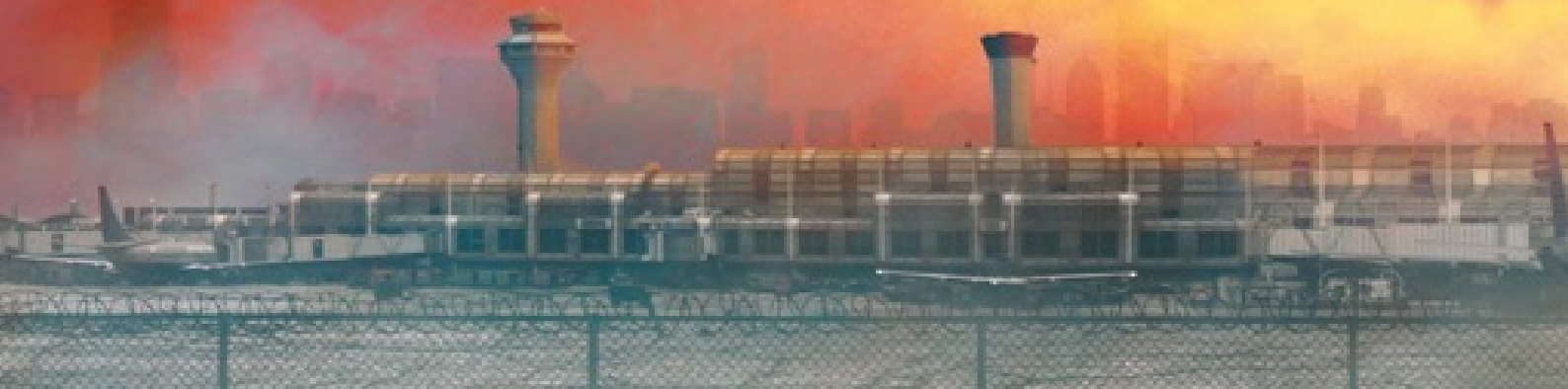


ONE CHOICE WILL DEFINE YOU



ALLEGIAN'T

#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR
VERONICA ROTH



ALLEGIANT

VERONICA ROTH



KATHERINE TEGEN BOOKS
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*To Jo,
who guides and steadies me*

*Every question that can be answered must be
answered or at least engaged.
Illogical thought processes must be
challenged when they arise.
Wrong answers must be corrected.
Correct answers must be affirmed.*

—From the Erudite faction manifesto

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I PACE IN our cell in Erudite headquarters, her words echoing in my mind: *My name will be Edith Prior, and there is much I am happy to forget.*

“So you’ve *never* seen her before? Not even in pictures?” Christina says, her wounded leg propped up on a pillow. She was shot during our desperate attempt to reveal the Edith Prior video to our city. At the time we had no idea what it would say, or that it would shatter the foundation we stand on, the factions, our identities. “Is she a grandmother or an aunt or something?”

“I told you, no,” I say, turning when I reach the wall. “Prior is—was—my father’s name, so he would have to be on his side of the family. But Edith is an Abnegation name, and my father’s relative must have been Erudite, so . . .”

“So she must be older,” Cara says, leaning her head against the wall. From this angle she looks just like her brother, Will, my friend, the one I shot. Then she straightens, and the ghost of him is gone. “A few generations back. An ancestor.”

“Ancestor.” The word feels old inside me, like crumbling brick. I touch one wall of the cell as I turn around. The panel is cold and white.

My ancestor, and this is the inheritance she passed to me: freedom from the factions, and the knowledge that my Divergent identity is more important than I could have known. My existence is a signal that we need to leave this city and offer our help to whoever is outside it.

“I want to know,” Cara says, running her hand over her face. “I need to know how long we’ve been here. Would you stop pacing for *one minute*?”

I stop in the middle of the cell and raise my eyebrows at her.

“Sorry,” she mumbles.

“It’s okay,” Christina says. “We’ve been in here way too long.”

It’s been days since Evelyn mastered the chaos in the lobby of Erudite headquarters with a few short commands and had all the prisoners hustled away to cells on the third floor. A factionless woman came to doctor our wounds and distribute painkillers, and we’ve eaten and showered several times, but no one has told us what’s going on outside. No matter how forcefully I’ve asked them.

“I thought Tobias would come by now,” I say, dropping to the edge of my cot. “Where *is* he?”

“Maybe he’s still angry that you lied to him and went behind his back to work with his father,” Cara says.

I glare at her.

“Four wouldn’t be that petty,” Christina says, either to chastise Cara or to reassure me, I’m not sure. “Something’s probably going on that’s keeping him away. He told you to trust him.”

In the chaos, when everyone was shouting and the factionless were trying to push us toward the staircase, I curled my fingers in the hem of his shirt so I wouldn’t lose him. He took my wrists in his hands and pushed me away, and those were the words he said. *Trust me. Go where they tell you.*

“I’m trying,” I say, and it’s true. I’m trying to trust him. But every part of me, every fiber and every nerve, is straining toward freedom, not just from this cell but from the prison of the city beyond it.

I need to see what’s outside the fence.

I CAN'T WALK these hallways without remembering the days I spent as a prisoner here, barefoot, pain pulsing inside me every time I moved. And with that memory is another one, one of waiting for Beatrice Prior to go to her death, of my fists against the door, of her legs slung across Peter's arm when he told me she was just drugged.

I hate this place.

It isn't as clean as it was when it was the Erudite compound; now it is ravaged by war, bullet holes in the walls and the broken glass of shattered lightbulbs everywhere. I walk over dirty footprints and beneath flickering lights to her cell and I am admitted without question, because I bear the factionless symbol—an empty circle—on a black band around my arm and Evelyn's features on my face. Tobias Eaton was a shameful name, and now it is a powerful one.

