

"You're supposed to be dead," I say, flat. It's a stupid thing to say. Such a stupid thing to say to your mother when she comes back from the dead, but it's a stupid situation.

"I know," she says, and I think there are tears in her eyes, but it's too dark to tell. "I'm not."

"Obviously." The voice coming from my mouth is snide, casual. "Were you ever even pregnant?"

"Pregnant? Is that what they told you, something about dying in childbirth?" She shakes her head. "No, I wasn't. I had been planning my exit for months—I needed to disappear. I thought he might tell you when you were old enough."

I let out a short laugh, like a bark. "You thought that *Marcus Eaton* would admit that his wife left him. To me."

"You're his son," Evelyn says, frowning. "He loves you."

Then all the tension of the past hour, the past few weeks, the past few *years* builds inside me, too much to contain, and I really laugh, but it comes out sounding strange, mechanical. It scares me even though I'm the one doing it.

"You have a right to be angry that you were lied to," she says. "I would be angry, too. But Tobias, I had to leave, I know you understand why…"

She reaches for me, and I grab her wrist, push her away. “Don’t touch me.”

“All right, all right.” She puts her palms up and backs away. “But you do understand, you must.”

“What I *understand* is that you left me alone in a house with a sadistic maniac,” I say.

It looks like something inside her is collapsing. Her hands fall to her sides like two weights. Her shoulders slump. Even her face goes slack, as it dawns on her what I mean, what I must mean. I cross my arms and put my shoulders back, trying to look as big and strong and tough as possible. It’s easier now, in Dauntless black, than it ever was in Abnegation gray, and maybe *that’s* why I chose Dauntless as a haven. Not out of spite, not to hurt Marcus, but because I knew this life would teach me a stronger way to be.

“I—” she starts.

“Stop wasting my time. What are we doing here?” I toss the crumpled note on the ground between us and raise my eyebrows at her. “It’s been seven years since you died, and you never tried to do this dramatic reveal before, so what’s different now?”

At first she doesn’t answer. Then she pulls herself together, visibly, and says, “We—the factionless—like to keep an eye on things. Things like the Choosing Ceremony. This time, our eye told me that you chose Dauntless. I would have gone myself, but I didn’t want to risk running into *him*. I’ve become… kind of a leader to the factionless, and it’s important that I don’t expose myself.”

I taste something sour.

“Well, well,” I say. “What important parents I have. I’m so very lucky.”

“This isn’t like you,” she says. “Is even a part of you happy to see me again?”

“Happy to see you again?” I say. “I barely remember you, Evelyn. I’ve almost lived as long without you as I did with you.”

Her face contorts. I wounded her. I’m glad.

“When you chose Dauntless,” she continues slowly, “I knew it was time to reach out to you. I’ve always been planning to find you, after you chose and you were on your own, so that I could invite you to join us.”

“Join you,” I say. “Become factionless? Why would I want to do that?”

“Our city is changing, Tobias.” It’s the same thing Max said yesterday. “The

factionless are coming together, and so are Dauntless and Erudite. Sometime soon, everyone will have to choose a side, and I know which one you would rather be on. I think you can really make a difference with us."

"*You* know which one I'd rather be on. Really," I say. "I'm not a faction traitor. I chose Dauntless; that's where I belong."

"You aren't one of those mindless, danger-seeking fools," she snaps. "Just like you weren't a suffocated Stiff drone. You can be more than either, more than any faction."

"You have no idea what I am or who I can be," I say. "I was the first-ranked initiate. They want me to be a Dauntless leader."

"Don't be naive," she says, narrowing her eyes at me. "They don't want a new leader; they want a pawn they can manipulate. That's why Jeanine Matthews frequents Dauntless headquarters, that's why she keeps planting minions in your faction to report on their behavior. You haven't noticed that she seems to be aware of things she has no right to be aware of, that they keep shifting Dauntless training around, experimenting with it? As if the Dauntless would ever change something like that on their own."

Amar told us the fear landscapes didn't usually come first in Dauntless initiation, that it was something new they were trying. An experiment. But she's right; the Dauntless don't do experiments. If they were really concerned with practicality and efficiency, they wouldn't bother teaching us to throw knives.

And then there's Amar, turning up dead. Wasn't I the one who accused Eric of being an informant? Haven't I suspected for weeks that he was still in touch with the Erudite?

