

UNCORRECTED E-PROOF—NOT FOR SALE

HarperCollinsPublishers

.....

Also by Veronica Roth

Divergent

Insurgent

Allegiant

Four: A Divergent Collection

Carve the Mark

The Fates Divide

The End and Other Beginnings

UNCORRECTED E-PROOF—NOT FOR SALE

HarperCollins*Publishers*

.....

Copyright

HarperCollins Children's Books, a division of HarperCollins Publishers, 195 Broadway, New York, NY 10007

HarperCollins Publishers, Macken House, 39/40 Mayor Street Upper, Dublin 1, D01 C9W8, Ireland

The Sixth Faction

Copyright © 2026 by Veronica Roth

All rights reserved. Manufactured in Harrisonburg, VA, United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Without limiting the exclusive rights of any author, contributor, or the publisher of this publication, any unauthorized use of this publication to train generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies is expressly prohibited. HarperCollins also exercises their rights under Article 4(3) of the Digital Single Market Directive 2019/790 and expressly reserves this publication from the text and data mining exception.

harpercollins.com

ISBN 978-0-06-346254-0

Typography by Joel Tippie

\$PrintCode

FIRST EDITION

UNCORRECTED E-PROOF—NOT FOR SALE

HarperCollinsPublishers

.....

Dedication

*To Katherine Tegen,
a Candor role model when I needed one most*

Contents

Cover

Title Page

Also by Veronica Roth

Copyright

Dedication

1: Stiff

Chapter 1: Beatrice

Chapter 2: Beatrice

Chapter 3: Beatrice

Chapter 4: Beatrice

Chapter 5: Beatrice

Chapter 6: Beatrice

Chapter 7: Beatrice

Chapter 8: Beatrice

2: Initiate

Chapter 9: Caleb

Chapter 10: Beatrice

Chapter 11: Beatrice

Chapter 12: Beatrice

3: Stray

Chapter 13: Caleb

Chapter 14: Four

Chapter 15: Tris

Chapter 16: Tris

Chapter 17: Tris

Chapter 1

Beatrice

Our household's mirror is behind a sliding panel in the wall upstairs, and I'm allowed to stand in front of it once every three months, when my mother cuts my hair.

It's the same choreography every time. I take the stool out of the hall closet and carry it over. She brings the scissors and the comb from the drawer in the bathroom. I sit. She slides the panel back. And I stare into my own eyes, hoping I'll see something different this time.

But I'm the same. Small, pale. Bright blue eyes. Plain face. Dull blond hair. I want to keep staring, try on all my different expressions so I know what they look like. But even though I'm allowed to look at my reflection right now, I'm not supposed to revel in it. That would be vanity.

I look away.

My mother takes out the pins that are keeping my bun in place and then drags her fingers through my hair to unwind it. It would be easy to let this carry on the way it always has, this comforting ritual. But today I think of my brother, Caleb, how he's been cutting his own hair for years, and my mother's small smile and the tug of the comb make me feel like a child.

"Can I do it?" I ask her, nodding to the scissors.

She hesitates for only a moment before putting the scissors in my hand. I pinch my hair between two fingers the way I've seen her do it, and I think about shifting them higher, so I trim off more than just an inch. What if I cut my hair at my chin? Could I be someone different then?

Don't be ridiculous, I tell myself. A haircut doesn't change a person.

But I'm just so desperate to be different. To be the person I'm supposed to be.

Desperate to be the person who fits here, in our faction, in our *home*, instead of the one who doesn't.

I close the scissors over the first lock of hair, and cut.

UNCORRECTED E-PROOF—NOT FOR SALE

HarperCollinsPublishers

.....

Chapter 2

Beatrice

My mother is humming.

She only ever hums when she cooks. I never recognize the tune. Right now she's chopping carrots for the soup, and she chops in time with the music.

I slide my knife along the cutting board to get the last onions into the pot. They sizzle in the oil.

"Thank you for doing that," she says to me. "They always make me cry."

"Of course."

I wash the cutting board right away and look at the cross-stitch of our faction's motto that hangs over the sink. *Them before I*. Mrs. Black made it. The little knots are tight and even.

My father taps the door frame. "The council leader is almost here."

My mother looks up and smiles. She seems at ease, like the most important man in the city coming over for dinner is nothing to fret about. She puts her carrots in the pot and pours a jar of vegetable broth over carrots and onions both. Then we stand together at the counter to chop the herbs, rosemary for her and thyme for me.

In these moments, I think that I *can* belong here. Working side by side with my mother. A quiet song in a quiet kitchen. The beautiful simplicity of an Abnegation life spent searching for ways to help other people, in actions big and small. My mother has accomplished both. She organizes volunteers to help the factionless and to restore the worn-down parts of the city; people in our faction routinely come to her for counsel; and my father, always so convinced of his own point of view, seeks her wisdom constantly. How can I not want that for myself? A life well-lived. A guarantee of meaning.

It's not that I don't want it, I guess. It's that I'm not right for it.

"Are you nervous for tomorrow?" she asks me—quiet, like it's a secret.

Tomorrow is the aptitude test. It will tell me . . . everything. Who I am. Where I belong. It will tell me what to choose. How to untie this knot inside me that's been getting tighter and tighter for months.

Our city is divided into five factions. Each one wraps itself around a virtue like people huddled around a hearth fire. For our faction, that virtue is selflessness. For Erudite, intelligence. For Amity, kindness. For Candor, honesty. And for Dauntless, bravery. Everything we do—our jobs, our clothes, the way we speak, the way we act—has its foundation in our virtue of choice.

My mother's shoulder is warm where it presses against mine.

"Yes," I admit. "I'm nervous."

She puts an arm around me and squeezes. “Just remember: the test won’t tell you anything you don’t already know.”

My stomach churns. She pulls away as the front door opens and the council leader’s low voice fills the entryway.

Children aren’t allowed to talk at the dinner table in Abnegation, and it’s just as well, because I’m distracted by the last thing my mother said to me. It’s only when I feel Susan’s eyes on me that I realize I’m just swirling my spoon in my soup instead of eating it. I scoop some carrot into my mouth.

The council leader’s name is Marcus Eaton. He looks just like my father: tall, short brown hair, gray clothes. Abnegation has a way of making all people look the same, and that’s the whole point—individuals disappear, and the collective good is all that’s left. But my father’s face is creased in perpetual sympathy, and Marcus’s is unreadable. I’ve known him my whole life, and I don’t know him at all.

My father says grief can make people turn inward, and Marcus has had more grief than most. He had a wife once, and a son. Evelyn Eaton died from complications with her second pregnancy. I didn’t know her well, but I remember being wary of her; she wasn’t as warm or friendly as the other Abnegation women I knew. Her death must have broken something in their son, because, years later, at his Choosing Ceremony, he left Abnegation. I don’t remember which faction he chose instead. Now Marcus is alone, because you don’t stay in touch with your child if they leave your faction.

Faction before blood. That’s one of our highest laws.

Marcus has been coming over for dinner once a week since his son left us—so, for two years.

“What are you growing in the garden this year, Agnes?” my mother is asking Mrs. Black. She runs the community garden that her son, Robert, was working in earlier. Our families were paired together because Robert and Susan are fraternal twins, just like me and Caleb.

“The radishes are flourishing,” Mrs. Black replies. “As are the tomatoes, which we’ve had trouble with in the past—Robert has been reading up on soil composition for us.”

Robert’s face is already red. His complexion makes him easy to read: He gets red when he’s angry, red when he’s embarrassed, red when he tries to lie. Right now I think he’s just red because Marcus is looking at him.

“Soil composition,” Marcus says. “Sounds very scientific.”

It’s not a compliment. My faction is suspicious of scientific pursuits. The science itself isn’t the problem—there are Abnegation doctors, after all, and they have to understand science for their work. But the line between pursuing it for other people’s benefit and pursuing it for your own interest is a fine one, as we’re often warned.

Robert stares at his plate.

“Oh, perhaps,” my mother chimes in, smiling at him. “But Robert’s focus is always the communal good, Council Leader. Not a mere idle curiosity.”

Robert's returned smile is grateful.

"And your two?" Marcus asks my mother. "Still volunteering at the hospital?"

"Caleb is," my mother replies. "Beatrice has been joining me in serving the factionless."

"Ah, I see." Marcus's voice softens, and he looks at me in a way that seems to measure and then approve me.

My face heats, and I look at my bowl. For most people, being looked at that way by a council leader—the final word of not only our faction but our city's entire government—would be flattering. But it just makes me feel like a fraud. The factionless—those who were cast out of their factions, or failed their factions' initiations—are in need. And yes, I've been joining my mother in her efforts to help them. But I hate every second of it.

Some of them are kind and seem to appreciate the work we're doing. Most of them just take what they need and go. And some of them are insulting. *Stiff*, they call me, which is slang for Abnegation, or *faction scum*. They snatch things from my hands and order me to bring them more. They never expect me to defend myself, and I never do. I'm not supposed to, after all; I'm supposed to be focused on doing good for others.

There are a lot of things I'm supposed to do, and be.

"Such critical, necessary work," Marcus says.

My face gets even hotter.

"Everyone has a place in our society." My mother's eyes—green like Caleb's—almost seem to twinkle. "Each one as important as the next."