Tris crouches on the ground inside, shoulder to shoulder with Christina and diagonal from Cara. Most Tris should look pale and small—she *is* pale and small, after all—but instead the room is full of her.

Her round eyes find mine and she is on her feet, her arms wound tightly around my waist and her face against my chest.

I squeeze her shoulder with one hand and run my other hand over her hair, still surprised when her hair stops above her neck instead of below it. I was happy when she cut it, because it was hair for a warrior and not a girl, and I knew that was what she would need.

“How'd you get in?” she says in her low, clear voice.

“I'm Tobias Eaton,” I say, and she laughs.

“Right. I keep forgetting.” She pulls away just far enough to look at me. There is a wavering expression in her eyes, like she is a heap of leaves about to be scattered by the wind. “What's happening? What took you so long?”

She sounds desperate, pleading. For all the horrible memories this place carries for me, it carries more for her, the walk to her execution, her brother's betrayal, the fear serum. I have to get her out.

Cara looks up with interest. I feel uncomfortable, like I have shifted in my skin and it doesn't quite fit anymore. I hate having an audience.

“Evelyn has the city under lockdown,” I say. “No one goes a step in any direction without her say-so. A few days ago she gave a speech about uniting against our oppressors, the people outside.”

“Oppressors?” Christina says. She takes a vial from her pocket and dumps the contents into her mouth—painkillers for the bullet wound in her leg, I assume.

I slide my hands into my pockets. “Evelyn—and a lot of people, actually—think we shouldn't leave the city just to help a bunch of people who shoved us in here so they could use us later. They want to try to heal the city and solve our own problems instead of leaving to solve other people's. I'm paraphrasing, of course,” I say. “I suspect that opinion is very convenient for my mother, because as long as we're all contained, she's in charge. The second we leave, she loses her hold.”

“Great.” Tris rolls her eyes. “Of course she would choose the most selfish route possible.”

“She has a point.” Christina wraps her fingers around the vial. “I'm not saying I don't want to leave the city and see what's out there, but we've got enough going on here. How are we supposed to help

bunch of people we've never met?"

Tris considers this, chewing on the inside of her cheek. "I don't know," she admits.

My watch reads three o'clock. I've been here too long—long enough to make Evelyn suspicious. I told her I came to break things off with Tris, that it wouldn't take much time. I'm not sure she believed me.

I say, "Listen, I mostly came to warn you—they're starting the trials for all the prisoners. They're going to put you all under truth serum, and if it works, you'll be convicted as traitors. I think you would all like to avoid that."

"Convicted as *traitors*?" Tris scowls. "How is revealing the truth to our entire city an act of betrayal?"

"It was an act of defiance against your leaders," I say. "Evelyn and her followers don't want to leave the city. They won't thank you for showing that video."

"They're just like Jeanine!" She makes a fitful gesture, like she wants to hit something but there's nothing available. "Ready to do anything to stifle the truth, and for what? To be kings of their tiny little world? It's ridiculous."

I don't want to say so, but part of me agrees with my mother. I don't owe the people outside the city anything, whether I am Divergent or not. I'm not sure I want to offer myself to them to solve humanity's problems, whatever that means.

But I do want to leave, in the desperate way that an animal wants to escape a trap. Wild and rabid. Ready to gnaw through bone.

"Be that as it may," I say carefully, "if the truth serum works on you, you will be convicted."

"If it works?" says Cara, narrowing her eyes.

"Divergent," Tris says to her, pointing at her own head. "Remember?"

"That's fascinating." Cara tucks a stray hair back into the knot just above her neck. "But atypical. In my experience, most Divergent can't resist the truth serum. I wonder why you can."

"You and every other Erudite who ever stuck a needle in me," Tris snaps.

"Can we focus, please? I would like to avoid having to break you out of prison," I say. Suddenly desperate for comfort, I reach for Tris's hand, and she brings her fingers up to meet mine. We are not people who touch each other carelessly; every point of contact between us feels important, a rush of energy and relief.

"All right, all right," she says, gently now. "What did you have in mind?"

"I'll get Evelyn to let you testify first, of the three of you," I say. "All you have to do is come up with a lie that will exonerate both Christina and Cara, and then tell it under truth serum."

"What kind of lie would do that?"

"I thought I would leave that to you," I say. "Since you're the better liar."

I know as I'm saying the words that they hit a sore spot in both of us. She lied to me so many times. She promised me she wouldn't go to her death in the Erudite compound when Jeanine demanded the sacrifice of a Divergent, and then she did it anyway. She told me she would stay home during the Erudite attack, and then I found her in Erudite headquarters, working with my father. I understand why she did all those things, but that doesn't mean we aren't still broken.

"Yeah." She looks at her shoes. "Okay, I'll think of something."

I set my hand on her arm. "I'll talk to Evelyn about your trial. I'll try to make it soon."

"Thank you."

I feel the urge, familiar now, to wrench myself from my body and speak directly into her mind. It's the same urge, I realize, that makes me want to kiss her every time I see her, because even a sliver of

distance between us is infuriating. Our fingers, loosely woven a moment ago, now clutch together, her palm tacky with moisture, mine rough in places where I have grabbed too many handles on too many moving trains. Now she looks pale and small, but her eyes make me think of wide-open skies that I have never actually seen, only dreamed of.

“If you’re going to kiss, do me a favor and tell me so I can look away,” says Christina.

“We are,” Tris says. And we do.

I touch her cheek to slow the kiss down, holding her mouth on mine so I can feel every place where our lips touch and every place where they pull away. I savor the air we share in the second afterword and the slip of her nose across mine. I think of something to say, but it is too intimate, so I swallow. A moment later I decide I don’t care.