"Even if you're right," I say, and all the malicious energy has gone out of me. I move closer to her. "Even if you're right about Dauntless, I would never join you." I try to keep my voice from wavering as I add, "I never want to see you again."

"I don't believe you," she says quietly.

"I don't care what you believe."

I move past her, toward the stairs I climbed to get up to the platform.

She calls after me, "If you change your mind, any message given to one of the factionless will go to me."

I don't look back. I run down the stairs and sprint down the street, away from

the platform. I don't even know if I'm moving in the right direction, just that I want to be as far away from her as possible.

I don't sleep.

I pace my apartment, frantic. I pull the remnants of my Abnegation life out of my drawers and dump them in the trash, the ripped shirt, the pants, the shoes, the socks, even my watch. At some point, around sunrise, I hurl the electric shaver against the shower wall, and it breaks into several pieces.

An hour after daybreak, I walk to the tattoo parlor. Tori is already there—well, "there" might be too strong a word, because her eyes are swollen from sleep and unfocused, and she's just started on her coffee.

"Something wrong?" she said. "I'm not really here. I'm supposed to go for a run with Bud, that maniac."

"I'm hoping you'll make an exception," I say.

"Not many people come in here with urgent tattoo requests," she says.

"There's a first time for everything."

"Okay." She sits up, more alert now. "You have something in mind?"

"You had a drawing in your apartment when we walked through it a few weeks ago. It was of all the faction symbols together. Still have it?"

She stiffens. "You weren't supposed to see that."

I know why I wasn't supposed to see it, why that drawing isn't something she wants made public. It suggests leanings toward other factions instead of asserting Dauntless supremacy, like her tattoos are supposed to. Even established Dauntless members are worried about seeming Dauntless enough, and I don't know why that is, what kind of threats are leveled at people who could be called "faction traitors," but that's exactly why I'm here.

"That's sort of the point," I say. "I want that tattoo."

I thought of it on the way home, while I was cycling through what my mother said, over and over again. *You can be more than either, more than any faction.* She thought that in order to be more than any faction, I would have to abandon this place and the people who have embraced me as their own; I would have to forgive her and let myself be swallowed by her beliefs and her lifestyle. But I don't have to leave, and I don't have to do anything I don't want to do. I

can be more than any faction right here in Dauntless; maybe I already am more, and it's time to show it.

Tori looks around, her eyes jumping up to the camera in the corner, one I noticed when I walked in. She is the type who notices cameras, too.

"It was just a stupid drawing," she says loudly. "Come on, you're clearly upset—we can talk about it, find something better for you to get."

She beckons me to the back of the parlor, through the storage room behind it, and into her apartment again. We walk through the dilapidated kitchen to the living room, where her drawings are still stacked on the coffee table.

She sorts through the pages until she finds a drawing like the one I was talking about, the Dauntless flames being cupped by Abnegation hands, the Amity tree roots growing beneath an Erudite eye, which is balanced under the Candor scales. All the faction symbols stacked on top of each other. She holds it up, and I nod.

"I can't do this in a place that people will see all the time," she says. "That'll make you a walking target. A suspected faction traitor."

"I want it on my back," I say. "Covering my spine."

The hurts from my last day with my father are healed now, but I want to remember where they were; I want to remember what I escaped for as long as I live.

"You really don't do things halfway, do you." She sighs. "It'll take a long time. Several sessions. We'll have to do them in here, after hours, because I'm not going to let those cameras catch it, even if they don't bother to look in here most of the time."

"Fine," I say.

"You know, the kind of person who gets this tattoo is probably the kind that should keep it very quiet," she says, looking at me from the corner of her eye. "Or else someone will start thinking they're Divergent."

"Divergent?"

"That's a word we have for people who are aware during simulations, who refuse categorization," she says. "A word you don't speak without care, because those people often die in mysterious circumstances."

She has her elbows resting on her knees, casual, as she sketches the tattoo I want on transfer paper. Our eyes meet, and I realize: Amar. Amar was aware

during simulations, and now he's dead.

Amar was Divergent.

And so am I.

"Thanks for the vocabulary lesson," I say.

"No problem." She returns to her drawing. "I'm getting the feeling you enjoy putting yourself through the wringer."