"Yes. Of course."

The news brief comes on right as I'm scraping the bottom of my bowl, the screen in the wall flickering to life. We don't control the news; the morning report comes on at the same time every day, and special reports appear whenever they appear, no matter what we're doing. My father often complains about Erudite deliberately releasing special reports during the Abnegation dinner hour, like they're doing it just to spite us. Given what they're reporting these days, he might be right.

I read the words as they scroll past:

ABNEGATION LEADERSHIP STRENUOUSLY DENIES ALLEGATIONS OF MEMORY TAMPERING.

Last week, a report issued by this office brought to light a concerning pattern of Dauntless wall guards suffering memory lapses. In each incident, these lapses were preceded by a visit to the Abnegation Memory Vault. For several years, members of each faction have been called upon to store memories in the vault as part of an initiative by Abnegation leadership "to improve city recordkeeping," as Council Member Andrew Prior claimed at the time of proposing it. But when asked about the connection between the concerning cognitive symptoms experienced by Dauntless officers and the visits to the Memory Vault, Council Leader Marcus Eaton—notably the only person in the city with full access to the Memory Vault's systems—dismissed the allegations as "nonsense," declaring that

the report was “a flagrant attempt by Erudite leader Jeanine Matthews to deteriorate the public’s confidence in their leadership.”

Marcus’s face is, as ever, unreadable.

“Ludicrous,” my father says, shaking his head. He looks at my mother. “The way they phrase everything—I ‘claim’ my proposal was to improve city recordkeeping, like it can’t possibly be the truth. And you, Marcus—‘dismissing’ and ‘declaring’ things like some kind of tyrant—”

“They’re doubling down,” Mrs. Black cuts in, her voice quiet. The candlelight flickers over her cheekbones. “They’re determined to erode our reputation—”

“Reputation is an egocentric concept,” Marcus says, a mild chastisement. “My concern is who they’re getting their information from.”

And then words are bubbling out of me like boiling water teeming over: “So their information is right?”

Everyone at the table turns to look at me at once.

“Beatrice,” my mother says. A warning.

I curse myself silently. I didn’t mean to say anything, but now it’s too late.

“Are you questioning our faction’s integrity?” Marcus asks me. He sounds surprisingly mild, despite how pointed the question is.

I swallow hard. “No, of course not—I just . . . I thought Erudite was making up all these things.” They’re all staring at me, uncomprehending. I just want them to understand. “If they’re making them up, why would they need a source?”

“*Beatrice*.” That’s my father this time, but I’m already speaking.

“And if they’re *not* making all of it up, then—”

My mother doesn’t raise her voice. She just says, “Penalty of Silence until morning.”

My mouth closes with a snap. The Penalty of Silence deprives me of my right to speak until the penalty period is over. If I break it, the consequences are dire: detainment in Abnegation headquarters for at least a day, if not more. And the shame of that, the communal *disappointment*, is harder to quantify.

I feel it now, as I stand up to gather the bowls. Across the table from me, Robert and Caleb do the same, avoiding my eyes. The back of my neck is hot; my eyes burn. I try not to slam the bowls together as I stack them—I can’t afford to get into any more trouble. So I hurry through the task and seek refuge in the kitchen, at the sink.

My father comes to stand beside me, picking up a dishrag to dry the dishes after I wash them. He bumps his shoulder into mine, and I look over to see that he’s smiling a little.

“You get it from me,” he says.

I raise my eyebrows at him to ask the question, *I get what?*

“The direct line between brain and mouth,” he clarifies. “We have a version of the Penalty of Silence in council meetings if someone is ‘contributing to a contentious environment.’ ”

I get the sense he would roll his eyes at that statement if he let himself.

“Guess who’s penalized with it most often?”

I stare at him. I guess I know my father isn’t perfect—he loses his patience more than most Abnegation I know. But I never thought about what he was like around other Abnegation members. The cold knot of tension in my chest loosens a little.

“It’s good to challenge people. That’s how our faction maintains its high standards,” he adds. “You just have to learn to pick the right moments, that’s all.”

He squeezes my shoulder, then takes the wet bowl from my hands to dry it. I return to scrubbing.

That night, after all the cleaning is done, and Marcus Eaton goes home, and I’ve spent an hour doing my homework in the living room with Robert, Susan, and Caleb—silently—and seething at my mother—also silently—I finally go to bed. I lie on top of the blankets for the better part of an hour, my nightgown sticking to my chest. It’s warmer than it should be at this time of year, a false summer that won’t last more than a few days.

My room is just big enough for a bed and a cabinet for my clothes. I stick out a leg to open the cabinet door with my heel and stare at the stacks of gray fabric, my spare boots. I don’t own anything else, at least nothing else that I could call only mine. The brush I use for my hair is for both me and my mother; the books I use for school are borrowed; even the embroidery I’m working on is on loan from the Abnegation supply house, and I’ll have to give it away when I’m done.

Everything is shared, and that’s a good thing. Here in Abnegation, we always make sure there’s enough to go around. So why does it bother me so much?

Maybe that’s why I end up sticking my feet into my boots and tying the laces, even though there’s nowhere to go. Maybe that’s why I stick one leg out my window, and then the other, to duck under the railing of the fire escape. It rattles a little; the fire escapes on Abnegation buildings are always old and worn, since nobody uses them. I climb the ladder to the next level up, and then the next.

I look down and discover I’m at least ten stories off the ground now, and the warm wind is getting cooler and stronger. It blows my nightgown away from my body and dries the sweat on my stomach. I get to the top of the next ladder and hoist myself onto the roof.

There’s a flock of black birds roosting nearby, their beaks tucked under their wings. I turn away from them, toward the city. It’s dark at this hour; the curfew for electricity is at eleven o’clock. But I can see little flickers of light here and there where people have lit lanterns or candles. Not in the

Abnegation sector, but farther out, where a lot of the factionless live huddled around what little comforts they can find.

I plant my hands on the ledge and lean over to see down to the street. I think of how it felt when words were spilling out of me at the dinner table, my Abnegation mask slipping just for a moment to show the selfish person beneath; the person I can't help but be. I think of my mother's hard voice.

Penalty of Silence until morning.

Then I press forward, into the open air, so the wind blows my hair back from my face, and I scream at the top of my lungs.

The birds wake and scatter.

UNCORRECTED E-PROOF—NOT FOR SALE

HarperCollins*Publishers*

.....

Chapter 3

Beatrice

I step closer to Caleb as we enter the factionless sector. I've never liked this part of the city, where time is breaking everything. Plants force their way through the cracks in the street and sidewalk. Walls and roofs buckle. Street signs and stoplights topple. Everything is crumbling.

There's a group of us—me and Caleb, Robert and Susan, and some of the younger Abnegation—all walking to the bus stop to go to school. The oatmeal I forced myself to eat this morning is heavy in my stomach, or maybe that's the dread of the aptitude test.

Caleb nudges me with his elbow. There's a factionless woman in the alley near us, unkempt and wrapped in fabrics of all colors, all factions. Robert is collecting apples from everyone's lunches to give her. I hand mine over without argument. Most of the food that we distribute to the factionless is preserved in cans or jars, even the fruit. Apples cooked down into a sauce, pears preserved in light syrup. So it's probably been some time since the woman ate something fresh.

Robert carries the apples over to her. I wonder if she'll share them with anyone. I've heard the factionless are loners; that's why they didn't fit into factions to begin with. I've heard they're territorial, too, and the Dauntless break up fights in the factionless sector all the time.

"Maybe Mom's garden should be reserved for the factionless," Robert is saying to Susan, as we keep walking. "We have more than enough."

There are no official borders to the factionless sector, but I can feel it when we pass into another part of the city. There are people on the street, gathered around the Amity cart that offers loaves of bread in exchange for either faction chits or trade, clustered around the bus stop, or just standing together, swapping conversation.

The bus arrives, and we wait for everyone else to get on before climbing on ourselves. The driver is an Abnegation volunteer, her hair pinned back just like mine, her loose trousers the same shade of charcoal. She may as well be me.

We're the only faction with a real uniform; everyone else just wears their faction colors, in every style. There are creased, pressed Erudite blue slacks alongside loose blue jeans with holes at the knee; simple white Candor pants and layered black Candor skirts, like the tiers of cakes I've only ever seen in books; a linen shirt on an Amity man next to an Amity woman in a tight maroon dress. The bus is one of a few places in the city where the factions intermingle so freely.

The bus turns on Lake Shore, the road that follows the curve of the

marsh. The city's downtown, with its tall, gleaming glass buildings, is like the center of a wheel, and most faction members travel along its spokes every morning and evening to and from work.

"Do we go straight to the test?" I ask Caleb, though we don't usually speak on the bus. "Or do we have to go to homeroom first?"

"Straight to the test." Caleb's hand tightens around the rail above his head. It's the first sign of nerves I've seen from him this morning.

We bump along for ten minutes, and then the bus stops in front of the secondary school. We only started going to school with the other factions six years ago, when I was ten years old. Every faction educates their own until the students turn ten, and then again after sixteen, when we make our choices. We don't really make friends outside our faction, as a result.

"Come on," Robert says to me as we pass the library. "We have a couple minutes."