“I wish we were alone,” I say as I back out of the cell.

She smiles. “I almost always wish that.”

As I shut the door, I see Christina pretending to vomit, and Cara laughing, and Tris’s hands hanging at her sides.

"I THINK YOU'RE all idiots." My hands are curled in my lap like a sleeping child's. My body is heavy with truth serum. Sweat collects on my eyelids. "You should be thanking me, not questioning me."

"We should thank you for defying the instructions of your faction leaders? Thank you for trying to prevent one of your faction leaders from killing Jeanine Matthews? You behaved like a traitor!" Evelyn Johnson spits the word like a snake. We are in the conference room in Erudite headquarters where the trials have been taking place. I have now been a prisoner for at least a week.

I see Tobias, half-hidden in the shadows behind his mother. He has kept his eyes averted since I sat in the chair and they cut the strip of plastic binding my wrists together. For just for a moment, his eyes touch mine, and I know it's time to start lying.

It's easier now that I know I can do it. As easy as pushing the weight of the truth serum aside in my mind.

"I am not a traitor," I say. "At the time I believed that Marcus was working under Dauntless factionless orders. Since I couldn't join the fight as a soldier, I was happy to help with something else."

"Why couldn't you be a soldier?" Fluorescent light glows behind Evelyn's hair. I can't see her face and I can't focus on anything for more than a second before the truth serum threatens to pull me down again.

"Because." I bite my lip, as if trying to stop the words from rushing out. I don't know when I became so good at acting, but I guess it's not that different from lying, which I have always had talent for. "Because I couldn't hold a gun, okay? Not after shooting . . . him. My friend Will. I couldn't hold a gun without panicking."

Evelyn's eyes pinch tighter. I suspect that even in the softest parts of her, there is no sympathy for me.

"So Marcus told you he was working under my orders," she says, "and even knowing what you know about his rather tense relationship with both the Dauntless and the factionless, you believed him?"

"Yes."

"I can see why you didn't choose Erudite." She laughs.

My cheeks tingle. I would like to slap her, as I'm sure many of the people in this room would, though they wouldn't dare to admit it. Evelyn has us all trapped in the city, controlled by armed factionless patrolling the streets. She knows that whoever holds the guns holds the power. And with Jeanine Matthews dead, there is no one left to challenge her for it.

From one tyrant to another. That is the world we know, now.

"Why didn't you tell anyone about this?" she says.

"I didn't want to have to admit to any weakness," I say. "And I didn't want Four to know I was working with his father. I knew he wouldn't like it." I feel new words rising in my throat, prompted by the truth serum. "I brought you the truth about our city and the reason we are in it. If you aren't thanking me for it, you should at least *do* something about it instead of sitting here on this mess you made, pretending it's a throne!"

Evelyn's mocking smile twists like she has just tasted something unpleasant. She leans in close my face, and I see for the first time how old she is; I see the lines that frame her eyes and mouth, and the unhealthy pallor she wears from years of eating far too little. Still, she is handsome like her son. Near-starvation could not take that.

"I am doing something about it. I am making a new world," she says, and her voice gets even quieter, so that I can barely hear her. "I was Abnegation. I have known the truth far longer than you have, Beatrice Prior. I don't know how you're getting away with this, but I promise you, you will not have a place in my new world, especially not with my son."

I smile a little. I shouldn't, but it's harder to suppress gestures and expressions than words, with this weight in my veins. She believes that Tobias belongs to her now. She doesn't know the truth, though he belongs to himself.

Evelyn straightens, folding her arms.

"The truth serum has revealed that while you may be a fool, you are no traitor. This interrogation is over. You may leave."

"What about my friends?" I say sluggishly. "Christina, Cara. They didn't do anything wrong either."

"We will deal with them soon," Evelyn says.

I stand, though I'm weak and dizzy from the serum. The room is packed with people, shoulder to shoulder, and I can't find the exit for a few long seconds, until someone takes my arm, a boy with warm brown skin and a wide smile—Uriah. He guides me to the door. Everyone starts talking.

Uriah leads me down the hallway to the elevator bank. The elevator doors spring open when I touches the button, and I follow him in, still not steady on my feet. When the doors close, I say, "You don't think the part about the mess and the throne was too much?"

"No. She expects you to be hotheaded. She might have been suspicious if you hadn't been."

I feel like everything inside me is vibrating with energy, in anticipation of what is to come. I am free. We're going to find a way out of the city. No more waiting, pacing a cell, demanding answers that I won't get from the guards.

The guards did tell me a few things about the new factionless order this morning. Former faction members are required to move closer to Erudite headquarters and mix, no more than four members to a particular faction in each dwelling. We have to mix our clothing, too. I was given a yellow Amity shirt and black Candor pants earlier as a result of that particular edict.

"All right, we're this way. . . ." Uriah leads me out of the elevator. This floor of Erudite headquarters is all glass, even the walls. Sunlight refracts through it and casts slivers of rainbow across the floor. I shield my eyes with one hand and follow Uriah to a long, narrow room with beds on either side. Next to each bed is a glass cabinet for clothes and books, and a small table.

"It used to be the Erudite initiate dormitory," Uriah says. "I reserved beds for Christina and Cara already."

Sitting on a bed near the door are three girls in red shirts—Amity girls, I would guess—and on the left side of the room, an older woman lies on one of the beds, her spectacles dangling from one ear—possibly one of the Erudite. I know I should try to stop putting people in factions when I see them, but it's an old habit, hard to break.

Uriah falls on one of the beds in the back corner. I sit on the one next to his, glad to be free and at rest, finally.

"Zeke says it sometimes takes a little while for the factionless to process exonerations, so the

should be out later,” Uriah says.