"So?" I say.

"Nothing, it's just a pretty Dauntless quality for someone who got an Abnegation result." Her mouth twitches. "Let's get started. I'll leave a note for Bud; he can jog alone just this once."

Maybe Tori is right. Maybe I do enjoy putting myself "through the wringer"; maybe there is a masochistic streak inside me that uses pain to cope with pain. The faint burning that follows me to my next day of leadership training certainly makes it easier to focus on what I'm about to do, instead of on my mother's cold, low voice and the way I pushed her away when she tried to comfort me.

In the years after her death, I used to dream that she would come back to life in the middle of the night and run a hand over my hair and say something comforting but nonsensical, like "It will be all right" or "It will get better someday." But then I stopped allowing myself to dream, because it was more painful to long for things and never get them than to deal with whatever was in front of me. Even now I don't want to imagine what reconciling with her would be like, what having a mother would be like. I'm too old to hear comforting nonsense anymore. Too old to believe that everything will be all right.

I check the top of the bandage that protrudes over my collar to make sure it's secure. Tori outlined the first two symbols this morning, Dauntless and Abnegation, which will be larger than the others, because they are the faction I chose and the faction I actually have aptitude for, respectively—at least, I think I have aptitude for Abnegation, but it's hard to be sure. She told me to keep them covered. The Dauntless flame is the only symbol that shows with my shirt on, and I'm not in the position to remove my shirt in public very often, so I doubt that will be a problem.

Everyone else is already in the conference room, and Max is speaking to

them. I feel a kind of reckless weariness as I walk through the door and take my seat. Evelyn was wrong about quite a few things, but she wasn't wrong about the Dauntless—Jeanine and Max don't want a leader of Dauntless, they want a pawn, and that's why they're selecting from the youngest of us, because young people are easier shaped and molded. I will not be molded and shaped by Jeanine Matthews. I will not be a pawn, not for them and not for my mother and not for my father; I will not belong to anyone but myself.

"Nice of you to join us," Max says. "Did this meeting interrupt your sleep?"

The others titter with laughter, and Max continues.

"As I was saying, today I would like to hear your thoughts about how to improve Dauntless—the vision you have for our faction in the coming years," he says. "I'll be meeting with you in groups by age, the oldest first. The rest of you, think of something good to say."

He leaves with the three oldest candidates. Eric is right across from me, and I notice that he has even more metal in his face than the last time I saw him—now there are rings through his eyebrows. Soon he's going to look more like a pincushion than a human being. Maybe that's the point—strategy. No one looking at him now could ever mistake him for being Erudite.

"Do my eyes deceive me, or are you really late because you were getting a tattoo?" he says, pointing to the corner of the bandage that's visible just over my shoulder.

"Lost track of time," I say. "A lot of metal appears to have attached itself to your face recently. You may want to get that checked out."

"Funny," Eric says. "Wasn't sure someone with your background could ever develop a sense of humor. Your father doesn't seem like the type to allow it."

I feel a stab of fear. He's dancing awfully close to saying my name in front of this room full of people, and he wants me to know it—he wants me to remember that he knows who I am, and that he can use it against me whenever he pleases.

I can't pretend that it doesn't matter to me. The power dynamic has shifted, and I can't make it shift back.

"I think I know who told you that," I say. Jeanine Matthews knows both my name and my alias. She must have given him both.

"I was already fairly sure," he says in a low voice. "But my suspicions were confirmed by a credible source, yes. You aren't as good at keeping secrets as you

think, Four."

I would threaten him, tell him that if he reveals my name to the Dauntless, I'll reveal his lasting connections to Erudite. But I don't have any evidence, and the Dauntless dislike Abnegation more than Erudite anyway. I sit back in my chair to wait.

The others file out as they're called, and soon we're the only ones left. Max makes his way down the hallway, then beckons to us from the door, without a word. We follow him back to his office, which I recognize from yesterday's footage of his meeting with Jeanine Matthews. I use my memory of that conversation to steel myself against what's coming next.

"So." Max folds his hands on his desk, and again I'm struck by how strange it is to see him in such a clean, formal environment. He belongs in a training room, hitting a bag, or next to the Pit, leaning over the railing. Not sitting at a low wooden table surrounded by paper.