Caleb sighs and waves us along. He doesn't approve of our little hobby, but he doesn't stop us, either.

Robert and I duck into the library and walk along the wall until we get to the Abnegation section. It's the smallest one, since only certain books are approved for members of our faction. Fiction is screened by a panel of elders for its moral value. "Useful" knowledge is permitted as long as it doesn't get "too technical," whatever that means.

We walk to the end of the stack, where the windows are. Robert drags a chair over for me to stand on, and cracks the window open so we can both look at the elevated train tracks behind the school.

We do this every morning.

"We're right on time," he says.

The train reaches the platform, slowing but not stopping, and then . . . the Dauntless start jumping.

Some land on two feet, stable and steady. Others stumble forward and brace themselves on the platform railing. A few even lose their balance, toppling and then rolling to their feet, casual, easy. I hear them on the wind, shouting, teasing, laughing.

Robert grins. We used to shelve books together before school, which is how I discovered that he, like me, loves watching the Dauntless disembark from the train. So now we do it together, a little rebellion.

I know I'm not selfless enough for Abnegation, but I'm not quite sure where I belong instead. I know where I'd like to belong, though; I know what I wish I could be. I'd like to sling my arm around a friend's shoulders and laugh with them; I'd like to wear my hair loose over my shoulders and tease someone with a sly look. I'd like to be daring and funny and capable, like the Dauntless are.

"You think you'll get a Dauntless result?" I ask Robert.

He laughs. "Not a chance. But it's nice to dream."

The bell rings. I shut the window.

My knee is bouncing so fast it's shaking the table, but the other Abnegation are too practiced in self-denial to say anything. The test administrators have been calling us back at random. Every time one of them steps into the cafeteria where we're all waiting, everyone straightens up and goes quiet.

In between those moments, I watch the factions play their favorite games. You can learn a lot about a faction from its games. The Erudite love games of strategy. They lay out complex systems of hexagonal tiles and cluster around them, their heads so close together I can barely see between them. The Candor are more concerned with wordplay, though, and whatever their game is, it's loud and involves constant arbitration. At the Amity table, some people are passing out scraps of paper and pencils. They all draw the same thing and then line up their work to point out what's good about each one. And a group of Dauntless are in two lines playing some kind of slapping game that's made the pale-skinned ones' knuckles red.

Abnegation sits and waits.

It's not that we don't have games. We just save our unguarded moments for private spaces. Out here, in public, is for disappearing. Like a rabbit in the grass, or a mouse in a dark corner, going so still that a predator's eyes pass right over them. That none of the other students—at least the ones outside of my faction—know my name, that they can't tell me apart from Susan . . . it means I've done something right.

The Dauntless test administrator, a tall black-haired woman with a hawk tattooed on her throat, steps out of her testing room. Everyone goes still as she looks at the clipboard in her hands.

"Beatrice Prior," she says, and my name sounds muffled. I sit for so long that Susan nudges me with her elbow, and then I stand too fast, hitting my knee on the table as I rise.

Wincing, I limp over to the test administrator and follow her back into the room.

There's not much in it: a padded chair with armrests, almost like a dentist's chair; a high stool nestled under a table with a computer on it, the screen bright and blank; and, by the door, a metal box, like a toolbox, that's closed but unlatched.

"My name's Tori." She gestures to the chair. "Sit."

She sounds tired. Or bored. She sits on the stool, one boot propped up on the stool's joint. Her laces are untied, the tongue of her boot flopping over. She shrugs off her jacket and tosses it aside; beneath it she's wearing a black tank top, and I can see that every inch of her arms is covered in tattoos. Flames dancing across one arm; flowers spilling petals down the other.

I sit, my hands folded in my lap. She nudges the metal box open with her toe and takes out a syringe. Even through the plastic covering, I can tell the needle is big and thick. My mouth goes dry. She fumbles in the box for a bottle of what appears to be antiseptic and a cotton ball.

"Here's how it works," she says. "I stick you with this needle, which will

flood your system with tiny transmitters and receivers. They'll all travel to your brain and set up shop there. Then I'll be able to use *this*"—she touches the computer—"to trigger the aptitude test. Which I could tell you about, but you won't remember what I told you once you're taking it, so there's really no point."

She yawns. She's already done this ten times today, but I still can't believe she can be so casual about it.

"Tiny transmitters and receivers will . . . live in my brain?" I ask. "For how long?"

"Forever," Tori replies.

"*Forever?*"

Tori rolls her eyes. "Your faction stores memories in its little Memory Vault, right?"

"Yes."

"Well, how did you think they got the memories in there? Did you think your leaders submitted detailed diary entries? No. They interface with a big, powerful computer using the little transmitters and receivers that have lived in their brains since they were sixteen, when they took their aptitude tests." She gestures widely to the room. "Hence all this. You know, Abnegation is really doing itself a disservice by discouraging curiosity. You should already know all this."

"We know things when they become relevant," I say. "Not just to indulge a whim."

"I'm a big fan of whims, myself." Tori brushes her fingers across the wings on her neck. "Got this ink on a whim, and now it's my favorite one."

She opens the bottle of antiseptic and squeezes some of it onto the cotton ball. It's bright orange. She stands over me, and dabs it against the side of my neck.

"Why the hawk?" I ask her.

She smiles a little and tosses the soiled cotton ball onto the table. "The hawk symbolizes the sun. I was afraid of the dark."

She picks up the syringe and unsheathes the needle.

"Not anymore?" I ask.

The needle is coming toward my neck. It looks more like the skewering end of a kitchen thermometer than the sewing needle I use to embroider. I should look away, or close my eyes, but instead I watch—watch the light catching on the metal, and Tori's tattooed finger on the syringe's plunger.

The pain is both sharp and deep. Her eyes find mine.

"Not anymore," she says, and then everything goes black.

UNCORRECTED E-PROOF—NOT FOR SALE

HarperCollins*Publishers*

.....

Chapter 4

Beatrice

When I open my eyes, I'm staring at a wall.

It's made of red brick, like so many of the crumbling buildings near the Abnegation sector. It looks as wide as an apartment building, but when I take a few steps to the left, the wall keeps going, like it's growing before my eyes. I stop and stare at it.

What is this place?

A gap opens up in front of me in the wall, wide as a doorway. It's an obvious invitation. I look over my shoulder, but everything behind me is dark and empty. There's only one path forward, so I take it.

As soon as I do, I hear a grinding sound. The walls behind me shift and seal together with mortar. I'm trapped.

I run my fingers over the bricks, marveling at how grainy they feel, how hard. It feels real, but it can't be real. I was just sitting in the chair, watching as Tori injected me.

There's a path to my left, so I walk along it, looking for something to guide me. The wall on my right ends, and then the path splits, one branch continuing straight and the other moving off to the left. I stand at the juncture of the two paths, trying to decide.

Then I hear a high-pitched scream off to the side, deeper in the maze. I don't consciously decide to move; I just take off running. The wall scrapes my hand as I round a corner. I hear the scream again and take the first left I can.

At the next place where two walls join is a little girl in gray Abnegation clothes. Her hair is blond like mine and pinned back in a tight knot like mine, but she's young, just a child. Her cheeks are streaked with tears. I rush toward her, steadying her shoulders as I look her over. She doesn't seem injured—only afraid.

"What is it?" I say. "What's wrong?"

I see movement reflected in her glassy eyes as she raises a hand and points over my shoulder. I turn, and the blackest smoke I've ever seen is billowing around the wall behind me, barreling straight toward us. Dread clutches at my throat, and I tug the front of the girl's shirt up and over her nose and mouth.

"Hold that there. Let's go."

I take her hand and pull her behind me as I run down the path, away from the smoke. The girl's footsteps are slow and clumsy, and her hand is sweaty. I can smell fire. I cough, and take the next turn that I can, but it leads to a dead end.

I look up at the wall. It does appear to have a finite height, if not a finite width. I crouch down and lace my fingers together, then hold them out to her.

"Your foot," I say to the girl. "Now!"

She steps into the cradle of my hands, and I push her up so she can grab the top of the wall. The smoke has reached us, pricking and stinging at my eyes. I take a big breath as the girl scrambles up the wall and perches on top of it, and then I jump.

I'm midair when I realize how pointless it is. I'm too short. I'll never be able to reach the top of the wall.

Black smoke surrounds me. I cough, which only brings more smoke into my lungs, so I start hacking into my elbow. My eyes water. I can hardly see. I go to my knees, trying to recover my breath beneath the smoke, but it's inescapable, it's everywhere.

The wall is rough beneath my hands, but as I grope the bricks for stability, I notice that some of them are sticking out farther than the others. I don't have to jump for the top of the wall; I can *climb*.

I use the bricks to pull myself to my feet and feel above my head for another handhold. Finding one, I pull myself up, scrambling along the wall with my toes until I find a foothold, too. I keep my eyes closed as I work my way up, one brick at a time, using my hands instead of my eyes.

I'm shocked when my hand finds the ledge. I keep moving my feet, searching for leverage. My toes catch on one last brick, this one up higher, near my thigh. I wrap my hands around the top of the wall and heave myself up. I think of climbing onto the roof of my apartment building, of how I like to lean close to the edge; I throw one leg over the top of the wall and sit, tears streaming down my cheeks.