~~For a moment I feel relieved that everyone I care about will be out of prison by tonight. But then~~ remember that Caleb is still there, because he was a well-known lackey of Jeanine Matthews, and the factionless will never exonerate him. But just how far they will go to destroy the mark Jeanine Matthews left on this city, I don’t know.

I don’t care, I think. But even as I think it, I know it’s a lie. He’s still my brother.

“Good,” I say. “Thanks, Uriah.”

He nods, and leans his head against the wall to prop it up.

“How are you?” I say. “I mean . . . Lynn . . .”

Uriah had been friends with Lynn and Marlene as long as I’d known them, and now both of them are dead. I feel like I might be able to understand—after all, I’ve lost two friends too, Al to the pressures of initiation and Will to the attack simulation and my own hasty actions. But I don’t want to pretend that our suffering is the same. For one thing, Uriah knew his friends better than I did.

“I don’t want to talk about it.” Uriah shakes his head. “Or think about it. I just want to keep moving.”

“Okay. I understand. Just . . . let me know if you need . . .”

“Yeah.” He smiles at me and gets up. “You’re okay here, right? I told my mom I’d visit tonight, but I have to go soon. Oh—almost forgot to tell you—Four said he wants to meet you later.”

I pull up straighter. “Really? When? Where?”

“A little after ten, at Millennium Park. On the lawn.” He smirks. “Don’t get too excited, your head will explode.”

MY MOTHER ALWAYS sits on the edges of things—chairs, ledges, tables—as if she suspects she will have to flee in an instant. This time it's Jeanine's old desk in Erudite headquarters that she sits on the edge of, her toes balanced on the floor and the cloudy light of the city glowing behind her. She is a woman of muscle twisted around bone.

"I think we have to talk about your loyalty," she says, but she doesn't sound like she's accusing me of something, she just sounds tired. For a moment she seems so worn that I feel like I can see right through her, but then she straightens, and the feeling is gone.

"Ultimately, it was you who helped Tris and got that video released," she says. "No one else knows that, but *I* know it."

"Listen." I lean forward to prop my elbows on my knees. "I didn't know what was in that file. I trusted Tris's judgment more than my own. That's all that happened."

I thought telling Evelyn that I broke up with Tris would make it easier for my mother to trust me and I was right—she has been warmer, more open, ever since I told that lie.

"And now that you've seen the footage?" Evelyn says. "What do you think now? Do you think we should leave the city?"

I know what she wants me to say—that I see no reason to join the outside world—but I'm not a good liar, so instead I select a part of the truth.

"I'm afraid of it," I say. "I'm not sure it's smart to leave the city knowing the dangers that might be out there."

She considers me for a moment, biting the inside of her cheek. I learned that habit from her—I used to chew my skin raw as I waited for my father to come home, unsure which version of him I would encounter, the one the Abnegation trusted and revered, or the one whose hands struck me.

I run my tongue along the bite scars and swallow the memory like it's bile.

She slides off the desk and moves to the window. "I've been receiving disturbing reports of a rebel organization among us." She looks up, raising an eyebrow. "People always organize into groups. That's a fact of our existence. I just didn't expect it to happen this quickly."

"What kind of organization?"

"The kind that wants to leave the city," she says. "They released some kind of manifesto this morning. They call themselves the Allegiant." When she sees my confused look, she adds, "Because they're *allied* with the original purpose of our city, see?"

"The original purpose—you mean, what was in the Edith Prior video? That we should send people outside when the city has a large Divergent population?"

"That, yes. But also living in factions. The Allegiant claim that we're meant to be in factions because we've been in them since the beginning." She shakes her head. "Some people will always feel change. But we can't indulge them."

With the factions dismantled, part of me has felt like a man released from a long imprisonment. I don't have to evaluate whether every thought I have or choice I make fits into a narrow ideology. I don't want the factions back.

But Evelyn hasn't liberated us like she thinks—she's just made us all factionless. She's afraid of what we would choose, if we were given actual freedom. And that means that no matter what I believe about the factions, I'm relieved that someone, somewhere, is defying her.

I arrange my face into an empty expression, but my heart is beating faster than before. I have had to be careful, to stay in Evelyn's good graces. It's easy for me to lie to everyone else, but it's more difficult to lie to her, the only person who knew all the secrets of our Abnegation house, the violence contained within its walls.

"What are you going to do about them?" I say.

"I am going to get them under control, what else?"

The word "control" makes me sit up straight, as rigid as the chair beneath me. In this city, "control" means needles and serums and seeing without seeing; it means simulations, like the one that almost made me kill Tris, or the one that made the Dauntless into an army.

"With simulations?" I say slowly.

She scowls. "Of course not! I am not Jeanine Matthews!"

Her flare of anger sets me off. I say, "Don't forget that I barely know you, Evelyn."

She winces at the reminder. "Then let me tell you that I will never resort to simulations to get my way. Death would be better."

It's possible that death is what she will use—killing people would certainly keep them quiet, stifle their revolution before it begins. Whoever the Allegiant are, they need to be warned, and quickly.

"I can find out who they are," I say.

"I'm sure that you can. Why else would I have told you about them?"

There are plenty of reasons she would tell me. To test me. To catch me. To feed me false information. I know what my mother is—she is someone for whom the end of a thing justifies the means of getting there, the same as my father, and the same, sometimes, as me.

"I'll do it, then. I'll find them."

I rise, and her fingers, brittle as branches, close around my arm. "Thank you."

I force myself to look at her. Her eyes are close above her nose, which is hooked at the end, like mine. Her skin is a middling color, darker than mine. For a moment I see her in Abnegation gray, her thick hair bound back with a dozen pins, sitting across the dinner table from me. I see her crouched in front of me, fixing my mismatched shirt buttons before I go to school, and standing at the window watching the uniform street for my father's car, her hands clasped—no, clenched, her tan knuckles white with tension. We were united in fear then, and now that she isn't afraid anymore, part of me wants to see what it would be like to unite with her in strength.