I look out the windows of the Pire at the Dauntless sector of the city. A few yards away I can see the edge of the hole I jumped into when I first chose Dauntless, and the rooftop that I stood on just before that. *I chose Dauntless,* I told my mother yesterday. *That's where I belong.*

Is that really true?

"Eric, let's begin with you," Max says. "Do you have ideas for what might be good for Dauntless, moving forward?"

"I do." Eric sits up. "I think we need to make some changes, and I think they should start during initiation."

"What kind of changes do you have in mind?"

"Dauntless has always embraced a spirit of competition," Eric says. "Competition makes us better; it brings out the best, strongest parts of us. I think initiation should foster that sense of competition more than it currently does, so that it produces the best initiates possible. Right now initiates are competing only against the system, striving for a particular score in order to move forward. I think they should be competing against each other for spots in Dauntless."

I can't help it; I turn and stare at him. A limited number of spots? In a faction? After just *two weeks* of initiation training?

"And if they don't get a spot?"

"They become factionless," Eric says. I swallow a derisive laugh. Eric

continues, “If we believe that Dauntless truly is the superior faction to join, that its aims are more important than the aims of other factions, then becoming one of us should be an honor and a privilege, not a right.”

“Are you kidding?” I say, unable to contain myself any longer. “People choose a faction because they value the same things that faction values, not because they’re already proficient in what a faction teaches. You’d be kicking people out of Dauntless just for not being strong enough to jump on a train or win a fight. You would favor the big, strong, and reckless more than the small, smart, and brave—you wouldn’t be improving Dauntless at all.”

“I’m sure the small, smart ones would be better off in Erudite, or as little gray-clad Stiffs,” Eric says with a wry smile. “And I don’t think you’re giving our potential new Dauntless members enough credit, Four. This system would favor only the most determined.”

I glance at Max. I expect him to look unimpressed by Eric’s plan, but he doesn’t. He’s leaning forward, focused on Eric’s pierced face like something about it has inspired him.

“This is an interesting debate,” Max says. “Four, how would you improve Dauntless, if not by making initiation more competitive?”

I shake my head, looking out the window again. *You aren’t one of those mindless, danger-seeking fools*, my mother said to me. But those are the people Eric wants in Dauntless: mindless, danger-seeking fools. If Eric is one of Jeanine Matthew’s lackeys, then why would Jeanine encourage him to propose this kind of plan?

Oh. Because mindless, danger-seeking fools are easier to control, easier to manipulate. Obviously.

“I would improve Dauntless by fostering true bravery instead of stupidity and brutality,” I say. “Take out the knife throwing. Prepare people physically and mentally to defend the weak against the strong. That’s what our manifesto encourages—ordinary acts of bravery. I think we should return to that.”

“And then we can all hold hands and sing a song together, right?” Eric rolls his eyes. “You want to turn Dauntless into Amity.”

“No,” I say. “I want to make sure we still know how to think for ourselves, think about more than the next surge of adrenaline. Or just think, period. That way we can’t be taken over or… controlled from the outside.”

“Sounds a little Erudite to me,” Eric says.

“The ability to think isn’t exclusive to Erudite,” I snap. “The ability to think in stressful situations is what the fear simulations are supposed to develop.”

“All right, all right,” Max says, holding up his hands. He looks troubled. “Four, I’m sorry to say this, but you sound a little paranoid. Who would take us over, or try to control us? The factions have coexisted peacefully for longer than you’ve been alive, there’s no reason that’s going to change now.”

I open my mouth to tell him he’s wrong, that the second he let Jeanine Matthews get involved in the affairs of our faction, the second he let her plant Erudite-loyal transfers into our initiation program, the second he started consulting with her on who to appoint as the next Dauntless leader, he compromised the system of checks and balances that has allowed us to coexist peacefully for so long. But then I realize that to tell him those things would be to accuse him of treason, and to reveal just how much I know.

Max looks at me, and I read disappointment in his face. I know that he likes me—likes me more than Eric, at least. But my mother was right yesterday—Max doesn’t want someone like me, someone who can think for himself, develop his own agenda. He wants someone like Eric, who will help him establish the new Dauntless agenda, who will be easy to manipulate simply because he’s still under the thumb of Jeanine Matthews, someone with whom Max is closely aligned.