I sit there for a while, coughing, before I realize the girl is gone. Whoever she is—or whatever she is—she seems to have served her purpose.

I dab my eyes dry with my sleeve and look over my shoulder at the maze, stretching out in every direction as far as I can see. I search the maze for some kind of exit. On my left is a break in the pattern, a set of double doors.

The wall is just a little wider than my feet, so I'm careful when I stand up. But when I was a child, I used to walk along the edge of every sidewalk, my arms out to each side to keep my balance. I do the same now, my arms wide, my footsteps light and careful.

It's easier to find the path through the maze from above. I make it to the exit in just a few minutes, sweat prickling on my shoulders and neck. Then I sit on the edge of the wall and drop down, landing with bent knees right in front of the doors.

When I push through them, everything goes dark.

I'm coughing when I surface, my throat still scratchy. I sit up and bring my knees to my chest. Even though that place wasn't real, my fear of the smoke and my anxiety about helping that little girl were. It takes me a while to

realize Tori is staring at me.

"Well, that was . . ." Her fingers are drumming a halting rhythm on her legs, and her mouth is set in a line. "Perplexing. Excuse me."

She steps out of the room and closes the door behind her. I'm alone with the dentist's chair, the stool, the metal box full of syringes. I'm alone with my own fears. What if I did the test wrong? What if I get in trouble for it? I shudder as I imagine Tori coming back in here to tell me I can't go to my Choosing Ceremony because I failed the aptitude test and now I have to be factionless. I think of the unsteady hands of the factionless woman who snatched a sweater out of my grasp the other day. *Give it here, Stiff.*

By the time Tori comes back, I'm trembling again. She closes the door behind her and then leans against it, her hands trapped behind her back.

"Sorry about that," she says. "I had to report an error and enter your result manually."

"What—" My voice comes out choked and small. "What was my result?"

Tori frowns. "Well . . . it's hard to say, actually."

"What do you mean?"

"Some of the things you did in that test aren't supposed to be possible," she says, her voice quiet. "Scaling the wall, for example. Walking along the top of it. Those suggest . . . a certain level of awareness that you're not supposed to have."

I blink at her.

"You're not supposed to know that what you're experiencing in that test isn't real," she says, her eyes insistent on mine.

"What do you—how could I not? I was in here and then I was in a labyrinth. There was nothing *real* about that place; it wouldn't make any sense—"

"That's what I'm telling you. Most people, when they take the aptitude test, don't remember what came before it, and they accept their surroundings because the test suppresses the part of your brain that asks questions like, *Hey, where did these walls come from?* and *Why is there a smoke monster chasing me through this giant maze?* and *Who the hell is that screaming kid?* But your brain just shrugged off that part of the program. Figuratively speaking."

"You're saying my brain is . . . broken?" My hands are sweating. I wipe them on the hem of my shirt. This is exactly what I was afraid of—that I did it wrong, that I don't fit, that I'm going to get kicked out of the entire faction system before I even get a chance to make a choice—

"No. I'm saying you're a Divergent," she says. "It's what we call it when someone's mind is especially resistant to the faction computers. And it's—"

"So what am I supposed to do?" The question bursts out of me. I want to shake her. It's as if she's telling me as little as possible on purpose. "I'm supposed to make a choice, and the test was supposed to tell me where to go, what to do—"

"Solving the maze that quickly was very Erudite. But you never froze up,

which means you acted like a Dauntless,” she says. “But you also saved the girl, which suggests Abnegation. So if I had to guess—”

Abnegation? I think. I can’t have aptitude for Abnegation. If I did, I wouldn’t feel so *wrong* all the time . . . would I?

“I’d say you should pick from one of those three. Surely you already have an idea of where you’d like to end up.” Tori’s eyes soften. “There’s something you should know. I logged your result as ‘Abnegation,’ and you should pretend that’s the case. With your classmates, your friends, and especially with your family. Okay?”

My thoughts are racing so fast I hardly register the look in her eyes, the urgency in her voice. But then I do.

“Why?” I say.

“Being the way you are, it destabilizes things,” she says. “There are some people—powerful people—who find it . . . disconcerting. And when powerful people find something disconcerting . . .” She trails off and then gives me a look, like I’m supposed to understand what she means. Only I don’t. I don’t understand any of this.

She’s more insistent this time: “It’s dangerous. For you, and for every person you tell. But all you have to do is make your choice and forget the aptitude test ever happened, and you’ll be fine. Okay?”

“Dangerous how?” I demand.

In answer Tori opens the door and steps to the side so I can walk out.

“Dangerous how?” I ask again, quieter this time.

A Dauntless boy—my age, he’s in my math class—is walking past the open doorway. His black T-shirt is spotted with bleach—on purpose, I think—and he has electric orange laces in his boots.

She looks relieved to see him. “Uriah! Can you make sure Beatrice gets home? The test made her sick, so she has to leave early today.”

I stare at her. Is she really going to shoo me from this room without giving me a real explanation? Judging by how fixed her gaze is on Uriah—whose smile is fading by the second—she really is. And I’m not going to say the word “Divergent” in front of him after she just told me it’s dangerous.

So there’s nothing left to do but walk out.

UNCORRECTED E-PROOF—NOT FOR SALE

HarperCollins*Publishers*

.....

Chapter 5

Beatrice

Uriah is all ease. It's in the way he smiles, like that's just how his mouth wants to move. The way he walks, like he has nowhere to be. And the way he talks, too, telling me about his older brother, Zeke, who's a Dauntless wall guard—a prestigious position among the Dauntless—and what his friend Marlene said on the train that morning that made everyone double over in laughter.

"You can just take me to the bus stop," I say, when it's in view. "I feel fine now, and it's a long way—"

Uriah raises an eyebrow at me. "You do realize that the longer it takes me to walk you home, the less time I have to spend at school today."

"Oh." I hadn't thought about that. I look at the little curl of his lip and decide to try something. "So are you saying it would be an act of selflessness for me to let you walk me home?"

For a second he seems a little startled. Not used to an Abnegation girl making a joke, I guess. Then he puts on a serious expression and says, "Oh, definitely."

"Then I guess I have no choice."

"Guess not."

His smile is wide and white. My answering one is a little more careful.

I don't usually walk through the city like this, with no urgency or purpose, just looking at the buildings around me. So many of them are empty, their doors locked and their windows boarded. It seems impossible to me that there were ever enough people to fill them.

As we pass beneath the elevated train tracks that run through this part of the city like a seam, I think I see a glimmer of light through one of the windows. A low flame. It must be a factionless haunt; sometimes they live in unoccupied buildings outside their sector. As far as I know, no one has taken a census of the factionless population. My mother's last estimate was two hundred, based on the ones who come to the donation centers and the ones who agree to work for the city, driving trains or maintaining its plumbing and electricity, in exchange for whatever provisions they need.

My father always says they deserve our deepest sympathy. That it's a fate worse than death, to live without community, without purpose, without meaning.

We turn toward the marsh. The smell of it is on the wind, algae and mud. I wrinkle my nose.

"Zeke told me the back door of the Hall is always open," Uriah says. "Want to go in? See the Choosing Ceremony room?"

The Hall of Factions is positioned close to the marsh, right in the city's center. My stomach lurches at the thought of tomorrow's Choosing Ceremony. I nod, not trusting myself to speak.

I'm saying you're a Divergent. Tori's voice lives in my mind now, right alongside my father's. *It's dangerous. For you and for everyone you tell.* I know myself well enough to know I won't be telling anyone—and not because I'm just that selfless. Because I don't want them to know there's something wrong with me.

We walk around the older part of the building, which is a stately structure made of gray stone, with huge columns at the entrance. The back section is different, though, long and narrow, white and glass. There, I stare through the windows at the faction banners, which hang in the center of the space, as Uriah pushes the door open with his shoulder.

"I was here two years ago, for Zeke's ceremony," Uriah says. "You ever been to one?"

"No. What's it like?"

The floor is polished stone, so our words and footsteps echo. I wince at the sound of my own voice, amplified, but the noise doesn't seem to bother Uriah.

In the middle of the room, under the banners where the faction manifestos hang, is a long table with five metal bowls on top of it. The bowls would be too big for me to wrap my arms around, and there's something different in each one: glass, for Candor; stones, for Abnegation; coals, for Dauntless; earth, for Amity; and water, for Erudite.

We stand in front of the table, Uriah looking at the Dauntless coals, and me at the Abnegation stones.

"Each person choosing gets a knife." He sounds more serious than he has since I met him. "A small one. You cut into your hand, just enough to draw blood. And then you put your hand over one of the bowls." He thrusts one hand out over the Dauntless bowl, palm down. "Kind of brutal, actually."

"It's symbolic," I say. "Give your blood to your new faction—so they become your new family."

"Like I said—brutal, if you're switching factions."

I glance at him. "Are you . . . thinking about it?"

"Aren't you?" It's his turn to shrug. "Doesn't everyone at least *consider* it?"

I look up at the banners. Erudite's—blue, naturally—catches my eye. Apparently I acted like an Erudite during the aptitude test. My faction hates Erudite, and the feeling seems to be mutual. But as I read their manifesto, *Every question that can be answered must be answered*, I think about what a relief it would be to ask any question I want and receive an answer. To argue with an adult like Marcus Eaton and feel like he was actually listening.