I feel an ache, like I betrayed her, the woman who used to be my only ally, and I turn away before she can take it all back and apologize.

I leave Erudite headquarters amid a crowd of people, my eyes confused, hunting for faction colors automatically when there are none left. I am wearing a gray shirt, blue jeans, black shoes—neutral clothes, but beneath them, my Dauntless tattoos. It is impossible to erase my choices. Especially these.

I SET MY watch alarm for ten o'clock and fall asleep right away, without even shifting to a comfortable position. A few hours later the beeps don't wake me, but the frustrated shout of someone across the room does. I turn off the alarm, run my fingers through my hair, and half walk, half jog to one of the emergency staircases. The exit at the bottom will let me out in the alley, where I probably won't be stopped.

Once I'm outside, the cool air wakes me up. I pull my sleeves down over my fingers to keep them warm. Summer is finally ending. There are a few people milling around the entrance to Erudite headquarters, but none of them notices me creeping across Michigan Avenue. There are some advantages to being small.

I see Tobias standing in the middle of the lawn, wearing mixed faction colors—a gray T-shirt, blue jeans, and a black sweatshirt with a hood, representing all the factions my aptitude test told me I was qualified for. A backpack rests against his feet.

"How did I do?" I say when I'm close enough for him to hear me.

"Very well," he says. "Evelyn still hates you, but Christina and Cara have been released without questioning."

"Good." I smile.

He pinches the front of my shirt, right over my stomach, and tugs me toward him, kissing me softly.

"Come on," he says as he pulls away. "I have a plan for this evening."

"Oh, really?"

"Yes, well, I realized that we've never been on an actual date."

"Chaos and destruction do tend to take away a person's dating possibilities."

"I would like to experience this 'date' phenomenon." He walks backward, toward the mammoth metal structure at the other end of the lawn, and I follow him. "Before you, I only went on group dates and they were usually a disaster. They always ended up with Zeke making out with whatever girl I intended to make out with, and me sitting in awkward silence with some girl that I had somehow offended in some way early on."

"You're not very nice," I say, grinning.

"You're one to talk."

"Hey, I could be nice if I tried."

"Hmm." He taps his chin. "Say something nice, then."

"You're very good-looking."

He smiles, his teeth a flash in the dark. "I like this 'nice' thing."

We reach the end of the lawn. The metal structure is larger and stranger up close than it was from far away. It's really a stage, and arcing above it are massive metal plates that curl in different directions, like an exploded aluminum can. We walk around one of the plates on the right side to the back of the stage, which rises at an angle from the ground. There, metal beams support the plates from behind. Tobias secures his backpack on his shoulders and grabs one of the beams. Climbing.

“This feels familiar,” I say. One of the first things we did together was scale the Ferris wheel, but that time it was me, not him, who compelled us to climb higher.

I push up my sleeves and follow him. My shoulder is still sore from the bullet wound, but it's mostly healed. Still, I bear most of my weight with my left arm and try to push with my feet whenever possible. I look down at the tangle of bars beneath me and beyond them, the ground, and laugh.

Tobias climbs to a spot where two metal plates meet in a V, leaving enough room for two people to sit. He scoots back, wedging himself between the two plates, and reaches for my waist to help me when I get close enough. I don't really need the help, but I don't say so—I am too busy enjoying his hands on me.

He takes a blanket out of his backpack and covers us with it, then produces two plastic cups.

“Would you like a clear head or a fuzzy one?” he says, peering into the bag.

“Um . . .” I tilt my head. “Clear. I think we have some things to talk about, right?”

“Yes.”

He takes out a small bottle with clear, bubbling liquid in it, and as he twists open the cap, says, “I stole it from the Erudite kitchens. Apparently it's delicious.”

He pours some in each cup, and I take a sip. Whatever it is, it's sweet as syrup and lemon-flavored, and makes me cringe a little. My second sip is better.

“Things to talk about,” he says.

“Right.”

“Well . . .” Tobias frowns into his cup. “Okay, so I understand why you worked with Marcus, and why you felt like you couldn't tell me. But . . .”

“But you're angry,” I say. “Because I lied to you. On several occasions.”

He nods, not looking at me. “It's not even the Marcus thing. It's further back than that. I don't know if you can understand what it was like to wake up alone, and know that you had gone”—*to your death*, is what I suspect he wants to say, but he can't even say the words—“to Erudite headquarters.”

“No, I probably can't.” I take another sip, turning the sugary drink over in my mouth before swallowing. “Listen, I . . . I used to think about giving my life for things, but I didn't understand what ‘giving your life’ really was until it was right there, about to be taken from me.”

I look up at him, and finally, he looks back at me.

“I know now,” I say. “I know I want to live. I know I want to be honest with you. But . . . but I can't do that, I won't do it, if you won't trust me, or if you talk to me in that condescending way you sometimes do—”

“*Condescending?*” he says. “You were doing ridiculous, risky things—”

“Yeah,” I say. “And do you really think it helped to talk to me like I was a child who didn't know any better?”

“What else was I supposed to do?” he demands. “You wouldn't see reason!”

“Maybe reason wasn't what I needed!” I sit forward, not able to pretend I am relaxed anymore. I felt like I was being eaten alive by guilt, and what I needed was your patience and your kindness, not for you to yell at me. Oh, and for you to constantly keep your plans from me like I couldn't possibly handle—”

“I didn't want to burden you more than you already were.”

“So do you think I'm a strong person, or not?” I scowl at him. “Because you seem to think I can take it when you're scolding me, but you don't think I can handle anything else? What does that mean?”