My mother presented me with two options yesterday: be a pawn of Dauntless, or become factionless. But there’s a third option: to be neither. To align myself with no one in particular. To live under the radar, and free. That’s what I really want—to shed all the people who want to form and shape me, one by one, and learn instead to form and shape myself.

“To be honest, sir, I don’t think this is the right place for me,” I say calmly. “I told you when you first asked me that I’d like to be an instructor, and I think I’m realizing more and more that that’s where I belong.”

“Eric, will you excuse us, please?” Max says. Eric, barely able to suppress his glee, nods and leaves. I don’t watch him go, but I would bet all my Dauntless credits that there’s a little skip in his step as he walks down the hallway.

Max gets up and sits next to me, in the chair Eric just vacated.

“I hope you’re not saying this because I accused you of being paranoid,”

Max says. “I was just concerned about you. I feared that the pressure was getting to you, making you stop thinking straight. I still think you’re a strong candidate for leadership. You fit the right profile, you’ve demonstrated proficiency with everything we’ve taught you—and beyond that, quite frankly, you’re more likable than some of our other promising candidates, which is important in a close working environment.”

“Thank you,” I say. “But you’re right, the pressure is getting to me. And the pressure if I was actually a leader would be much worse.”

Max nods sadly. “Well.” He nods again. “If you’d like to be an initiation instructor, I will arrange that for you. But that’s seasonal work—where would you like to be placed for the rest of the year?”

“I was thinking maybe the control room,” I say. “I’ve discovered that I enjoy working with computers. I don’t think I would enjoy patrolling nearly as much.”

“Okay,” Max says. “Consider it done. Thank you for being honest with me.”

I get up, and all I feel is relief. He seems concerned, sympathetic. Not suspicious of me or my motives or my paranoia.

“If you ever change your mind,” Max says, “please don’t hesitate to tell me. We could always use someone like you.”

“Thank you,” I say, and even though he’s the worst faction traitor of anyone I’ve met, and probably responsible at least in part for Amar’s death, I can’t help but feel a little grateful to him for letting me go so easily.

Eric is waiting for me around the corner. As I try to walk past him, he grabs my arm.

“Careful, Eaton,” he murmurs. “If anything about my involvement with Erudite escapes you, you won’t like what happens to you.”

“You won’t like what happens to you, either, if you ever call me by that name again.”

“Soon I’m going to be one of your leaders,” Eric says, smirking. “And believe me, I am going to keep a very, very close eye on you and how well you implement my new training methods.”

“He doesn’t like you, you know that?” I say. “Max, I mean. He’d rather have anyone else but you. He’s not going to give you more than an inch in any

direction. So good luck with your short leash."

I wrench my arm from his grasp and walk toward the elevators.

"Man," Shauna says. "That *is* a bad day."

"Yeah."

She and I are sitting next to the chasm with our feet over the edge. I rest my head against the bars of the metal barrier that's keeping us from falling to our deaths, and feel the spray of water against my ankles as one of the larger waves hits a wall.

I told her about my departure from leadership training, and Eric's threat, but I didn't tell her about my mother. How do you tell someone that your mother came back from the dead?

All my life, someone has been trying to control me. Marcus was the tyrant of our house, and nothing happened without his permission. And then Max wanted to recruit me as his Dauntless yes-man. And even my mother had a plan for me, for me to join up with her when I reached a certain age to work against the faction system that *she* has a vendetta against, for whatever reason. And just when I thought that I had escaped control altogether, Eric swooped in to remind me that if he became a Dauntless leader, he would be watching me.

All I have, I realize, are the small moments of rebellion I'm able to manage, just like when I was in Abnegation, collecting objects I found on the street. The tattoo that Tori is drawing on my back, the one that might declare me to be Divergent, is one of those moments. I'll have to keep looking for more of them, more brief moments of freedom in a world that refuses to allow it.

"Where's Zeke?" I say.

"I don't know," she says. "I haven't wanted to hang out with him much recently."

I look sideways at her. "You could just tell him that you like him, you know. I honestly don't think he has a clue."

"That's obvious," she says, snorting. "But what if this is what he wants—to just bounce around from girl to girl for a while? I don't want to be one of those girls he bounces to."

"I seriously doubt you would be," I say, "but fair enough."

We sit quietly for a few seconds, both of us staring down at the raging water below.