Still, my attention is drawn back to the middle of the banners, to the black one that belongs to Dauntless. To the phrase that has always been my

favorite: *We believe in ordinary acts of bravery, in the courage that drives one person to stand up for another.* When I was a child, I asked my father if that meant the Dauntless were selfless like the Abnegation, focused on standing up for each other. He laughed a little and said, *Every faction tries to look out for its own, Beatrice. Ours is the only one that tries to look out for everyone, whether they belong to us or not.*

I feel a dull ache in my chest at the thought of him. If I leave, what will become of him? Of both my parents? Will they hate me for abandoning them? Mourn me like I died?

They'll have Caleb, I tell myself. They'll be fine.

"We should go," I say. "Before someone catches us."

That night, my parents make dinner for everyone. They prepare a plate for each of the children—Robert, Susan, Caleb, and me—and put each one on a tray for us to carry back to our rooms.

"The night before your Choosing Ceremony is for private contemplation," my father says, as he offers me my tray. His smile is crooked, and there are creases at the corners of his eyes.

I take my food, and he bends over me, pressing a kiss to the top of my head, as he has every night since I can remember, and probably before then.

"I love you," he whispers, into my hair.

My throat is too tight for me to speak. So I just offer him a weak smile and take my tray to my room.

The apartment is split in half, with the kitchen, bathroom, and sitting room in the middle, and a row of bedrooms for the Blacks branching off from it. At the top of the stairs is another row of bedrooms that are ours. Caleb and I climb the steps together, and each of us disappears into our rooms.

I don't taste my food as I eat it. I'm just finishing with my beans and rice when I hear the little tap on my wall that means Caleb wants to talk.

I go to the window and work it open slowly, so it doesn't make noise. There are no meetings the night before the Choosing Ceremony, no sewing circles or woodworking classes, so the streets are quiet.

Caleb is already leaning out of his window, his elbows braced on the edge. His fingertips are ink-stained, like he's been reading a newspaper or an old book. I wedge myself into the windowsill, sitting sideways so I'm almost facing him.

"Can you not do that?" he says. "If you fell, you would break every bone in your body."

"I'm not going to fall. Wait—oh no—maybe I am!" I let go of the windowsill and make a show of waving my arms around, like I'm losing my balance.

"Beatrice, for heaven's sake—"

It's an old argument, one we've been having since we were old enough to have separate bedrooms. For once, he relents first, closing his eyes against

the wind.

"You left school after the aptitude test," he says. "Did something happen?"

In that moment, I'm desperate to tell him. Caleb has always been a good listener, levelheaded in a crisis. Maybe he can help me think through what Tori said—about the receivers that are now swimming around in my skull, finding a home in my neurons; about how aware I was during the test when I wasn't supposed to be; about the three factions she thinks—*thinks*—I have an aptitude for. Does everyone have aptitude for more than one faction? I have no idea, and I could find out from Caleb, but—

But.

It's dangerous. For you and for everyone you tell.

I say, "I didn't feel well, afterward. Queasy. Probably just nervous."

He raises his eyebrow like he always does when he doesn't believe me. But this time, he lets me lie to him.

"Are you nervous?" I ask him.

I expect him to say no. Caleb is a model Abnegation citizen. He never complains, and he always sees what people need. He knows who he is and what he's going to choose. The only reason I can even *think* about leaving Abnegation is that he'll be there for my parents if I do.

"Yeah," he says, with a breathless laugh. "Yeah, I am."

Some of the tension in my shoulders eases. Maybe I'm more normal than I think. *Divergent*, Tori's voice whispers, but I ignore it.

Then he says, "You remember when we were kids and we were fighting over that toy—the one with the string and the cup and the ball?"

I laugh. "And then we both fell down the stairs?"

Caleb nods. "And I was so terrified for you that I got up to check on you, and got blood all over the carpet in the process."

There's still a stain at the bottom of the stairs that never quite came out. His nose is a little crooked from that accident.

"Well, when I was at the hospital afterward, Mom said something to me that I keep thinking about. She said, *You have to check yourself before you check your sister.*" He taps his fingers on the windowsill, and looks at me. "We have to think of our family, Beatrice, but . . . we also have to think of ourselves. We're the ones who have to live with our choices. No one else. So . . . make a choice you can live with. Okay?"

I usually hate it when Caleb tries to give me advice. He's only two minutes older than I am, but he acts like my older brother. This time, though, I'm so nervous about what's coming that I don't mind it.

"Okay," I say. "Thanks."

He gives me a strange smile. Fond, but a little sad, like he knows I'm thinking of leaving Abnegation, of leaving our *family*, and he'll miss me.

I'll miss him, too.

UNCORRECTED E-PROOF—NOT FOR SALE

HarperCollins*Publishers*

.....

Chapter 6

Beatrice

My hands are sweaty. I can see the Hall of Factions from the bus stop, the glass walls of its newer wing catching the sunlight. Behind it is the long line of buildings on Michigan Avenue, locked together like soldiers in a shield wall.

We get off the bus and walk in a group to the Hall, looking like a flock of pigeons in our Abnegation grays. Once we reach the entrance, we stand to the side as the other faction members arrive with their sixteen-year-olds in tow. I can see them all through the glass, gathered in groups beneath their faction banners. There are rows of chairs arranged there now, but no one is sitting yet.

I spot Uriah walking toward the entrance. He grins at me and waves, and I smile back at him.

Once everyone else arrives, Marcus Eaton leads us in. It might be my imagination, but I can feel contempt radiating from the Erudite section of the Hall—and maybe the rest of it, too, though most of the other factions regard us with pity, not hostility. *Poor Stiffs, so repressed.*

According to my father, the source of Erudite's loathing is their leader, Jeanine Matthews. Each of the other factions has a representative on the city's council, though the task of making final decisions mostly falls to Abnegation, since a selfless leader is a trustworthy leader. Jeanine Matthews is Erudite's representative, and as my father likes to say, attitudes trickle downhill—from Jeanine to her advisory board, and from the advisory board down to the rest of the faction.

Jeanine stands behind the line of metal bowls in a blue suit with sharp shoulders, her shirt buttoned up to her throat. Her hair—blond, like mine, though a darker shade—is smooth and pinned behind each ear. She watches us file into the Hall, expressionless, and then it's time for Caleb and me to line up behind the other sixteen-year-olds, waiting in line right in the center of the room. There are ninety of us, a smaller class than usual, and of those, there are only twelve from Abnegation.

I feel a warm hand squeeze mine: my father's. And it might seem like nothing, to the others, but to me, knowing how sparing my fellow Abnegation are about affection . . . it makes me want to burst into tears.

Can I leave my family? Can I bear it?

I find my place in line—or, rather, I wait for Caleb to find his, since the line is in order of age, from oldest to youngest. Anyone who turned sixteen since last spring's Choosing Ceremony will choose their new faction today—people usually delay a child's enrollment in school if they're born in the

latter half of the year, so they won't have to attend for longer than their peers—and there's some muttering about birthdays in the line, "What *time* were you born on April twenty-fourth, though?" And "Oh, you're March seventh? I'm March eighth, so I guess I should get behind you." I take my place behind Caleb, born two minutes later, and let the ones who are younger than I am line up behind me.

Marcus Eaton stands at the table, right in the center, with Jack Kang, representative of Candor, on his right and Johanna Reyes, representative of Amity, on his left. He brings his hands together, and the room gets quiet.

The Dauntless are the last to follow suit. Like Uriah, they seem at ease, chatting with their neighbors, their arms slung over the back of their chairs, their feet tapping on the floor as they wait. I try to imagine myself among them, all in black, my hair no longer pinned so tightly to my head that my scalp aches, my smiles no longer met with a sharp look or a raised eyebrow.

I feel a pang of longing for the person I could be, there. But how can I be sure that if I chose Dauntless, I wouldn't just be a Stiff in black clothing—an impostor? The test didn't even work for me. Tori's assessment of my results was just a *guess*.

"Welcome," Marcus Eaton says, and he's smiling, but he has a way of making even smiling look serious. "Welcome to this year's Choosing Ceremony. Welcome to the day we honor the philosophy of our founders, which tells us that everyone has a right to choose their own place in this world."

I look at Caleb's hands, hanging loose at his sides. They're shaking. Without thinking, I reach for one and grip him tightly. He squeezes back.

"Long ago, when our founders created this city, they shed the archaic categories that once separated people—the political, the religious, the cultural, the superficial—and embraced a new understanding of human nature. That understanding was this: Human beings are united in that they are deeply flawed. For any society to live in harmony, they said, those flaws needed to be corrected. Defining new priorities was the best path to accomplishing that goal. Yet they could not agree on what the most egregious of those flaws was."

I look at the banners hanging from the glass ceiling, representing the five flaws our founders blamed . . . and the five corrections to those flaws. Movement catches my eye through the skylights, but it's fleeting—probably just a bird.

"Some of them blamed aggression and cruelty, and they called themselves Amity," Marcus says, and Johanna Reyes, standing at the metal bowl that holds dark earth, spreads her hands over it. The Amity exchange smiles. Their clothes are bright and expressive. Red and yellow, of every shade, sometimes creeping toward orange or brown. To me, even though they're not dressed alike, they all look the same. Kind. Warm. Relaxed.