“Of course I think you're a strong person.” He shakes his head. “I just . . . I'm not used to telling

people things. I'm used to handling things on my own."

"I'm reliable," I say. "~~You can trust me. And you can let me be the judge of what I can handle.~~"

"Okay," he says, nodding. "But no more lies. Not ever."

"Okay."

I feel stiff and squeezed, like my body was just forced into something too small for it. But that's not how I want the conversation to end, so I reach for his hand.

"I'm sorry I lied to you," I say. "I really am."

"Well," he says. "I didn't mean to make you feel like I didn't respect you."

We stay there for a while, our hands clasped. I lean back against the metal plate. Above me, the sky is blank and dark, the moon shielded by clouds. I find a star ahead of us, as the clouds shift, but it seems to be the only one. When I tilt my head back, though, I can see the line of buildings along Michigan Avenue, like a row of sentries keeping watch over us.

I am quiet until the stiff, squeezed feeling leaves me. In its place I now feel relief. It isn't usually that easy for me to let go of anger, but the past few weeks have been strange for both of us, and I am happy to release the feelings I have been holding on to, the anger and the fear that he hates me and the guilt from working with his father behind his back.

"This stuff is kind of gross," he says, draining his cup and setting it down.

"Yes, it is," I say, staring at what remains in mine. I drink it in one gulp, wincing as the bubbles burn my throat. "I don't know what the Erudite are always bragging about. Dauntless cake is much better."

"I wonder what the Abnegation treat would have been, if they had one."

"Stale bread."

He laughs. "Plain oatmeal."

"Milk."

"Sometimes I think I believe everything they taught us," he says. "But obviously not, since I'm sitting here holding your hand right now without having married you first."

"What do the Dauntless teach about . . . that?" I say, nodding to our hands.

"What do the Dauntless teach, hmm." He smirks. "Do whatever you want, but use protection, what they teach."

I raise my eyebrows. Suddenly my face feels warm.

"I think I'd like to find a middle ground for myself," he says. "To find that place between what you want and what I think is wise."

"That sounds good." I pause. "But what do you want?"

I think I know the answer, but I want to hear him say it.

"Hmm." He grins, and leans forward onto his knees. He presses his hands to the metal plate, framing my head with his arms, and kisses me, slowly, on my mouth, under my jaw, right above my collarbone. I stay still, nervous about doing anything, in case it's stupid or he doesn't like it. But then I feel like a statue, like I am not really here at all, and so I touch his waist, hesitantly.

Then his lips are on mine again, and he pulls his shirt out from under my hands so that I am touching his bare skin. I come to life, pressing closer, my hands creeping up his back, sliding over his shoulders. His breaths come faster and so do mine, and I taste the lemon-syrup-fizz we just drank and I smell the wind on his skin and all I want is more, more.

I push his shirt up. A moment ago I was cold, but I don't think either of us is cold now. His arms wrap around my waist, strong and certain, and his free hand tangles in my hair and I slow down drinking it in—the smoothness of his skin, marked up and down with black ink, and the insistence

the kiss, and the cool air wrapped around us both.

~~I relax, and I no longer feel like some kind of Divergent soldier, defying serums and government leaders alike.~~ I feel softer, lighter, and like it is okay to laugh a little as his fingertips brush over my hips and the small of my back, or to sigh into his ear when he pulls me against him, burying his face the side of my neck so that he can kiss me there. I feel like myself, strong and weak at once—allowed at least for a little while, to be both.

I don't know how long it is before we get cold again, and huddle under the blanket together.

"It's getting more difficult to be wise," he says, laughing into my ear.

I smile at him. "I think that's how it's supposed to be."

SOMETHING IS BREWING.

I can feel it as I walk the cafeteria line with my tray, and see it in the huddled heads of a group of factionless as they lean over their oatmeal. Whatever is about to happen will happen soon.

Yesterday when I left Evelyn's office I lingered in the hallway to eavesdrop on her next meeting. Before she closed the door, I heard her say something about a demonstration. The question that's itching at the back of my mind is: Why didn't she tell me?

She must not trust me. That means I'm not doing as good a job as her pretend right-hand man as she thinks I am.

I sit down with the same breakfast as everyone else: a bowl of oatmeal with a sprinkle of brown sugar on it, and a mug of coffee. I watch the group of factionless as I spoon it into my mouth without tasting it. One of them—a girl, maybe fourteen—keeps flicking her eyes toward the clock.

I'm halfway done with breakfast when I hear the shouts. The nervy factionless girl jolts from her seat as if stuck with a live wire, and they all start toward the door. I am right behind them, elbowing my way past slow-movers through the lobby of Erudite headquarters, where the portrait of Jeanine Matthews still lies in shreds on the floor.

A group of factionless has already gathered outside, in the middle of Michigan Avenue. A layer of pale clouds covers the sun, making the daylight hazy and dull. I hear someone shout, "Death to the factions!" and others pick up the phrase, turning it into a chant, until it fills my ears, *Death to the factions, death to the factions*. I see their fists in the air, like excitable Dauntless, but without the Dauntless joy. Their faces are twisted with rage.

I push toward the middle of the group, and then I see what they're all gathered around: The huge man-sized faction bowls from the Choosing Ceremony are turned on their sides, their contents spilling across the road, coals and glass and stone and earth and water all mingling together.

I remember slicing into my palm to add my blood to the coals, my first act of defiance against my father. I remember the surge of power inside me, and the rush of relief. Escape. These bowls were my escape.

Edward stands among them, shards of glass ground to dust beneath his heel, a sledgehammer held above his head. He brings it down on one of the overturned bowls, forcing a dent into the metal. Coals and dust rises into the air.