“You’ll be a good instructor,” she says. “You were really good at teaching me.”

“Thanks.”

“*There* you are,” Zeke says from behind us. He’s carrying a large bottle full of some kind of brown liquid, holding it by the neck. “Come on. I found something.”

Shauna and I look at each other and shrug, then follow him to the doors on the other side of the Pit, the ones we first went through after jumping into the net. But instead of leading us toward the net, he takes us through another door—the lock is taped down with duct tape—and down a pitch-black corridor and a flight of stairs.

“Should be coming up—ouch!”

“Sorry, I didn’t know you were stopping,” Shauna says.

“Hold on, almost got it—”

He opens a door, letting faint light in so we can see where we are. We’re on the other side of the chasm, several feet above the water. Above us, the Pit seems to go on forever, and the people milling around near the railing are small and dark, impossible to distinguish from this distance.

I laugh. Zeke just led us into another small moment of rebellion, probably without meaning to.

“How did you *find* this place?” Shauna says with obvious wonder as she jumps down onto one of the lower rocks. Now that I’m here, I see a path that would carry us up and across the wall, if we wanted to walk to the other side of the chasm.

“That girl Maria,” Zeke says. “Her mom works in chasm maintenance. I didn’t know there was such a thing, but apparently there is.”

“You still seeing her?” Shauna asks, trying to be casual.

“Nah,” Zeke says. “Every time I was with her I just kept getting the itch to be with friends instead. That’s not a good sign, right?”

“No,” Shauna agrees, and she seems more cheerful than before.

I lower myself more carefully onto the rock Shauna is standing on. Zeke sits next to her, opening his bottle and passing it around.

“I heard you’re out of the running,” Zeke says when he passes it to me. “Thought you might need a drink.”

“Yeah,” I say, and then I take a swig.

“Consider this act of public drunkenness a big—” He makes an obscene gesture toward the glass ceiling above the Pit. “You know, to Max and Eric.”

And Evelyn, I think, as I take another swallow.

“I’ll be working in the control room when I’m not training initiates,” I say.

“Awesome,” Zeke says. “It’ll be good to have a friend in there. Right now no one talks to me.”

“Sounds like me in my old faction,” I say with a laugh. “Imagine an entire lunch period in which no one even looks at you.”

“Ouch,” Zeke says. “Well, I bet you’re glad to be here now, then.”

I take the bottle from him again, drink another mouthful of stinging, burning alcohol, and wipe my mouth with the back of my hand. “Yeah,” I say. “I am.”

If the factions are deteriorating, as my mother would have me believe, this is not a bad place to watch them fall apart. At least here I have friends to keep me company while it happens.

It’s just after dark, and I have my hood up to hide my face as I run through the factionless area of the city, right by the border it shares with the Abnegation sector. I had to go to the school to get my bearings, but now I remember where I am, and where I ran, that day that I barged into a factionless warehouse in search of a dying ember.

I reach the door I walked through when I exited, and tap on it with my first knuckle. I can hear voices just beyond it and smell food coming from one of the open windows, where smoke from the fire within is leaking into the alley. Footsteps, as someone comes to see what the knocking is about.

This time the man is wearing a red Amity shirt and black Dauntless pants. He still has a towel tucked into his back pocket, the same as the last time I spoke to him. He opens the door just enough to look at me, and no farther.

“Well, look who made a change,” he said, eyeing my Dauntless clothes. “To what do I owe this visit? Did you miss my charming company?”

“You knew my mother was alive when you met me,” I say. “That’s how you

recognized me, because you've spent time with her. That's how you knew what she said about inertia carrying her to Abnegation."

"Yeah," the man said. "Didn't think it was my business to be the one to tell you she was still alive. You here to demand an apology, or something?"

"No," I say. "I'm here to hand off a message. You'll give it to her?"

"Yeah, sure. I'll be seeing her in the next couple days."

I reach into my pocket and take out a folded piece of paper. I offer it to him.

"Go ahead and read it, I don't care," I say. "And thanks."

"No problem," he says. "Want to come in? You're starting to seem more like one of us than one of them, Eaton."

I shake my head.

I make my way back down the alley, and before I turn the corner, I see him opening up the note to read what it says.

Evelyn,
Someday. Not yet.

—4

P.S. I'm glad you're not dead.