Joining them has never been an option for me. I've never been relaxed a day in my life.

“Some of them blamed ignorance and disinterest, and they called themselves Erudite.”

I could never choose Erudite. Not when they hate us so much.

“Some of them blamed duplicity and secrecy. They called themselves Candor.”

I think of the secret burning inside me: *Divergent*.

“Some of them blamed selfishness and ego. They called themselves Abnegation.”

I do blame selfishness; I can feel it in myself, driving me to complain, and lie, and demand things I haven’t earned. I can feel it even now.

“And some of them blamed cowardice and weakness of character. They called themselves Dauntless.”

And I blame cowardice, too. I do.

Marcus goes on:

“Our five factions have coexisted peacefully for as long as this city has existed, each contributing in different ways to our society. Candor is a faction of forthright administrators, teachers, investigators, and judges. Erudite has supplied us with new technologies, improvements, and a deeper understanding of our world. Dauntless protects us from threats, both without and within, and aids us in moments of crisis. Amity counsels us, feeds us, and eases our burdens. And Abnegation stands ready to serve in whatever capacity they can. But each faction is more than those qualities; each faction offers its members something more valuable than its mere function in society. It offers community. Purpose. *Meaning*.”

He pauses as he picks up the clipboard where all of the initiates’ names are written.

And then all the skylights above us shatter at once.

Shrieks ring out through the Hall of Factions. Shards of glass pelt us like hailstones. I duck automatically, covering my head with my arms. Beside me, Caleb is staring, wide-eyed, at a piece of glass sticking out of his forearm. Red stains his gray sleeve.

All the lights—which were low already—go out, but by moonlight I can see dark figures above us, walking along the now-empty window frames like tightropes.

“Death to factions!” a voice shouts, and it’s so loud I can’t tell where it’s coming from. Other voices join in, echoing: “Death to factions! Death to factions!”

All around me people are moving, pushing toward the exits. But I feel frozen. I’m watching, unmoving, as the faction banners come down.

Amity’s is first, rippling as it drops to the floor, and then Candor’s, Erudite’s, Dauntless’s, and Abnegation’s. I see the symbols before the fabric crumples: the tree, the scales, the eye, the flames, and the outstretched hands. Then a new banner unfurls above me, dangling from the rafters like a leaf clinging to a branch.

It’s a symbol that mimics the size and circle-bounded shape of the faction

symbols. It's stitched in white to the green fabric of the banner. It depicts a spray of small white flowers.

The doors at the far end of the hall are wide open, and people are rushing toward them as Dauntless sentries rush in, all in black with their needle guns held high.

"Beatrice!" Caleb yells, but I'm too small to see him.

Then, the bang of a needle gun, firing. A scream. And a dark shape toppling from the rafters above us.

A body slams into the floor just a few feet away from me. I'm close enough to see the needle sticking out of the fallen woman's neck. She's dressed all in green, her face covered, but from what I can tell by her empty eyes, she's not much older than I am. Shot by a Dauntless needle—a nonlethal round that causes pain and paralysis—and knocked off-balance; and now, broken on the ground, probably dead.

If there was chaos around me a moment ago, it's nothing compared to what erupts now, as everyone in the Hall of Factions stampedes toward the doors. Frantic, I search for my father, my mother, my brother, anyone I recognize as the crowd presses me from all angles. An elbow hits me in the side of the head, and I cry out, stumbling away. Everyone is shouting, but to me their voices are muffled, and I keep thinking of the needle in that woman's neck.

My head pounds. Someone shoves me hard from the left, and I lose my balance and fall. Someone steps on my hand, and I scream into my teeth as the hard sole of their shoe crushes my fingertips. Then someone grabs my arm and hauls me to my feet.

My body aches. I look up to see a Dauntless boy standing in front of me in a shaft of moonlight, his brow furrowed.

In my daze all I can think is that his eyes are a strange color—dark blue.

"That way!" the boy shouts over the noise, pointing at the side of the room. I see an emergency door there, still closed. In everyone's rush to get to the main exit they've forgotten about all the other ways to get out of here.

When I don't move right away, the boy grabs my shoulder and shoves me toward the door. It startles me into motion—I run to the side of the room and push through the door, setting off an alarm that I barely hear. I stumble into a quiet courtyard, and I think again of my parents and Caleb, still trapped inside, or maybe they made it out—

I run to the end of the courtyard's white awning and around the side of the building. It's quiet here, a contrast to the chaos behind me, but ahead of me is an Amity woman. She's running along the side of the building. And there's a gun in her hand.

I stop. An Amity woman with a gun?

She turns and raises her weapon in one fluid motion, like some kind of lethal dancer. She looks like no Amity I've ever seen, her hair pulled back in a sleek knot, her expression hard, her face bisected with shadow. She shifts so the moonlight glows on her cheekbones, and that's when I

recognize her:

Evelyn Eaton. Marcus Eaton's dead wife.

I couldn't forget her face if I tried. It was on all the news feeds after she died, that picture of the Eaton family: Marcus, his wife, their son, then ten or eleven years old. I remember it because it seemed like such a strange portrait for them to choose: a picture-perfect Abnegation family, but Evelyn's expression was all wrong for that, with her jaw set and her eyes bright and critical. She looked angry.

That was the picture on their mantel, the day of the funeral. *Her funeral*. I saw the urn that held her ashes. I watched Marcus Eaton pour the ashes into the wet clay for our funeral ritual.

And now here she is. Alive.

She doesn't acknowledge me. She just puts her gun down and keeps moving, around the edge of the building and into the dark street beyond it. I stand there for a few seconds, my ears ringing, before I remember that I need to look for my family, I need to make sure they're all right.

I run, the pain in my head and hand forgotten as I reach the street we walked down to get to the Hall of Factions. It's full of people. I search for gray clothes, for my flock of Abnegation pigeons. I find them by the doors, ushering people out of the building. I see them through the glass, still inside the Hall, because of course they are. Of course the Abnegation refuse to save themselves.

"Beatrice!"

I recognize Caleb's voice before I see him, and then he crushes me into a hug.

"Are you okay?" I ask him. "Your arm—"

"I'm fine," he says, and he pulls back. His eyes are wet. "You didn't — You haven't—"

"What is it?" I haven't seen Caleb cry in years. "Is Mom okay? Dad?"

He nods. His Adam's apple bobs.

"Robert," he says. "Robert's dead."

UNCORRECTED E-PROOF—NOT FOR SALE

HarperCollins*Publishers*

.....

Chapter 7

Beatrice

Hours later, my mother puts a glass of water in my hand. “Drink.”

I do as I’m told. I didn’t realize how thirsty I was until I took a sip, and pretty soon the glass is empty.

We’re sitting in our small living room, surrounded by people. Mr. and Mrs. Black are on the sofa, with Susan between them. She looks how I feel, like she’s still caught in a dream. Mrs. Black is weeping.

There’s food in the kitchen, on all the counters. I watched people bring it in, loaves of bread and bowls of savory porridge and hard-boiled eggs and pots of soup. I’ve never felt less like eating, but I want more water, so I walk into the kitchen with my empty glass.

Only the oven light is on, so the room is dark. My father is washing a stack of bowls. I forget about wanting water, pick up a clean cloth, and stand beside him to dry the dishes as he finishes washing them. He bumps me with his shoulder in greeting.

“Where did you go, during the attack?” he says. “One moment you were there, and I was trying to get to you . . . and the next, you were just gone.”

His tone is careful, neutral, but I see a tremor in his hands. He must have been as scared as I was.

“After that woman fell—” I think of the shape of her body on the ground, the needle in her neck, and I force myself to keep talking. “Someone helped me up and showed me the emergency exit. And then . . .”

I pause. I think of the woman with the gun, dressed in Amity clothes. The woman who looked like Evelyn Eaton.

“If I saw something strange,” I say, “who would I tell?”

“You saw something strange?” Again, he sounds neutral, like he’s trying not to upset me.

I nod. Then I wonder if I saw anything at all. It was dark. Maybe that woman wasn’t Evelyn Eaton. How could she be? Evelyn Eaton is dead.

“Maybe. I don’t know.”

“You can always talk to me, Beatrice. No matter what.”

I think of Tori telling me I’m Divergent. That it’s dangerous for me and anyone I tell. I think of watching the Dauntless arrive every morning with Robert. I think of what I was considering at the Choosing Ceremony, right before—

No. There are some things I can’t tell my father.

“Do they know how Robert—how it happened?” I ask him. I should have asked hours ago, but the specifics didn’t seem important then. Robert was gone; the particulars couldn’t change that. All I could think about was his

small smile as he led the way between the stacks in the library yesterday morning. *We're right on time*. He always remembered to drag the chair over for me, so I could see the Dauntless arrive.

"He was shot," my father says.

It's not the answer I was expecting. I thought Robert was crushed by the crowd or injured in the chaos—not *shot*.

"The Dauntless were carrying needle guns," I say. "Needle guns can't kill people, can they?"

"No, they can't," my father replies, in a tight, hard voice. "But the Dauntless weren't the only ones with weapons."