I have to stop myself from running at him. He can't destroy it, not that bowl, not the Choosing Ceremony, not the symbol of my triumph. Those things should not be destroyed.

The crowd is swelling, not just with factionless wearing black armbands with empty white circles on them, but with people from every former faction, their arms bare. An Erudite man—his faction still indicated by his neatly parted hair—bursts free of the crowd just as Edward is pulling back the sledgehammer for another swing. He wraps his soft, ink-smudged hands around the handle, just above Edward's, and they push into each other, teeth gritted.

I see a blond head across the crowd—Tris, wearing a loose blue shirt without sleeves, showing the edges of the faction tattoos on her shoulders. She tries to run to Edward and the Erudite man, but

Christina stops her with both hands.

~~The Erudite man's face turns purple. Edward is taller and stronger than he is. He has no chance.~~ he's a fool for trying. Edward rips the sledgehammer handle from the Erudite man's hands and swings again. But he's off balance, dizzy with rage—the sledgehammer hits the Erudite man in the shoulder at full force, metal cracking bone.

For a moment all I hear is the Erudite man's screams. It's like everyone is taking a breath.

Then the crowd explodes into a frenzy, everyone running toward the bowls, toward Edward, toward the Erudite man. They collide with one another and then with me, shoulders and elbows and heads hitting me over and over again.

I don't know where to run: to the Erudite man, to Edward, to Tris? I can't think; I can't breathe. The crowd carries me toward Edward, and I grab his arm.

"Let go!" I shout over the noise. His single bright eye fixes on me, and he bares his teeth, trying to wrench himself away.

I bring my knee up, into his side. He stumbles back, losing his grip on the sledgehammer. I hold close to my leg and start toward Tris.

She is somewhere in front of me, struggling toward the Erudite man. I watch as a woman's elbow hits her in the cheek, sending her reeling backward. Christina shoves the woman away.

Then a gun goes off. Once, twice. Three times.

The crowd scatters, everyone running in terror from the threat of bullets, and I try to see who, anyone, was shot, but the rush of bodies is too intense. I can barely see anything.

Tris and Christina crouch next to the Erudite man with the shattered shoulder. His face is bloody and his clothes are dirty with footprints. His combed Erudite hair is tousled. He isn't moving.

A few feet away from him, Edward lies in a pool of his own blood. The bullet hit him in the gut. There are other people on the ground too, people I don't recognize, people who got trampled or shot. I suspect the bullets were meant for Edward and Edward alone—the others were just bystanders.

I look around wildly but I don't see the shooter. Whoever it was seems to have dissolved into the crowd.

I drop the sledgehammer next to the dented bowl and kneel beside Edward, Abnegation stone digging into my kneecaps. His remaining eye moves back and forth beneath his eyelid—he's alive, for now.

"We have to get him to the hospital," I say to whoever is listening. Almost everyone is gone.

I look over my shoulder at Tris and the Erudite man, who hasn't moved. "Is he . . . ?"

Her fingers are on his throat, taking his pulse, and her eyes are wide and empty. She shakes her head. No, he is not alive. I didn't think he was.

I close my eyes. The faction bowls are printed on my eyelids, tipped on their sides, their contents a pile on the street. The symbols of our old way of life, destroyed—a man dead, others injured—another for what?

For nothing. For Evelyn's empty, narrow vision: a city where factions are wrenched away from people against their will.

She wanted us to have more than five choices. Now we have none.

I know for sure, then, that I can't be her ally, and I never could have.

"We have to go," Tris says, and I know she's not talking about leaving Michigan Avenue or taking Edward to the hospital; she's talking about the city.

"We have to go," I repeat.

The makeshift hospital at Erudite headquarters smells like chemicals, almost gritty in my nose. I close my eyes as I wait for Evelyn.

I'm so angry I don't even want to sit here, I just want to pack up my things and leave. She must have planned that demonstration, or she wouldn't have known about it the day before, and she must have known that it would get out of control, with tensions running as high as they are. But she did it anyway. Making a big statement about the factions was more important to her than safety or the potential loss of lives. I don't know why that surprises me.

I hear the elevator doors slide open, and her voice: "Tobias!"

She rushes toward me and seizes my hands, which are sticky with blood. Her dark eyes are wide with fear as she says, "Are you hurt?"

She's worried about me. The thought is a little pinprick of heat inside me—she must love me, she must worry about me. She must still be capable of love.

"The blood is Edward's. I helped carry him here."

"How is he?" she says.

I shake my head. "Dead."

I don't know how else to say it.

She shrinks back, releasing my hands, and sits on one of the waiting room chairs. My mother embraced Edward after he defected from Dauntless. She must have taught him to be a warrior again after the loss of his eye and his faction and his footing. I never knew they were so close, but I can see it now, in the gleam of tears in her eyes and the trembling of her fingers. It's the most emotion I've ever seen her show since I was a child, since my father slammed her into our living room walls.

I press the memory away as if stuffing it into a drawer that is too small for it.

"I'm sorry," I say. I don't know if I really mean it or if I'm just saying it so she still thinks I'm on her side. Then I add tentatively, "Why didn't you tell me about the demonstration?"

She shakes her head. "I didn't know about it."

She's lying. I know. I decide to let her. In order to stay on her good side, I have to avoid conflict with her. Or maybe I just don't want to press the issue with Edward's death looming over both of us. Sometimes it's hard for me to tell where strategy ends and sympathy for her begins.

"Oh." I scratch behind my ear. "You can go in and see him, if you want."

"No." She seems far away. "I know what bodies look like." Drifting further.

"Maybe I should go."

"Stay," she says. She touches the empty chair between us. "Please."

I take the seat beside her, and though I tell myself that I am just an undercover agent obeying her supposed leader, I feel like I am a son comforting his grieving mother.