It takes me a few seconds to piece it together. Dauntless wall guards have regular guns, with lethal ammunition in them. But those weapons are well controlled. Regulated. Or they're supposed to be.

"A wall guard brought in a lethal weapon by mistake?" I guess. It's the only explanation I can think of.

My father shakes his head. There's a soft look in his eyes that I don't like. Like he pities me.

"No," he says. "It wasn't a mistake. One of those factionless stole a gun from the wall, and after that woman fell from the rafters, they retaliated. They turned to violence."

Factionless. I see the factionless all the time at the donation center. Sad and shuffling. Weighed down by the world. It doesn't make sense to me, at first, that my father thinks there were factionless at the Choosing Ceremony.

But a moment later I feel foolish. Of course they were factionless. They were screaming "Death to factions!" They were cutting down the faction banners. They were hanging their own banner instead.

I think of the woman I saw. The factionless woman who may or may not have been Evelyn Eaton. She was carrying a gun. I can't remember, now, what it looked like. Whether it was lethal or not.

"That banner," I say.

"A sick joke. But what more can we expect from the factionless? Moral corruption is what got them where they are." He spits the words, and in his agitation he drops the soapy bowl he's holding and it breaks.

I jump back.

"I'm sorry." My father plants his hands on the edge of the sink and leans into them, his head hanging. "I'm sorry, Beatrice. I shouldn't lose my temper."

"It's all right." I wrap my arm around him and rest my head on his shoulder. "It's all right."

I could never be a Candor. It's too easy for me to lie.

The funeral is in the morning, and even though everyone in Abnegation shows up, it's a quiet affair.

Funerals are a regular part of Abnegation life. They always go the same way: The body is cremated and placed in an urn; people bring food to the

family of the deceased and sit with them; there's a religious service, and then the family makes a memorial stone.

With the exception of Evelyn Eaton's funeral, every one I've attended has been framed as a natural conclusion, a candle that's run out of wick. Not Robert Black's. The mood of the pre-funeral meal is shock, not sorrow. The sermon at the service is about tragedy, not remembrance. And the procession through the streets of the Abnegation sector—led by Robert's mother, clutching his ashes to her stomach as if she's remembering how it felt to carry him inside her womb—is tense.

The procession ends at the workshop, where Mr. Black mixes the clay in its mold, and Susan pries the urn out of her mother's clenched hands to remove its lid. Mrs. Black is shaking too hard to help, so Susan is the one who pours Robert's ashes into the clay and helps her father mix it and forms the stone with her small, delicate hands.

It will dry for a few days, and then someone will fire it, and then someone else will use it to build, like it's any other brick. Even in death, a member of Abnegation is expected to serve the community. At breakfast the morning after, I'm staring across the table at Robert's unoccupied chair when there's a knock at the door. I don't recognize the woman, but my mother calls her "Tabitha" like she knows her, and she has a hushed conversation with my father in the entryway. I can hear only my father's side of it; he's never been any good at talking quietly.

"This is cruel," he says, and then, "Fine. Fine."

The door closes, but my father doesn't walk back into the kitchen right away. I exchange a look with Caleb. He shrugs. Susan keeps eating her oatmeal.

I hear my father's sigh before he walks back in. When he does, he lingers by the door for a moment.

"Caleb, Beatrice. Susan," he says. "I'm afraid I need to talk to you." He hesitates again, and my heart races. Whatever he's about to say, he *really* doesn't want to say it. "As you already know, the Council has decided it's not safe to gather for another Choosing Ceremony. I've just been informed that each faction is conducting theirs separately. Today."

My spoon clatters against the side of my bowl.

"What?" Now I know what my father was calling "cruel."

Susan, I notice, is still taking bites at regular intervals.

"They already put it off for two days," Caleb says, his voice soft. "Initiation needs to start, Beatrice."

"Two whole days to grieve, how *generous*—" I'm about to continue when I notice Susan is raising her eyebrows, the way she often does when she wants to say something.

She looks at Robert's empty seat, and says, "Weeds grow, flowers bloom, fruit ripens." She rests her hand on the back of the chair. "And they don't ask us when they should."

There's no arguing after that.

I clean up our breakfast dishes, just as I did on the day of our first Choosing Ceremony. My hands tremble as I scrub the bowls. My mother slides back the panel upstairs so each of us can check our appearance—a special mercy for the grieving, she calls it. I don't look well, my eyes too wide and my skin too pale.

I try to slow things down for myself, try to memorize every part of this apartment: Mrs. Black's embroidery hanging over the sink, the perfect stack of towels in the hall closet, the gray shoes lined up next to the front door. Tidy and respectful, that's how our two families' lives have been together. Even now, with everything coming apart.

Everyone gathers down the street, outside of Abnegation headquarters. My sixteen-year-old classmates and their families are the only ones permitted at this new Choosing Ceremony. I think of the way I felt just a few days ago, looking at the Dauntless stirring in their seats, longing for loose hair and loud voices. It feels silly now, worrying about hairpins in the moments before my friend died.

A hand grabs mine: Caleb, his jaw so tight I can see its tendons.

"Remember what I said a few days ago," he says. "Make a choice you can live with."

I barely remember that conversation. I rub my fingers over my sternum to ease the ache in my chest.

My mother and father are right behind us. My father reaches out and squeezes Caleb's shoulder like he's working out the tension, something he used to do when we hunched over while studying. *It's not that serious, you know*, he used to say. *It's just learning*.

We walk through the main entrance, and the huge stone bowls are right there, holding water and earth, stone and coals and glass. Behind them is the wide-open space of the lobby and the simple sculpture that's usually its only adornment: a pair of cupped stone hands, the Abnegation symbol. Sometimes the hands look like they're receiving something and sometimes like they're offering something. Today I'm not sure which.

Standing behind the bowls are the faction leaders: Johanna Reyes of Amity, her hands folded in front of her; Jack Kang of Candor, with perfect posture; Max Young of Dauntless, scratching the back of his neck; Jeanine Matthews of Erudite, still and watching; and Marcus Eaton, his face grave.

Looking at him now, I wonder if I was seeing things the other day, when I thought I recognized his dead wife on the street. Everything about that day feels so unreal. Maybe my mind was playing tricks on me.

We line up just like we did before, earliest birthdays on the left and latest birthdays on the right. At the ceremony with all the other factions, there were quite a few people behind me; today, I'm almost at the end. Only Felicity is behind me.

There's one light in the room, shining down on the bowls. Our parents and siblings stand in the shadows, all around us.

Jeanine Matthews is holding a small box. When we're finished lining up,

she takes off the lid, revealing a collection of small knives.

“We want to begin by apologizing,” Marcus says. “This community has endured a great loss, and in an ideal world, you would be permitted to grieve before having to make such a big decision. We want to especially apologize to you, Susan.”

He gives her a sad smile. She returns it.

“But we agree that if there are violent forces in this city that want to destroy our way of life, it’s even more important that we hold fast to our convictions and move forward. It’s even more important that we cleave to our communities, our true families. So we must choose.”

I think of the motto I read in my Faction History textbook. *Faction before blood*. It means that a family can’t offer you the same things that a faction can. A family may love you, but it doesn’t necessarily understand you. It doesn’t necessarily guide you toward your best self. A family is just a temporary unit, serving its purpose until you figure out where you really belong.

“I said most of what I meant to say a few days ago, and I won’t make you sit through it again,” Marcus says, and polite laughter ripples through the room. “I will just say this: As much as a person can grow over time, the very root of who they are remains essentially the same. The aptitude test gets to that root, revealing the unchangeable inside the changeable. So we have all agreed that sixteen years is time enough to know the core of yourself—and to choose in what direction you wish to grow. And so.” Marcus steps back and gestures to the metal bowls in front of him. “And so, we’ll let you choose.”

Panic seizes my chest. What’s at the heart of me? What’s at the root of me? I feel like a dandelion seed adrift on the wind. I feel temporary and changeable.

“Mary Latham,” Marcus says, and Mary steps forward. She’s the tallest girl in our year. She takes the knife from Jeanine Matthews and cuts into her thumb. Blood bubbles up from the wound, and she lets it fall in the bowl right in the center, the pile of stones that symbolizes Abnegation.

“Eustace Cooke.” Red-cheeked Eustace takes a new knife from Jeanine Matthews. He pricks his finger. He chooses Abnegation.

There’s a moment of silence. Marcus is staring at the clipboard in his hands.

“This would have been Robert’s turn,” Marcus says. “So let’s consider the young man we lost.”

I feel like I swallowed something without chewing it. Like there’s a pill lodged in my throat.

Then: “Susan Black.”

Her cheeks shine with tears as she chooses Abnegation.

I’m inching closer and closer. One name at a time; one step at a time. Everyone is choosing Abnegation, and I’m imagining my blood on the stones, my blood on the coals, my blood—improbably—in the water. Worse

than that, what if I can't choose? What if I just stand there, unable to cut myself? What if they cast me out, or they see in my hesitation something suspicious, something *Divergent*—

"Caleb Prior."

I realize that I've been holding Caleb's hand this whole time only when he uncurls his fingers, and blood flows back into my fingertips, prickling. He doesn't look back at me. He steps up to the bowls, accepts the small knife from Jeanine Matthews, and then takes a deep breath that makes his shoulders shift and shudder.