We sit with our shoulders touching, our breaths falling into the same rhythm, and we don't say another word.

CHRISTINA TURNS A black stone over and over in her hand as we walk. It takes me a few seconds to realize that it's actually a piece of coal, from the Dauntless Choosing Ceremony bowl.

"I didn't really want to bring this up, but I can't stop thinking about it," she says. "That of the transfer initiates we started with, only six are still alive."

Ahead of us is the Hancock building, and beyond it, Lake Shore Drive, the lazy strip of pavement that I once flew over like a bird. We walk the cracked sidewalk side by side, our clothes smeared with Edward's blood, now dry.

It hasn't hit me yet: that Edward, by far the most talented transfer initiate we had, the boy whose blood I cleaned off the dormitory floor, is dead. He's dead now.

"And of the nice ones," I say, "it's just you, me, and . . . Myra, probably."

I haven't seen Myra since she left the Dauntless compound with Edward, right after his eye was claimed by a butter knife. I know they broke up not long after that, but I never found out where she went. I don't think I ever exchanged more than a few words with her anyway.

A set of doors to the Hancock building are already open, dangling from their hinges. Uriah said that he would come here early to turn on the generator, and sure enough, when I touch my finger to the elevator button, it glows through my fingernail.

"Have you been here before?" I say as we walk into the elevator.

"No," Christina says. "Not inside, I mean. I didn't get to go zip lining, remember?"

"Right." I lean against the wall. "You should try to go before we leave."

"Yeah." She's wearing red lipstick. It reminds me of the way candy stains children's skin if they eat it too sloppily. "Sometimes I get where Evelyn's coming from. So many awful things have happened, sometimes it feels like a good idea to stay here and just . . . try to clean up this mess before we get ourselves involved in another." She smiles a little. "But of course, I'm not going to do that," she adds. "I'm not even sure why. Curiosity, I guess."

"Have you talked to your parents about it?"

Sometimes I forget that Christina isn't like me, with no family loyalty to tie her to one place anymore. She has a mother and a little sister, both former Candor.

"They have to look after my sister," she says. "They don't know if it's safe out there; they don't want to risk her."

"But they would be okay with you leaving?"

"They were okay with me joining another faction. They'll be okay with this, too," she says. She looks down at her shoes. "They just want me to live an honest life, you know? And I can't do that here. I just know that I can't."

The elevator doors open, and the wind hits us immediately, still warm but woven with threads of winter cold. I hear voices coming from the roof, and I climb the ladder to get to them. It bounces with each of my footsteps, but Christina holds it steady for me until I reach the top.

Uriah and Zeke are there, throwing pebbles off the roof and listening for the clatter when they hit the windows. Uriah tries to bump Zeke's elbow before he throws, to mess him up, but Zeke is too

quick for him.

“Hey,” they say in unison when they spot Christina and me.

“Wait, are you guys related or something?” Christina says, grinning. They both laugh, but Uriah looks a little dazed, like he’s not quite connected to this moment or this place. I guess losing someone the way he lost Marlene can do that to a person, though that’s not what it did to me.

There are no slings on the roof for the zip line, and that’s not why we came. I don’t know why the others did, but I wanted to be up high—I wanted to see as far as I could. But all the land west of where I am is black, like it’s draped in a dark blanket. For a moment I think I can make out a glimmer of light on the horizon, but the next it’s gone, just a trick of the eyes.

The others are quiet too. I wonder if we’re all thinking the same thing.

“What do you think’s out there?” Uriah finally says.

Zeke just shrugs, but Christina ventures a guess. “What if it’s just more of the same? Just . . . more crumbling city, more factions, more of everything?”

“Can’t be,” Uriah says, shaking his head. “There has to be something *else*.”

“Or there’s nothing,” Zeke suggests. “Those people who put us all in here, they could just be dead. Everything could be empty.”

I shiver. I had never thought of that before, but he’s right—we don’t know what’s happened out there since they put us in here, or how many generations have lived and died since they did. We could be the last people left.

“It doesn’t matter,” I say, more sternly than I mean to. “It doesn’t matter what’s out there, we have to see it for ourselves. And then we’ll deal with it once we have.”

We stand there for a long time. I follow the bumpy edges of buildings with my eyes until all the windows smear into a line. Then Uriah asks Christina about the riot, and our still, silent moment passes as if carried away by the wind.

The next day, Evelyn stands among the pieces of Jeanine Matthews’s portrait in the Erudite headquarters lobby and announces a new set of rules. Former faction members and factionless alike are gathered in the space and spilling out into the street to hear what our new leader has to say, and factionless soldiers line the walls, their fingers poised over the triggers of their guns. Keeping us under control.

“Yesterday’s events made it clear that we are no longer able to trust each other,” she says. She looks ashen and exhausted. “We will be introducing more structure into everyone’s lives until our situation is more stable. The first of these measures is a curfew: Everyone is required to return to their assigned living spaces at nine o’clock at night. They will not leave those spaces until eight o’clock the next morning. Guards will be patrolling the streets at all hours to keep us safe.”

I snort and try to cover it up with a cough. Christina elbows me in the side and touches her finger to her lips. I don’t know why she cares—it’s not like Evelyn can hear me from all the way at the front of the room.

Tori, former leader of Dauntless, ousted by Evelyn herself, stands a few feet away from me, her arms crossed. Her mouth twitches into a sneer.

“It’s also time to prepare for our new, factionless way of life. Starting today, everyone will begin to learn the jobs the factionless have done for as long as we can remember. We will then *all* do those jobs on a rotation schedule, in addition to the other duties that have traditionally been performed by the factions.” Evelyn smiles without really smiling. I don’t know how she does it. “We will all contribute equally to our new city, as it should be. The factions have divided us, but now we will

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