He cuts his finger, and I wait for him to stick his hand out and add his blood to the Abnegation stones.

I stare, uncomprehending, as his blood falls into the water instead.

Caleb just chose Erudite.

The room is so silent I swear they can hear my heart racing. Pounding in my throat.

Erudite.

I think of his ink-smudged fingers. *We also have to think of ourselves*, he said to me, and I thought he was saying it to reassure me, but maybe he was saying it to reassure *himself*. *We're the ones who have to live with our choices, . . . so make a choice you can live with*. I can't imagine *this* being the choice he can live with. Erudite, the faction that hates us, the faction that lies about us, the faction that defames our father and our friends and everyone we care about.

"Beatrice Prior."

Caleb is standing in the shadows, behind Jeanine Matthews, his head bowed. Like he didn't just betray us all.

Faction before blood, I think, and then I think, *no*.

I thought I believed it. I thought I believed all of it. But there's an empty seat at our table where Robert used to sit. There's an empty room that used to be his. There's an empty space in me.

Right now, *faction before blood* sounds like nonsense. My complaints about my hair, my clothes, my frustrations with not owning anything that's just mine, my grievances about the restricted book selection for Abnegation in the library—all of it sounds like nonsense. Unimportant.

I no longer want to be the person who cares about those things.

"Beatrice?"

I step forward. Jeanine Matthews offers me a knife, handle first, her fingers pinching the blade. Like it's a scalpel and she's a nurse assisting a surgeon. I blink at her for a second before I take it. My brother's new leader.

I press the blade to the meaty part of my thumb, and it's easier than I thought it would be, maybe because I'm so angry I can barely see, maybe because the pain focuses me. I watch bright red blood pool in my palm for a moment.

I don't know what I want to become anymore. All I know is what I can

bear . . . and what I can't.

I thrust my hand out, and my blood falls on the stones.

And in that moment I know, I know, I *know* it's the wrong choice.

But it's too late.

UNCORRECTED E-PROOF—NOT FOR SALE

HarperCollins*Publishers*

.....

Chapter 8

Beatrice

My mind is blank with panic as I watch Caleb leave with Jeanine Matthews.

I don't really remember the walk from the bowl to the back of the room. I don't remember watching Felicity make her choice, though she's now following Caleb out of the room, our only other transfer. It's not until I feel a gentle nudge at my side—Susan Black next to me, wearing a soft smile—that I realize everyone is moving toward the door that will take us deeper into Abnegation headquarters.

There's a lump in my throat, but I can't cry, not now, not here. As I follow the crowd down the hall, I try to reason with myself. I've been Abnegation my whole life. I know what to expect from it. I'll have quiet mornings and peaceful evenings. Maybe I can work in the garden with Robert—

No. I guess I can't.

Okay, I say to myself, ignoring the pang in my chest at the thought of him. I'll figure out what I'm good at. I'll find a way not to be miserable.

I'll find a way.

I've never been down this hallway before. It's dim, and like all the other parts of our headquarters, it's plain, with concrete floors and walls and simple yellow-white orbs as light fixtures. At the end of it is a heavy door, which is where Marcus stops.

"Welcome, new initiates," he says. "I've been told there are no transfers to Abnegation this year, so we don't have to wait for them to begin."

I glance at Mary, who's standing on my left. Abnegation never gets a lot of transfers, but *none*?

Marcus continues, "Tomorrow you will begin the month of service that will be your initiation into Abnegation. But tonight is about something different."

He brings his hands together in front of him, palms up—our faction's symbol, brought to life.

"As members of Abnegation, you will spend your life giving to those around you. But tonight, you will be receiving." He pulls his hands back in, close to his body. "The interconnectedness of all people is at the heart of our faction's philosophy. We need each other to survive, and to thrive. When we can give, we give—but there will be times when we can't. When we are ailing, or infirm, or overcome with grief or pain. In those moments, we must learn to receive, and offer others the opportunity to care for us. So tonight, you will dedicate yourselves to the art of receiving."

He smiles.

"First, though, you have to introduce yourselves to the keeper of our city's memory. To that end . . . follow me."

He unlocks the door by touching a sensor beside it, and leads us in.

The room beyond is a perfect circle. Along its edges, everything is dark. But at its center, glowing in the ceiling, is a ring of dim light that illuminates the low stone table beneath it. Marcus directs us to kneel around the edge of it, and I do, so close the stone scrapes my kneecaps through my trousers. Beside me, near enough for me to hear her breaths, is Susan. There are only eight of us, total.

I realize, then, that I know what this place must be. The Abnegation Memory Vault. This is where the city's records are kept. Whenever I pictured this room before, I imagined something like a library, full of filing cabinets and bookshelves. This place—this empty place that feels almost like a church sanctuary—isn't what I expected at all.

"For some of you, this will be the last time you ever enter this room," Marcus says. "The Memory Vault is sacred. It contains the history of our city and our people—all our people, across all factions. As such, the responsibility of maintaining it resides with just one person." He taps his chest to indicate himself. "Accessing the Memory Vault after this point is forbidden to all except those summoned to make an offering. People of all factions are called upon to make offerings, some more than once, some not at all."

Marcus presses both hands to the stone in front of him, fingers spread wide.

"It's time for introductions," he says, and he doesn't say it to us but to the stone. "Your hands, please."

I do as I'm told, and the stone under my palms is warm, like it's been baking in the sun. I feel a prickle against my palms, and then the space changes.

I'm in the small room where I took my aptitude test. Sitting in the padded chair. Beside me, the Dauntless woman, Tori, sits at the small table behind the computer, drumming her fingers on her legs as she stares at me.

"Well, that was . . . perplexing. Excuse me," she says.

She gets up and walks out of the room. Fear spikes inside me as I realize: This is my memory of just after the aptitude test, playing out before my eyes. In a few seconds Tori will come back in here and tell me that my results were inconclusive. She'll point out that I'm not supposed to be aware during simulations. She'll call me Divergent and tell me it's dangerous for me and everyone I tell.

And all of that will be shared with the Abnegation Memory Vault.

Tori steps into the room and leans back against the door, her hands trapped behind her.

"Sorry about that," she says. "I had to report an error and enter your result manually."

No, I try to say. And: *stop*.

“What . . . what was my result?” is what I say instead, just as I did before.

“Well . . . it’s hard to say, actually.”

Stop. My chest heaves with panic. I know this isn’t real, that *I’m* not real here in the way I’m accustomed to. But I have to stop this, I have to—

“What do you mean?”

Stop!

“Some of the things you did in that test . . .” *aren’t supposed to be possible*, my mind supplies, and if she says that, it will be enough to damn me.

But she doesn’t say it.

Instead, the scene around me changes. Tori disintegrates. Darkness drapes over my body like a blanket. The overhead light turns into the moon.

In Tori’s place is a dark cityscape, the view from the roof of my family’s apartment building. I’m standing near the edge in my nightgown, my boots untied.

I open my mouth, and scream until the birds scatter.

Then I come back to myself. I’m kneeling in front of the table in the Abnegation Memory Vault, lifting my hands from the warm stone. All my fellow initiates appear around me again. Marcus Eaton’s eyes find mine, and then his brow furrows, like I’ve confused him.

The others surface one by one. When everyone else is finished, we all walk across the building to the banquet hall.

I’ve been here before—for birth celebrations, for funerals, for religious services, for our infrequent holiday celebrations. But I’ve never seen it like this. Lanterns outline the room in light, and there’s a long wooden table in the center with benches on either side. The initiates sit, the five girls on one side and the three boys on the other, and I don’t know what comes next.

Then my mother sets a plate in front of me, and my father sets down a fork, a knife, a spoon. Other people—friends, neighbors, people I’ve seen on the street—keep stepping forward with things: a slice of warm bread. A heap of cooked grains. A scoop of slow-roasted vegetables, soft and smoky. A drizzle of dark sauce—a rare addition. A side plate with lettuce dressed in oil and vinegar. Someone behind us says a prayer I can barely hear, and we all hesitate.

“Eat!” someone calls out, and someone else laughs. The spell is broken, and the initiates dig in.

It feels uncomfortable to eat while so many people surround us, watching. But a moment later someone starts singing.

The other factions think Abnegation has no games, has no music, has no celebrations. But we just keep them to ourselves. And true, we don’t have the same instruments the other factions do—but a voice is an instrument, too.

One voice starts the round, and another joins in, in harmony with the first. Other voices add to the song, and then another song starts beneath the

first one, filling in all its pauses and then twisting together with it, like hands clasping and then unclasping.

The song gets louder as everyone else joins in, every voice finding a place, even the old, creaky ones; even the tuneless ones; even the weak ones. The two songs line up next to each other like a key fitting into a lock, one supplying everything the other one needs in order to move.

As I relax and let myself really listen, I realize that I've heard both songs before. One of them is about the founding of the city, and the other is about helping your neighbor and trusting that he'll help you—a standard Abnegation song they teach to children.

The songs aren't just working together in their music, but in their messages, too—telling the story of our city, and showing the place that Abnegation has inside it. Helping. Filling in the gaps. Trusting each other.

My eyes prickle with tears, but this time they're the good kind. I set my fork down, close my eyes, and listen.